

Gods and Goals: Spiritual Striving as Purposeful Action

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Summary

Religion as a domain of human activity invests existence with meaning by establishing goals and value systems. These goals potentially pertain to all aspects of a persons' life. A goals approach rooted in personal strivings provides a general unifying framework to capture the dynamic aspect of religion in people's lives. Empirical research on the measurement of spirituality and religion through personal strivings is described. The origins of spiritual strivings in motivational needs theory and in an evolutionary psychology rooted in solutions to adaptive problems faced by our ancestors are discussed.

Key words: strivings, goals, sanctification, motives, evolution, personality integration

Zusammenfassung

Götter und Ziele: Spirituelles Streben als sinnvolle Tätigkeit

Religion als menschliche Aktivität erschafft Sinn und Bedeutung im Leben indem es Ziele und Wertesysteme bereitstellt. Diese Ziele haben das Potenzial, alle Bereiche des menschlichen Lebens zu erfassen. Ein Ansatz, der Religion nun vor dem Hintergrund solcher Ziele untersucht, stellt einen generellen verbindenden Rahmen zur Verfügung, um die Dynamik von Religion im menschlichen Leben zu untersuchen. Dazu wird im Folgenden ein empirischer Zugang zu Spiritualität und Religion vorgestellt. Außerdem wird mit Hilfe der Motivationstheorie eine Erklärung für spirituelles Streben versucht, sowie die Evolutionspsychologie als Erklärungsansatz mit einbezogen.

Schlagwörter: Bestrebungen, Ziele, Befriedigung, Motive, Evolution, Integration von Persönlichkeit

The goal-directed nature of human religious striving was first documented in Trout's (1931) textbook, *Religious Behavior*. Trout was impressed with the teleonomic quality of religious behavior, its purposive or goal-directed character. He coined the term "transcendental religious ultimates" to describe these religious goals. But it was Gordon Allport, considered by most the founding father of personality psychology, who really noted that the intentional nature of religious behavior was what made it distinctive. The field of personality has always had as its goal a scientific account of what a person is like, in his or her entirety. Whatever else it includes, this account, for Allport, must involve both *intention* and *religion*. In his book, *Pattern and Growth in Personality*, Allport wrote "Intention refers to what the person is trying to do it tells us what sort of future a person is trying to bring about, and this is the most important question we can ask of any mortal" (1961, p. 223). Allport also made significant contributions to the psychology of religion. Most psychologists of religion are familiar with the intrinsic - extrinsic religious orientations (Tix & Frazier, 2005) but many of them forget that this distinction originated with Allport. For Allport, religion involves a response of the total self, and that religious attitudes (or *sentiments*, the term that he preferred) differ chiefly from other aspects of personality in their comprehensiveness and centrality to the person (Allport, 1950).

The same year that Gordon published his seminal text, his older brother Floyd, a distinguished social psychologist, published an article in which he proposed that an individual's personality might be better described in terms of what the person is "trying to do" or the purpose of purposes that a person is trying to carry out (F. Allport, 1937). Allport coined the term "teleonomic trend" to describe these behavioral tendencies, which he claimed were more dynamic and revealing of personality

than were dispositional traits. In my doctoral dissertation (Emmons, 1986), I developed the concept of "personal strivings", modern day descendants of the teleonomic trend. In so doing, I began with several assumptions concerning human motivation, namely that (1) People seek purpose by setting and striving for goals, (2) These goals include the psychological, social, and spiritual, (3) Goals have cognitive, affective, and behavioral significance, and (4) Goal content (the "what of goals"), goal structure (the "how" of goals), and goal orientation (the why of goals) predict important life outcomes, such as well-being and performance. Over the past two decades, psychologists have learned how goals, as key integrative and analytic units in the study of human motivation, contribute to effective life functioning and to overall emotional, physical and relational well-being.

