

Dr Arjun Kingdon

Death and dying in a multi-cultural society

Objectives

Hear stories

**Reflect on issues of faith, belief, meaning,
culture and spirituality**

**Reflect on how spiritual issues can affect
dying people and those who care for them**

What IS spirituality?

Meaning has changed over time

Spiritus – soul, ghost, courage, vigour, breath

McCarroll 2005 – **twenty-seven definitions**

- Connection to a ‘higher power’ or divine force
- Connection to others and to the world
- Existential search for meaning or purpose
- Cultivation of inner peace / personal growth
- Transcendence / seeking higher state of consciousness

What IS spirituality?

In practical terms...

Small everyday experiences; being present

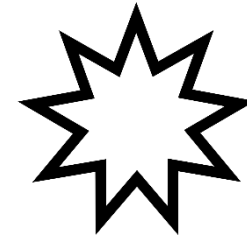
Legacy activities

Human or nature connection

Prayer, meditation, reflection

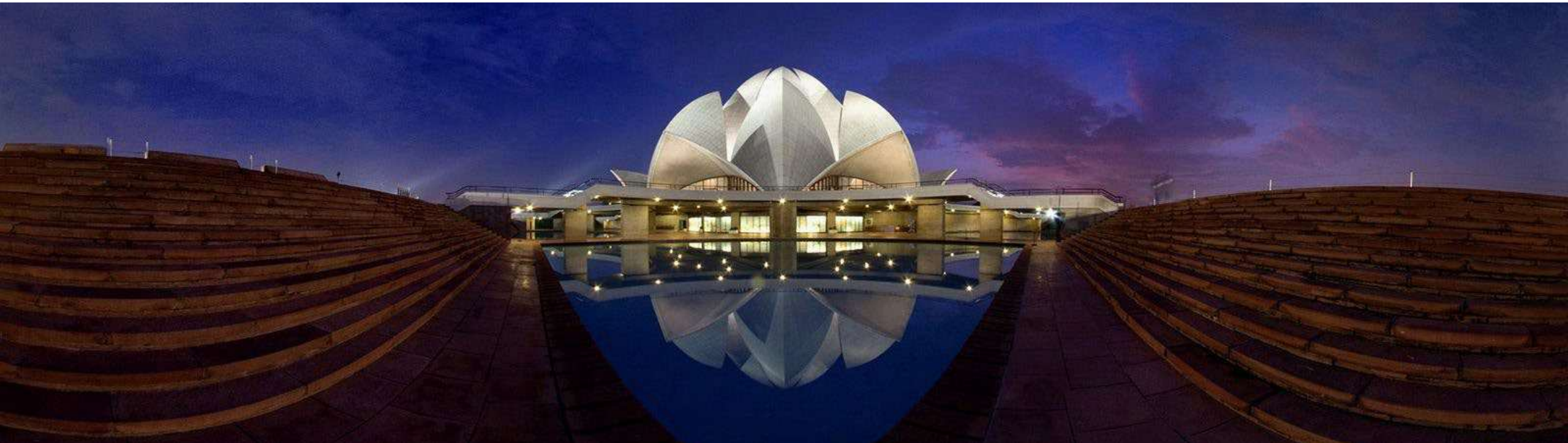
Pursuit of knowledge, pleasure, new experiences, transcendence

A bit about the Bahá'í Faith



Monotheistic religion, originated in Iran in 1800s. No clergy.

Core beliefs: “*progressive revelation*”, oneness of mankind.



Bahá'ís and death

- There is an afterlife
- No emphasis on 'heaven and hell'
- Almost no liturgy / ritual at all

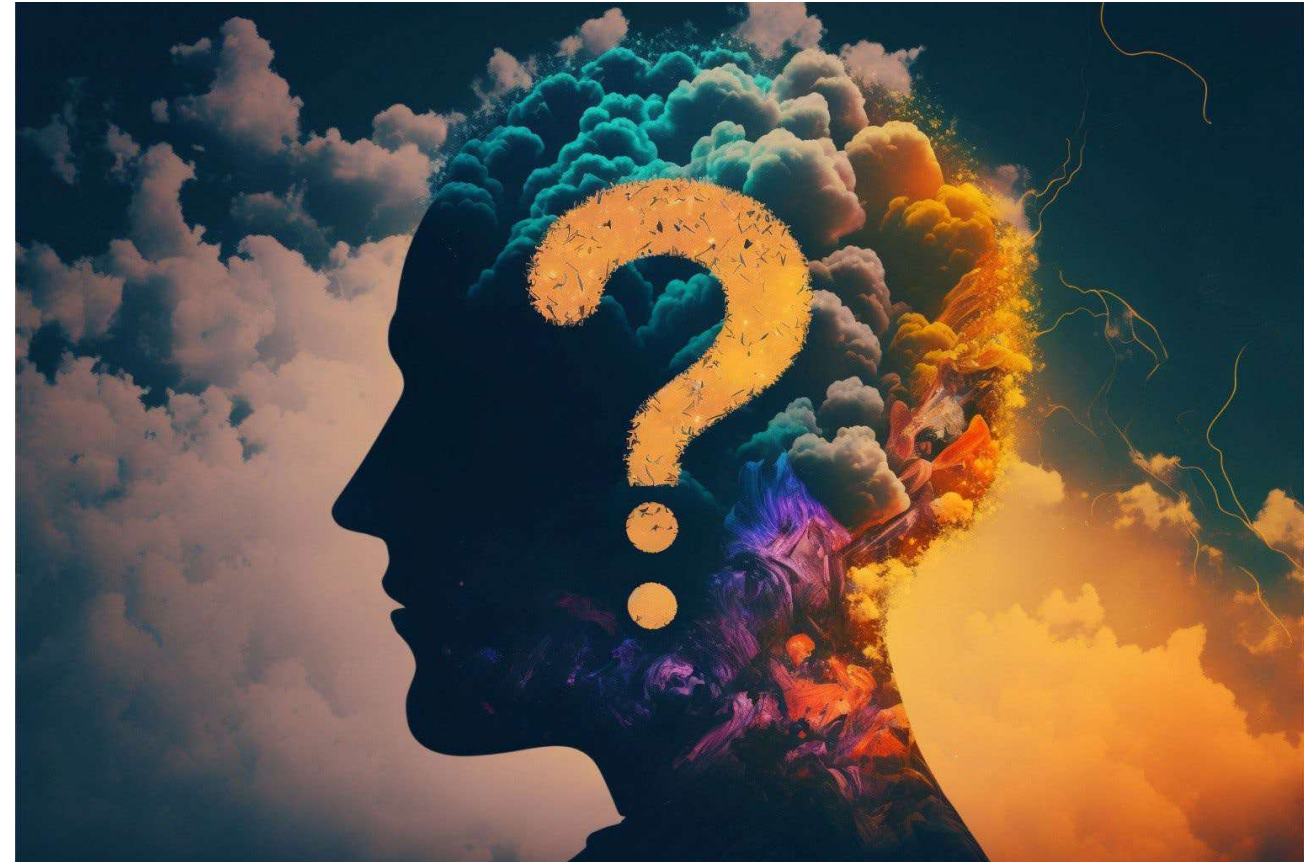


A bit about me

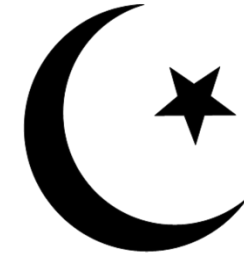


I lost my faith in my 20s

**What do I want
when I am dying?**



Vignette 1



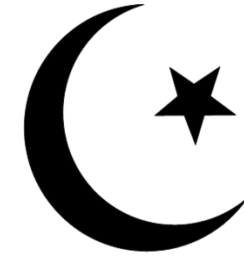
- Mr B – in 40s, Bangladeshi family background, UK citizen
- Muslim faith, important to him
- Rectal cancer, severe pain
- Strong concern about treatment choices and suicide