Personal Strivings and the Sacred

To empirically study goals, and to differentiate them from other units of analysis, I used the term "personal strivings." Personal strivings are consciously accessible and personally meaningful objectives that people pursue in their daily lives (see Emmons, 1999, for a review of goal constructs in psychology). Personal strivings refer to the typical goals that a person characteristically is trying to accomplish. As individualized and cognitively elaborated representations, they are the concretized expression of future orientation and life purpose. Several points need to be made with respect to the term "personal strivings" and their conceptual nature. First, an emphasis on the concept of striving implies an action-oriented perspective on human motivation. It stresses the behavioral movement toward identifiable endpoints as can be seen in the following definition of goals as "an imagined or envisaged state condition toward which a person aspires and which drives voluntary activity" (Karoly, 1993, p. 274). Second, strivings provide information not only on what a person is trying to do, but also on whom a person is trying to be – the relatively high level goals that are central aspects of a person's identity. Third, goals are highly personal – they reflect subjective experience, values and commitments as uniquely identified by the person. I rely on individual accounts of purpose and do not assume that all people seek the same purposes in the same ways. Fourth, these goals represent potentialities rather than actualities in that they are never fully satisfied. They reflect what a person is trying to do, not necessarily what they are actually doing. To strive also implies that meaning comes from the "journey" and not just arriving at the "destination." However, one can also strive toward particular modes of being without necessarily making a strenuous effort, for instance in Eastern philosophies which emphasize a cessation of striving and non-attachment to goals (e.g. being at peace with oneself, being at one with the universe). Certainly the notion of strivings (as a noun) would include these latter examples, in that they reflect desired endpoints or objectives to be realized. Spiritual concerns are reflected in both "doing" as well as in "being" goals; indeed perhaps that is an important distinction between the types of goals that adherents to Western and Eastern religious systems aspire toward.

The use of goal language in discussions of spirituality and religion may seem foreign. After all, isn't religion about beliefs and doctrine, feelings and emotions, perceptions and experiences of the sacred? Yes, but religion is also about goals. Spirituality is a motivational force that energizes and directs the goal striving process. One of the basic functions of a religious belief system and a religious worldview is that it provides "an ultimate vision of what people should be striving for in their lives" (Pargament and Park, 1995, p. 15) and the strategies to reach those ends. In addition to the prescriptive nature of religion, there is also a long history of using goal-language metaphorically to depict spiritual growth. In devotional writings and in sacred scriptures, spiritual growth and spiritual maturity are viewed as a process of goal attainment, with the ultimate goal being intimacy with the divine.

If spirituality is the search for the sacred (Hill et al., 2000), then spiritual strivings represent unique, individually tailored ways in which the person negotiates his or her search for the sacred. In my book (Emmons, 1999) I described the criteria I originally used for classifying strivings as spiritual. Spiritual strivings are those personal goals that are concerned with ultimate purpose, ethics, commitment to a higher power, and a seeking of the divine in daily experience. By identifying and committing themselves to spiritual goals, people strive to develop and maintain a relationship to the

sacred. In other words, spiritual strivings are strivings that reflect a desire to transcend the self, that reflect an integration of the individual with larger and more complex units, or that reflect deepening or maintaining a relationship with a higher power. Strivings are coded as spiritual if they reflect concern for an integration of the person with larger and more complex units: with humanity, nature, with the cosmos ("to achieve union with the totality of existence", "to immerse myself in nature and be part of it", "to live my life at all times for God," "to approach life with mystery and awe"). As implied, spiritual strivings contain both conventional religious themes as well as more personalized expressions of spiritual concern. Although as a psychologist of religion I have been primarily concerned with "religious spirituality", it is certainly the case that other, non-religious, humanistic versions of the concept can be detected in personal strivings as well. Coding strivings in this manner allows for inclusivity and is sensitive to the diversity of spiritual expression in a religiously pluralistic culture. Some other examples of spiritual goals or "ultimate concerns" are "trying hard not to expect God to answer all my prayers", "trying to become a more enlightened person", "trying to bring others closer to God", "trying to be a leader for younger women in my church", "trying to devote time to pray every day", and "trying to be open to God's will", and "trying to develop my spirituality to survive the pain and physical downgrading of polio in my life." Notice that these are phrased in terms of what the person is trying to do, implying goal-like striving toward some future state that the person may or may not successfully achieve.