Vignette 1



- Admitted to St Clare Hospice for symptom control
- Saw his Imam
- Spoke to Dr Abbas

Vignette 1



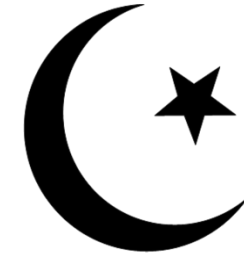
Qur'an 4:29:

Destroy not yourselves. Surely Allah is ever merciful to you.

DNR orders can be seen as a 'soft form' of euthanasia – which is strictly forbidden

But...

Vignette 1



Qur'an 16:61:

When their time comes, they cannot delay it for a single hour nor can they bring it forward by a single hour

Islamic Code of Medical Ethics: 'It is the process of life that the doctor aims to maintain and not the process of dying'

Learning points

Value of diverse workforce and identifying the right individuals to support someone

Spiritual concerns can affect symptoms

Value of picking up cues and spiritual assessment

Spirituality assessment

A horizontal bar composed of six colored segments: pink, orange, yellow, green, cyan, and purple.

Faith / beliefs

What things do you believe in that give meaning to your life?

Importance or influence

What influence does that have on how you care for yourself or want to be cared for?

Community

Are you part of a spiritual community, is that of support to you?

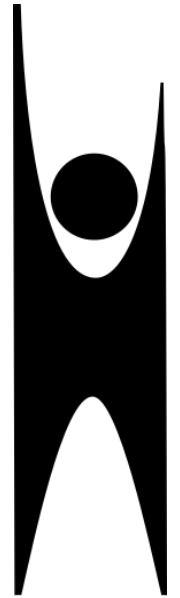
Address

How would you like people caring for you to address these issues?

Vignette 2



- Ms K – in 50s, artist, no faith, oesophageal cancer
- High degree of pain, anxiety and distress
- Eye donation
- Music