Such a conception of spirituality is consistent with a number of authors who, while acknowledging the diversity of meaning, affirm that a common core meaning of spirituality/religion is the recognition of a transcendent, metaempirical dimension of reality (see Emmons, 1999, chapter 5). For example, Tillich (1957), in his classic analysis of the affective and cognitive bases of faith, contended that the essence of religion, in the broadest and most inclusive sense, is *ultimate concern*. Faith, according to Tillich, is the state of being ultimately concerned—concerns that have a sense of urgency unparalleled in human motivation. Ultimate concern is "a passion for the infinite" (p. 8), and religion "is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life" (Tillich, 1963, p. 4). In religious behavior, "man seeks the largest values in their utmost completion—the ultimate relationships" (Johnson, 1959, p. 102).

Concerns over ultimate questions of meaning and existence, purpose and value, do find expression in one form or another through personal goals. In attempting to answer questions such as "Does life have any real meaning?" or "Is there any ultimate purpose to human existence?" implicit worldview beliefs give rise to goal concerns that reflect how people "walk with ultimacy" in daily life. In personal goals that participants have generated in past research studies, they report the ultimate concerns of trying to "be aware of the spiritual meaningfulness of my life", "discern and follow God's will for my life", "bring my life in line with my beliefs", and "speak up on issues concerning people who have been wronged."

In our research, we have found that people differ in their tendency to attribute spiritual significance to their strivings, with percentages of spiritual strivings ranging from zero to nearly 50%, depending upon the nature of the sample studied. College men have the lowest level of avowed spiritual strivings, whereas elderly, church-going women tend to have the highest levels. In both community-based and college student samples, we have found that the presence of intimacy strivings, generativity strivings, and spiritual strivings within a person's goal hierarchy predict greater subjective well-being (SWB), particularly higher positive affect such as happiness and joy. In each case, we examine the proportion of striving in that category relative to the total number of strivings generated. This provides a rough index of the centrality of each motivational theme within the person's overall goal hierarchy. Spiritual strivings also predicted both marital and overall life satisfaction (Emmons, Cheung, & Tehrani, 1998). But it's not just having spiritual strivings that bodes well for functioning. These goals are appraised in ways that have been shown to facilitate positive experiential and performance outcomes. They were rated as more important, requiring more effort, and engaged in for more intrinsic reasons than were nonspiritual strivings.

Why go to all this trouble of measuring spirituality through personal strivings? After all, isn't it easier just to ask someone how frequently they attend worship services, how often they pray, or whether they consider themselves to be a spiritual or a religious person? Certainly this method is more cumbersome. It is time consuming, it requires good verbal skills on the part of the respondent, it is not practical with very young or very old respondents, and it requires additional data coding. But in my mind, the advantages far outweigh these limitations, especially if the objective is to understand how people identify and search for the sacred in their daily lives. Consider two individuals, C.S. and J.I. On conventional measures of religiousness, such as worship attendance, prayer frequency, and self-rated importance of religion, they appear very similar to each other. In fact, they achieve identical scores on these indices. Yet these surface similarities obscure fundamental differences in structural and functional properties of their spiritual goal hierarchies. A.W. has the goals of "getting closer to God", "cultivating spiritual meaning in my life" and "discerning God's will for my life." Furthermore, he appraises these goals as extremely important, and sees them promoting his other goals in the realms of work and family. J.I., on the other hand, has included among his strivings "avoiding disappointing God", "trying not to feel guilty when I don't live up to my spiritual ideals", and "trying to avoid being punished for my sins." Even though he perceives a high degree of attainment, J.I.'s more avoidantly focused strivings are likely to frustrate his spiritual life compared to A.W.'s positive, approach goals that provide him with desired incentives to move toward with likely greater enjoyment and satisfaction. Avoidance goal striving is associated with more negative psychological, behavioral, and affective outcomes (Emmons, 1999). By decomposing spiritual goals into helpful and harmful components, researchers and clinicians may be able to better understand when and how spirituality is beneficial and when it how it can be damaging.

Sanctifying Personal Goals

In measuring spirituality through goals, a persistent issue has been whether to rely on my own classification of strivings as spiritual or let participants define for themselves whether a particular goal serves a spiritual purpose. Goals which, on the surface, may appear to have little to do with spiritual needs may in fact be perceived as highly spiritual by individuals. Ken Pargament, Annette Mahoney, and their colleagues (2005) refer to this process as *sanctification*. Sanctification is a psychological process through which aspects of life are perceived by people as having spiritual character and significance. Borrowing from the initial work of Pargament and Mahoney, we assess striving sanctification by having people evaluate each goal on the following items:

- God played a role in the development of this striving.
- God is present in this striving.
- This striving is a reflection of God's will.
- I experience God through this striving.
- This striving reflects what I think God wants for me.
- This striving enables me to get closer to God.