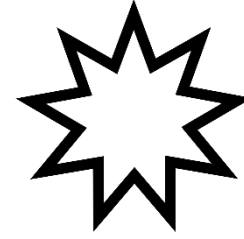
Learning points

Spiritual care is not only for the religious

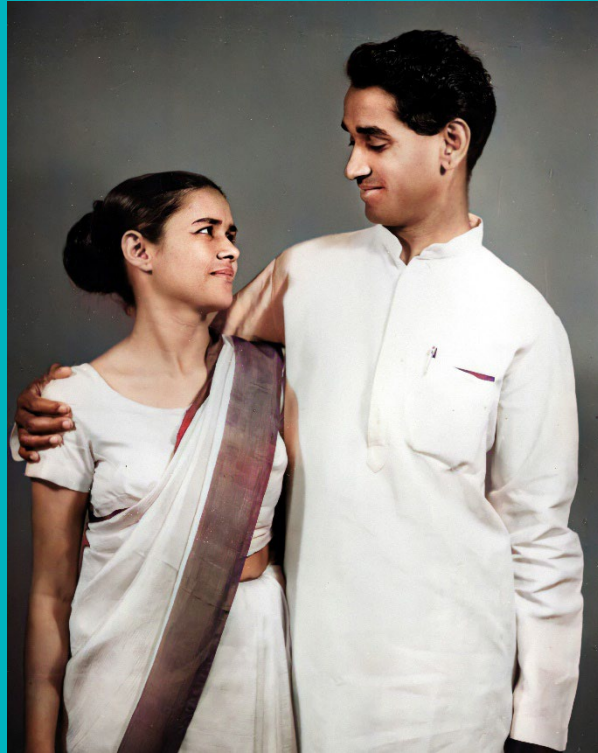
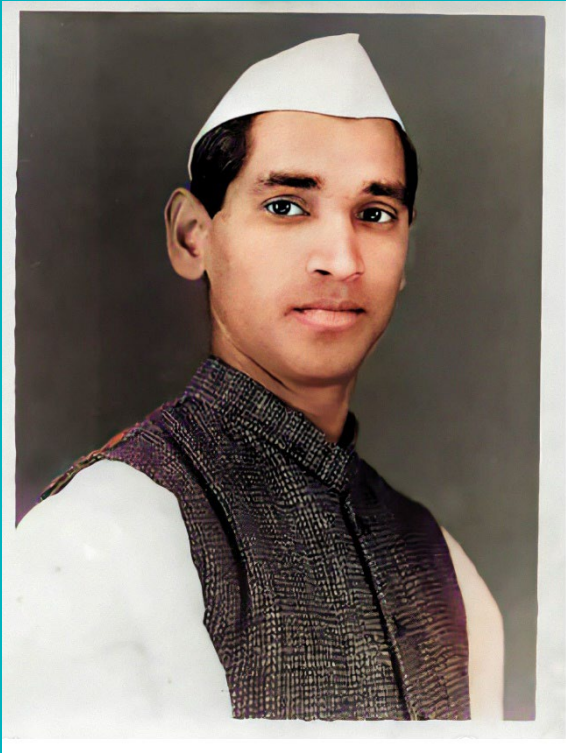
A degree of creativity is often helpful

**People may lose sense of purpose
towards end of life**

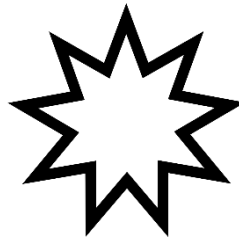
Vignette 3



- Jagdish Gandhi – my grandfather
- Raised Hindu, ardent Gandhian
- Ahimsa (peaceful non-violent protest)
- Converted to Bahá'í Faith in 1960s while visiting the UK