Each statement is answered on a 1-5 scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. We then derive an average sanctification score for each separate goal, as well as an overall sanctification score for each person, summed across their individual goals. With this approach, we have been able to identify sacred goals that, on the surface, appear to have little to do with spirituality. For example, goals rated high on sanctification include: "not to dwell on my disability", "remain as independent as possible as long as I can", "be considerate of others", "help others in any way I can", and "remain helpful." Interpersonal strivings such as these last three examples, more so than other types of strivings, tend to be viewed as having a sacred significance. We find that these are uniquely related to life outcomes such as meaning in life and emotional well-being. Strivings need not be overtly spiritual to be imbued with sacred qualities. Strivings that are sanctified are rated as more meaningful, as being supported more by others, and are related to greater commitment to others than are less sanctified strivings.

This approach to spirituality through goal striving and goal sanctification has generated important

research findings in laboratories outside our own. In their sample of 150 community adults, Mahoney and Pargament (2005) found that people tended to place a high priority on strivings that they viewed as sacred. They invested more time and energy into spiritual strivings and derived greater satisfaction and sense of meaning from them relative to strivings that were more self-focused and materially oriented. Ryan and Fiorito (2003) found that avoidance spiritual goals were associated with low levels of well-being (lower self-esteem, less identity integration, and more negative affect). In an important recent study, Tix and Frazier (2005) found that striving sanctification was associated with less anxiety, depression, and hostility and with greater intrinsic religiousness. In their study, they asked participants to rate each of the strivings they listed according to the extent to which they were pursued "because of religious or spiritual reasons." This measure of non-theistic sanctification has some advantages over the theistic measure that we have used, although it is subject to various idiosyncratic interpretations of the terms religious and spiritual. Tix and Frazier also conducted mediational analyses in which they found that sanctification of strivings mediated the relationship between intrinsic religiousness and hostility. The authors suggest that having religious and/or spiritual motives for pursuing daily tasks may lessen hostility because such motives may encourage a reframing of problems (that otherwise may provoke hostility) through connection with a higher "purpose" for engaging in such tasks.

In research conducted with inpatients of an alcoholism treatment center, Hart (2007) found that a stronger intention to seek a sacred experience of connectedness/oneness with Divinity is associated with higher rates of abstinence from alcohol, a stronger sense that one's life has meaning, purpose, and significance, and greater involvement in the active ingredients of recovery available through affiliation with Alcoholics Anonymous. These findings suggest that the pursuit of sacred goals may help sustain long-term abstinence from alcohol and enhance quality of life during the aftercare phase of overcoming an addictive disorder. A 'spiritual striving' orientation is associated with more a more favorable profile of recovery processes and outcomes, importantly extending the work on spiritual striving and well-being in non-clinical samples.

The Power of Sacred Strivings

What accounts for the unique ability of sacred strivings to predict well-being outcomes? As Pargament (2002) has convincingly argued, identifying that which is sacred and striving to protect and preserve the sacred lends deep significance to human existence, a significance that is difficult to explain through more basic psychological or social levels of description. Spiritual strivings may have a unique empowering function; people are more likely to persevere in these strivings, even under difficult circumstances. This empowering function may be stronger in groups that have limited access to other resources, such as racial minorities, the elderly, and the chronically ill (Pargament, 2002). People are more likely to take measures to protect and preserve strivings that focus on the sacred, and devote time and effort toward their realization. Spiritual strivings are also likely to provide stability and support in times of crisis by reorienting people to what is ultimately important in life (Emmons, Colby, & Kaiser, 1998). Investing goals with a sense of sacredness confers upon them a power to organize experience and to promote well-being that is absent in non-sacred strivings (Mahoney and Pargament, 2005). People admit that in today's secular culture, whether their spiritual strivings are socially accepted or socially sanctioned, they derive tremendous meaning and purpose from them. Hart (2007) suggested that the observed correlation of spiritual motivation to AA adherence may be due, in part, to a greater tendency of spiritual strivers to sanctify the processes involved in AA's planned program of recovery.