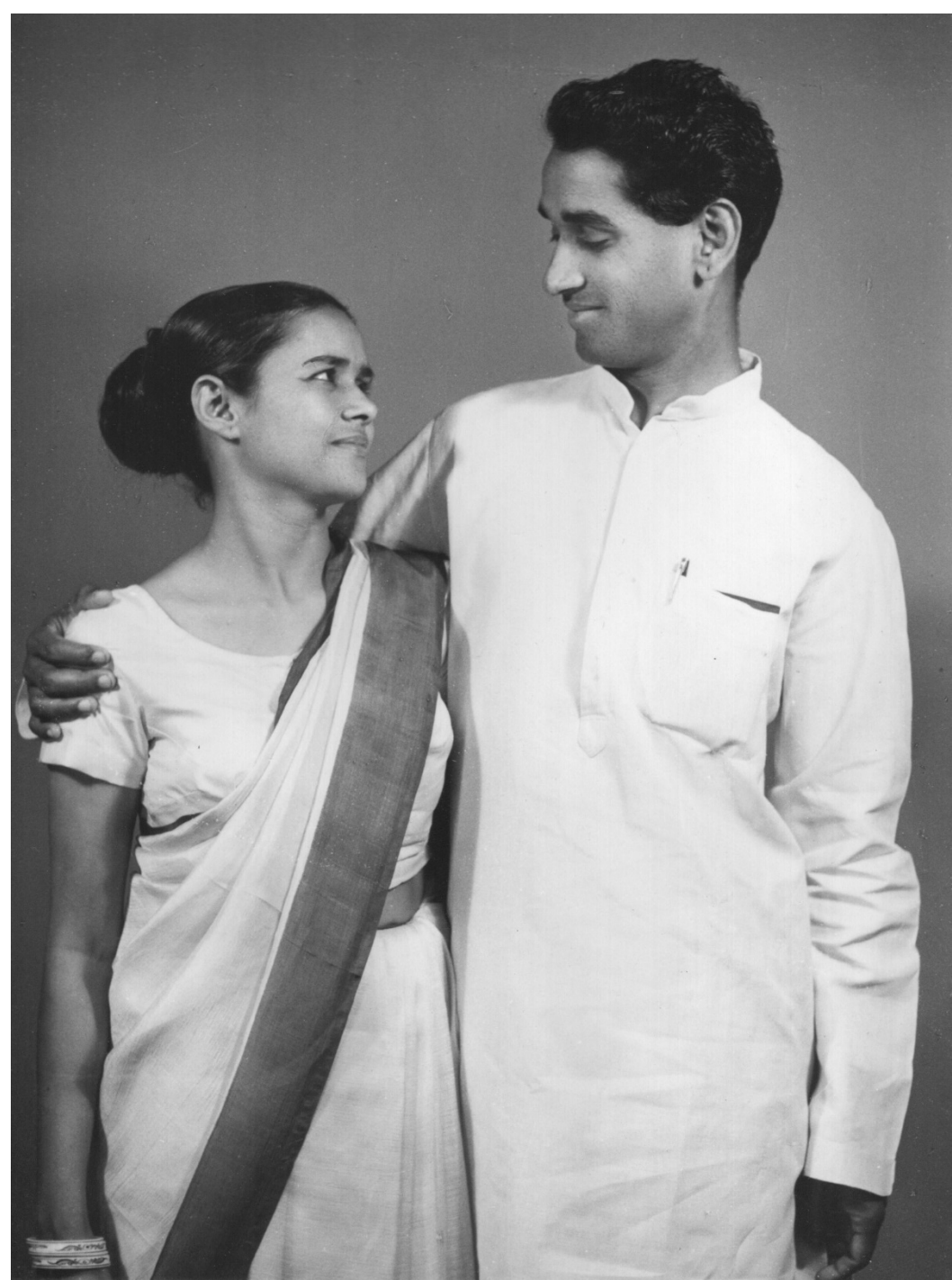


Vignette 3

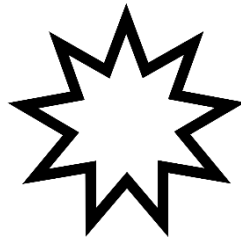


- 28 December 2023 – cardiac arrest
- Resuscitated ‘successfully’, taken to ICU
- No cognitive function

Decision-making: medical, legal, cultural, ethical, religious and spiritual dimensions



Vignette 3



Medical:

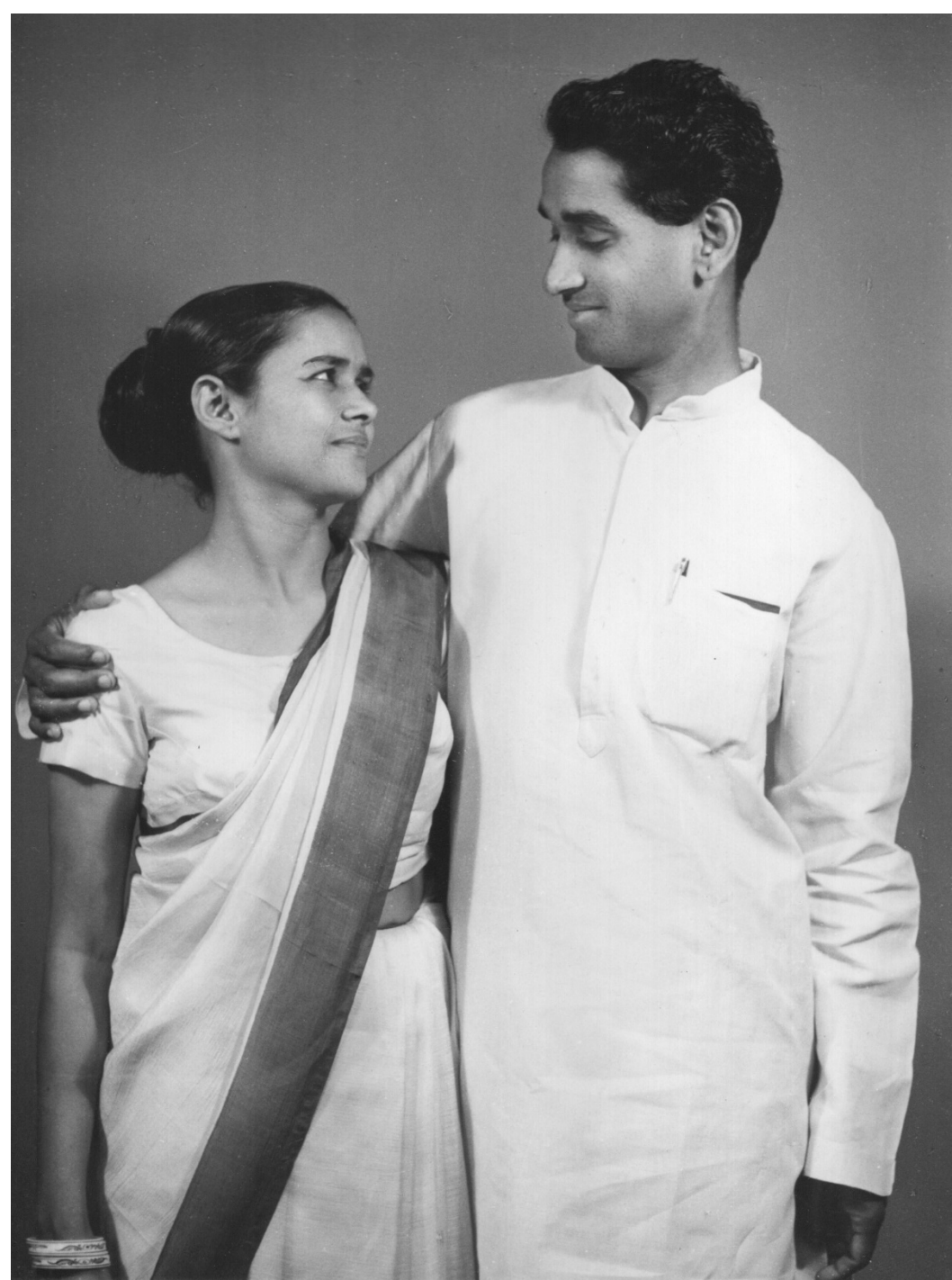
- No prospect of meaningful recovery

Legal:

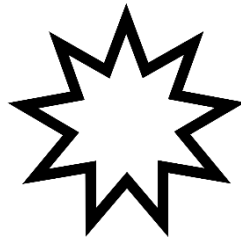
- Told DNACPR is illegal!

Cultural:

- “Everyone” pushes for life
- “No one” dies in the ICU



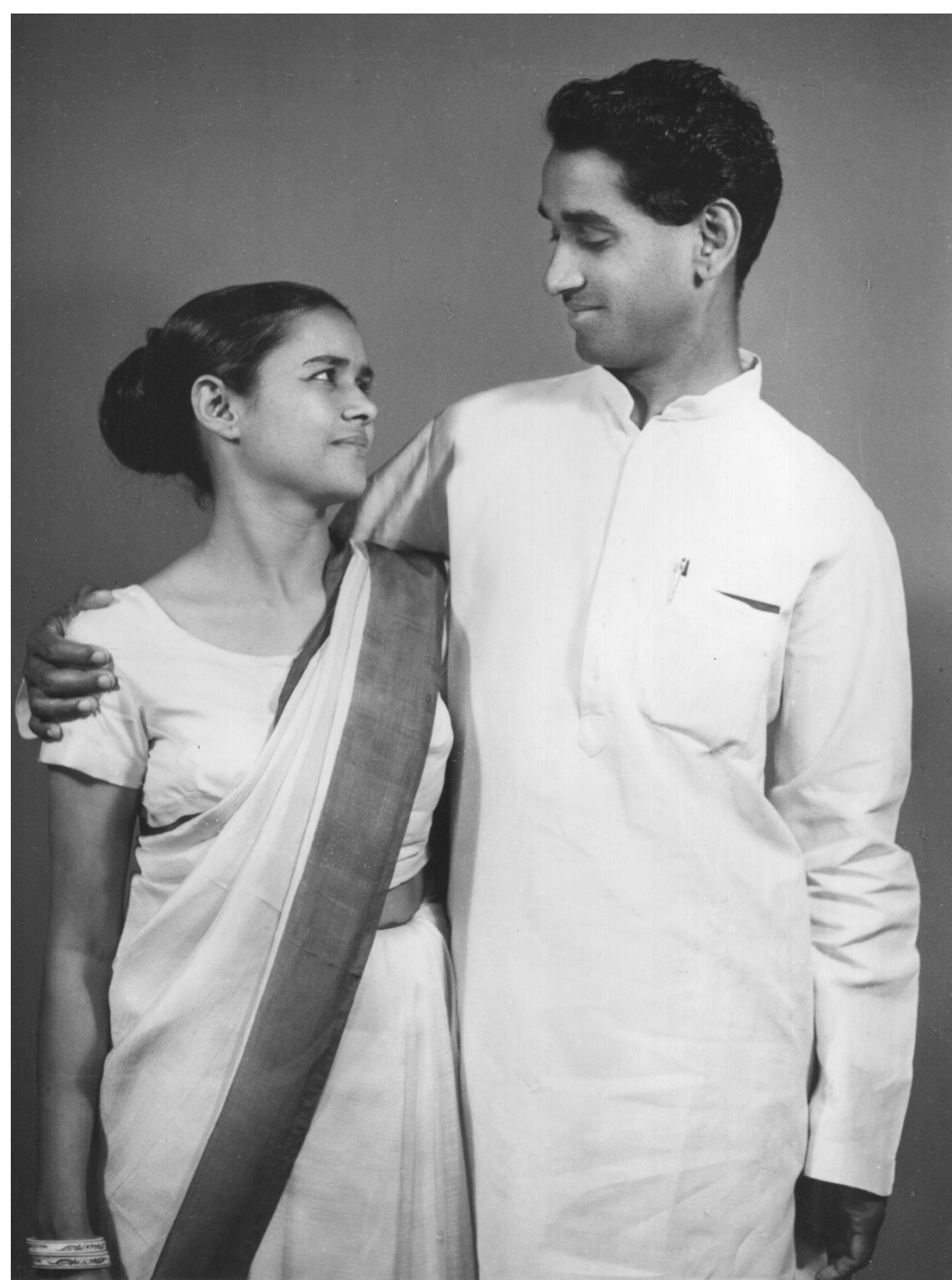
Vignette 3



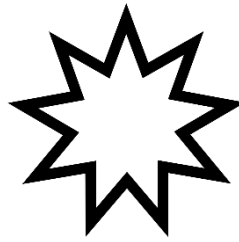
Ethical:

- Futility
- Suffering
- Autonomy

‘what would he want?’