The unique ability of spiritual strivings to promote well-being may be partially explained by the ability of religion to provide a unifying philosophy of life and to serve as an integrating force (Allport, 1950; Tillich, 1957). Conflict or fragmentation is a source of stress that can undermine purposeful striving and thus well-being. Research has documented the deleterious effect of goal conflict on well-being (Emmons & King, 1988). Although purpose is forged out of the many possibilities that life presents, these same choices can be experienced as paralyzing (see also Schwartz, 2000). Johnson (1959) describes this predicament:

Out of the very contradictions that provide freedom come the distresses of conflict. Life can never be simple or easy for a conscious person. He must forever contend with the competing demands of a complicated world that give him no rest. Like Adam, the prototype of every man, he is lured by the unknown, tempted by untasted possibilities, seduced by the one he loves, forbidden by highest authority, caught in conflicts of desire, overcome with guilty remorse and driven forth to wrestle and sweat in a world of contradiction and uncertainty (p. 104).

Some support for the integrative role of religious striving comes from research of ours (Emmons et al., 1998). Participants in this project completed a goal instrumentality matrix in which they were asked to judge the degree to which each of their 15 personal strivings had a helpful (instrumental), harmful (conflictual), or no effect on each of their other strivings. We found that the presence of theistic spiritual strivings (strivings which explicitly refer to God) in particular were related to low levels of inter-goal conflict, and to greater levels of goal integration. Furthermore, spiritual strivings were uniquely associated with overall goal integration. No other striving content category was associated with our measures of integration. In a related finding, Zinnbauer and Pargament (1988) found that recent converts were more likely to report a positive life transformation as reflected in a more unified sense of self and a belief that their goals had become more significant and meaningful compared to nonconverts who increased in their religious faith gradually, and with religious individuals who had not experienced a recent change in their faith.

Cast in the language of cognitive goal psychology, spiritual strivings appeared to have a greater number of positive, excitatory connections with other goals, and fewer negative, inhibitory connections within people's overall goal systems. Without an overall organizational framework that unites separate goal strivings into a coherent structure, a person would have a very difficult time living a life that is meaningful. Religion then, has the potential to invest human existence with meaning by establishing goals and value systems that pertain to all aspects of a person's life with the potential to confer unity upon disparate experiences. We thus find evidence to support Allport's (1950) thesis that "the religious sentiment [...] is the portion of personality that arises at the core and that has the longest range intentions, and for this reason is capable of conferring marked integration upon personality [...] it is man's ultimate attempt to enlarge and to complete his own personality" (p. 142).

At the same time, not all religious or spiritual goals facilitate other goals or even one another. There is no guarantee that spiritual strivings will be well integrated within the overall self-system. Sincerely held beliefs may be held with a degree of ambivalence because they prove costly in the person's social environment. For example, in our research we found that desires to share one's faith with others were often not consonant with other goals in the person's hierarchy. Second, fundamentalist religious mindsets might enhance internal consistency at the cost of interpersonal disharmony. Cognitive processing associated with fundamentalist thinking is likely to lead to the person's inability to tolerate healthy skepticism or doubt. Dogmatically held beliefs can bring about a forced unity at a surface level that might obscure conflicts that still persist at a deeper, less accessible level. Third, religious strivings might make people aware of discrepancies between what they believe and what they actually do. Although ideally such discrepancies can be motivating and lead to enhanced striving and ultimately to deeper faith, discrepancies between belief and action can also engender powerful feelings of inappropriate guilt, depression, and self-flagellation. Spiritual maturity or spiritual intelligence may be the critical factor influencing the integration of spiritual concerns into a well-functioning, coherent self-system.

The Spiritual Striving Questionnaire (SSQ)

Spiritual strivings are generally assessed through a series of interlocking assessment modules that can require anywhere from 2-4 hours to complete. Because this is not always practical, an alternative, briefer form of striving assessment is desirable. Toward that end, we have recently developed a short form of the strivings assessment procedure, known as the Spiritual Striving Questionnaire (SSQ; Emmons, 2008). The SSQ is shown in Table 1.

This questionnaire asks about the things that you are typically trying to do during an average day. These are called "strivings" and refer to the things you are typically striving to do or accomplish. They are basically daily goals we have that recur (they often don't have a definite end-point or permanent solution). Here are a number of strivings that may or may not apply to you. For each item, please indicate how much with you agree with the statement, "I see myself as someone who is typically trying to " by writing the number that describes your agreement from the 1-5 scale below. For example, you would rate how much you agree or disagree with the statement, "I see myself as someone who is typically trying to find that 'special someone.'"

Table 1: Spiritual Strivings Questionnaire

Disagree Strongly 1	Disagree a little 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree a little 4	Agree Strongly 5
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I See Myself as Someone Who is Typically Trying to...

- | | |
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| <p>1. ___ find that "special someone"</p> <p>1. ___ make sure everyone's needs are met</p> <p>2. ___ be involved in improving my community</p> <p>3. ___ discern and follow God's will for my life</p> <p>4. ___ be humble</p> <p>5. ___ remove my self-centered thoughts</p> <p>6. ___ win at all competitive events (sports, games, etc.)</p> <p>7. ___ live life more simply</p> <p>8. ___ make it appear that I am smart</p> <p>9. ___ win arguments</p> <p>10. ___ bring my life in line with my religious beliefs</p> <p>11. ___ teach others spiritual truths</p> <p>12. ___ find time for church functions</p> <p>13. ___ overcome shyness around strangers</p> <p>14. ___ treat others as I would like to be treated</p> <p>15. ___ pray and meditate</p> <p>16. ___ eliminate my self-centered actions</p> <p>17. ___ do my best as a student</p> <p>18. ___ get excellent grades</p> | <p>11. ___ appreciate God's creations</p> <p>12. ___ get others interested in what I do</p> <p>13. ___ be the best in a group of people</p> <p>14. ___ impress people so they notice me (i.e., making them laugh)</p> <p>15. ___ gain the approval of my family</p> <p>16. ___ realize that God loves me for who I am and try to love others the same way</p> <p>17. ___ seek the Lord's guidance for the day</p> <p>18. ___ take time for God</p> <p>19. ___ live a life inspired by Jesus' example</p> <p>20. ___ volunteer my time and talents for the benefit of others</p> <p>21. ___ be a forgiving person</p> <p>22. ___ have a closer relationship with God</p> <p>23. ___ have God influence my life and my daily actions</p> <p>24. ___ help others in time of need</p> |
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|--|---|
| <p>19. ___ be pleasing to God in all that I do each day</p> <p>20. ___ love God with my whole heart</p> <p>21. ___ prevent loneliness</p> <p>22. ___ meet new people</p> <p>2. ___ help my friends and let them know I care</p> <p>3. ___ accept others as they are</p> <p>4. ___ be a good listener</p> <p>23. ___ understand God and God's will</p> <p>5. ___ get other people to do the things I want</p> <p>6. ___ live my religion and grow closer to God</p> <p>7. ___ be nice to others so they will like and accept me</p> <p>8. ___ make myself physically attractive</p> <p>9. ___ feel useful to society</p> <p>10. ___ make my life mean something</p> | <p>25. ___ seek new experiences</p> <p>26. ___ feel better than others (e.g., in better shape, smarter, better clothes, better grades)</p> <p>27. ___ use my time productively</p> <p>28. ___ put my best effort into everything I do</p> <p>29. ___ be liked and accepted by other people I know</p> <p>30. ___ be open about my feelings and communicate them</p> <p>31. ___ be happier with my life</p> <p>32. ___ be strong while going through life's "ups and downs"</p> <p>33. ___ show that I am better than others</p> <p>34. ___ have others depend on me</p> <p>35. ___ take care of my own needs first</p> <p>36. ___ make my parents proud of me</p> <p>37. ___ seek a purpose or mission in what I do</p> |
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The SSQ was adapted from the Personal Striving Coding Manual (Emmons, 1999) and the self-report survey of goal strivings developed by Leak, DeNeve, and Greteman (2007). Approximately 1/3 of the items reflect religious and spiritual concerns ("discern and follow God's will for my life," "have a closer relationship to God"). In addition to these spiritual and religious goals, items were chosen to represent the major motive categories of achievement, affiliation-intimacy, and power. The final version of the SSQ consisted of 60 items (Cronbach's alpha = .91) for which participants rated the extent of agreement with the statement, "I see myself as someone who is typically trying to _____" on a 1 to 5 scale where 1 = disagree strongly and 5 = agree strongly. High scores indicate greater commitment to goal striving and can be taken as a general indicator of overall motivation to set and pursue goals.

Preliminary results using the SSQ have been promising suggesting that spiritual strivings can be assessed in a more direct and efficient manner than the more time-consuming original striving assessment methodology developed by Emmons (1999). Of course, there are trade-offs involved in sacrificing the amount of information obtained with ease of administration. For some purposes and if time permits, the original methodology may be preferable.

Explaining Spiritual Strivings

So it has been established that people's motivational lives are often characterized by spiritual strivings. But why do people have spiritual strivings? What functions or purposes do they serve? Motivation deals not only with the content of behavior, but also in understanding the proximal motives that influence individual's behavior day-to-day. In accounting for religious motivation, there are two primary schools of thought. The first, which might be called the "global motive" approach, emphasizes specific motivational needs (either a few or many), while the second approach is organized around psychological systems designed to solve adaptive problems faced by our

ancestors.

That religion serves to satisfy a small number of fundamental motives has been postulated by a number of different investigators. These would include basic, fundamental motives such as meaning, control, self-esteem, and relatedness or belongingness (Kirkpatrick, 2005; Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003). In contrast, others have proposed a much larger number of needs. For example, Reiss (2004) proposed a multi-factorial theory in which people turn to religion for 16 different motives: Status, acceptance, social contact, tranquility, eating, curiosity, exercise, independence, power, honor, family, vengeance, order, romance, and idealism. This global motive approach, while intuitively appealing, has been criticized on the grounds that it does not conform to innate psychological architecture (Kirkpatrick, 2005).

An approach which better reflects designed human psychology is the discrete domain-specific systems approach (Kirkpatrick, 2005). According to contemporary evolutionary psychology, the brain/mind comprises a host of domain-specific mechanisms designed by natural selection to solve adaptive problems faced recurrently by our ancestors in their environments. These mechanisms then serve to organize and direct behavior through a series of inputs and outputs. The adaptive problems include problems related to mating (such as selection, attraction, and retention of mates), problems related to competition for resources (the negotiation of status hierarchies, formation and maintenance of alliances), problems related to acquiring assistance and support from others (selection and maintenance of friendships), and problems related to inter-group conflict. The functional organization of these different systems must differ qualitatively from one another because the adaptive problems and their solutions vary widely across different domains (Kirkpatrick, 2005). Therefore, strivings reflecting these different systems are likely to be quite distinct from each other. Evolved systems that solve the above problems are the attachment system, coalitional psychology, kinship psychology, intrasexual competition, and social exchange (Kirkpatrick, 2005).

Perhaps then, strivings solve adaptive problems in these life domains. I attempted to classify spiritual strivings in terms of the five domains of status, attachment, coalition formation, kinship, and social exchange. I was able to map them in the following manner: status ("let God take control and not think I can do better," "let go and let God," "follow God's plan for my life," "not to expect God to answer all of my prayers"), attachment ("get closer to God," "improve my relationship with God," "work on things that separate me from God"), coalition formation ("help people meet God," "help others find God working in their own lives", "communicate my faith with others), kinship ("make our home a place that models the love of Christ," "honor and grow my child's spirituality", "pray with wife") and social exchange ("thank God for blessings", "worship God on a regular basis", "be more thankful for what God has given to me"). The fit between individual strivings and psychological systems is a good one for these.

On the other hand, consider these strivings: "knowing God," "live my life at all times for God," "glorifying God", "have fun and enjoy life because God gave me this life", "be faithful to God", "remember what God has done for me, "incorporate God into my daily life, "practice the presence of God in daily activities." These strivings do not appear to map readily on to the psychological systems. Which adaptive problems do they offer solutions to? It is not clear.

So then, do spiritual or theistic strivings solve particular adaptive problems? I think the answer at this early stage of research is mostly we don't know. Perhaps, then, a striving for the sacred is a unique motivation that does not easily fit the domain-specific psychological mechanism hypothesis. With this conclusion I echo the sentiments of Pargament (2002) who persuasively argued that the unique functions of religion cannot be reduced to a more familiar, naturalistic set of human motivations. Rather, the sacred component of religion sets it aside from other human phenomena and requires that religious motivation, and the psychological study of religion more generally, needs to be appreciated more fully and on its own terms.

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