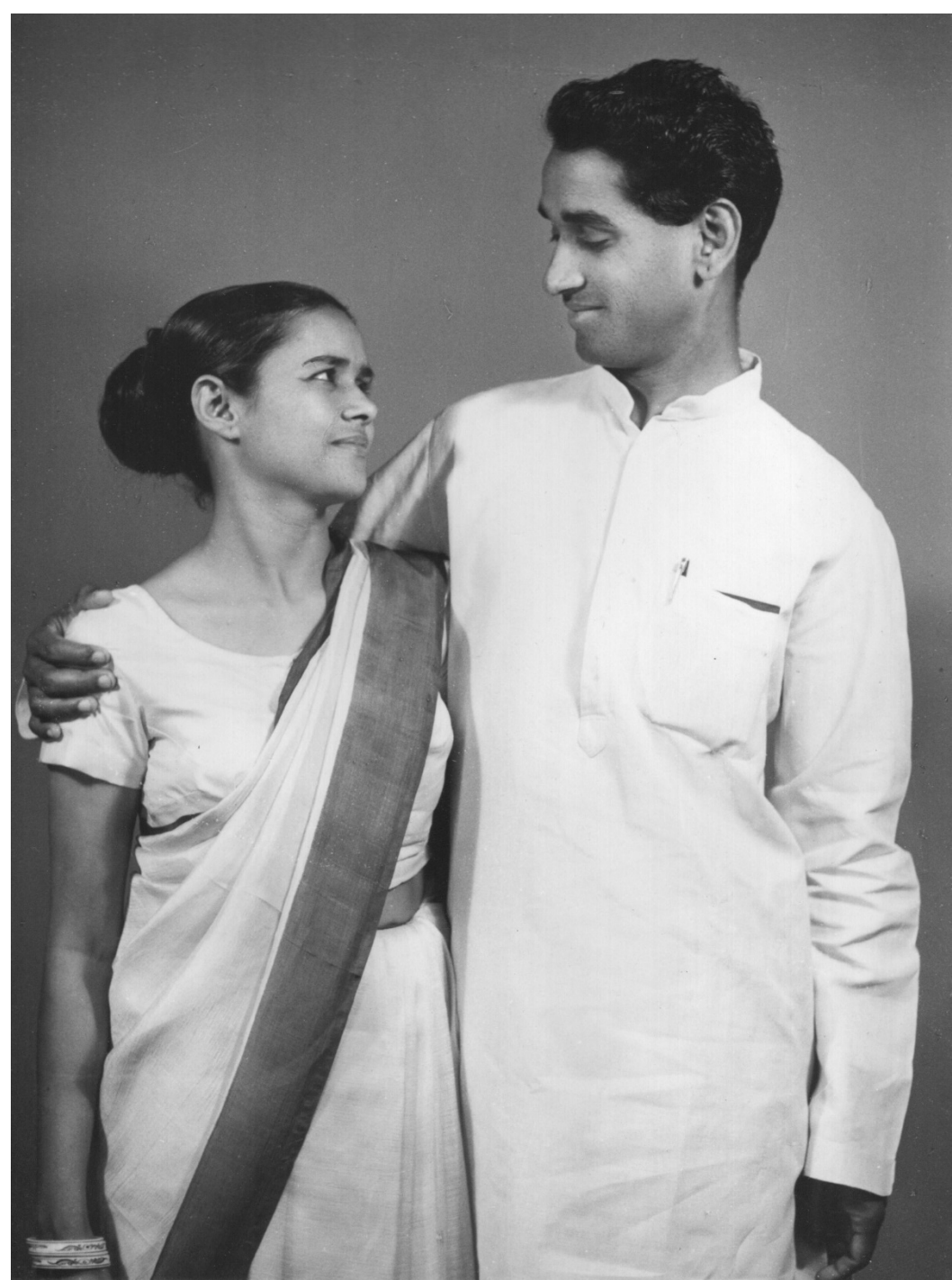
Vignette 3



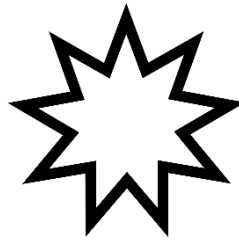
Religious / Spiritual:

***“I bear witness, O my God, that
Thou hast created me to
know Thee and worship Thee”***

“I want to work until my last breath”



Vignette 3



Wife

constantly praying

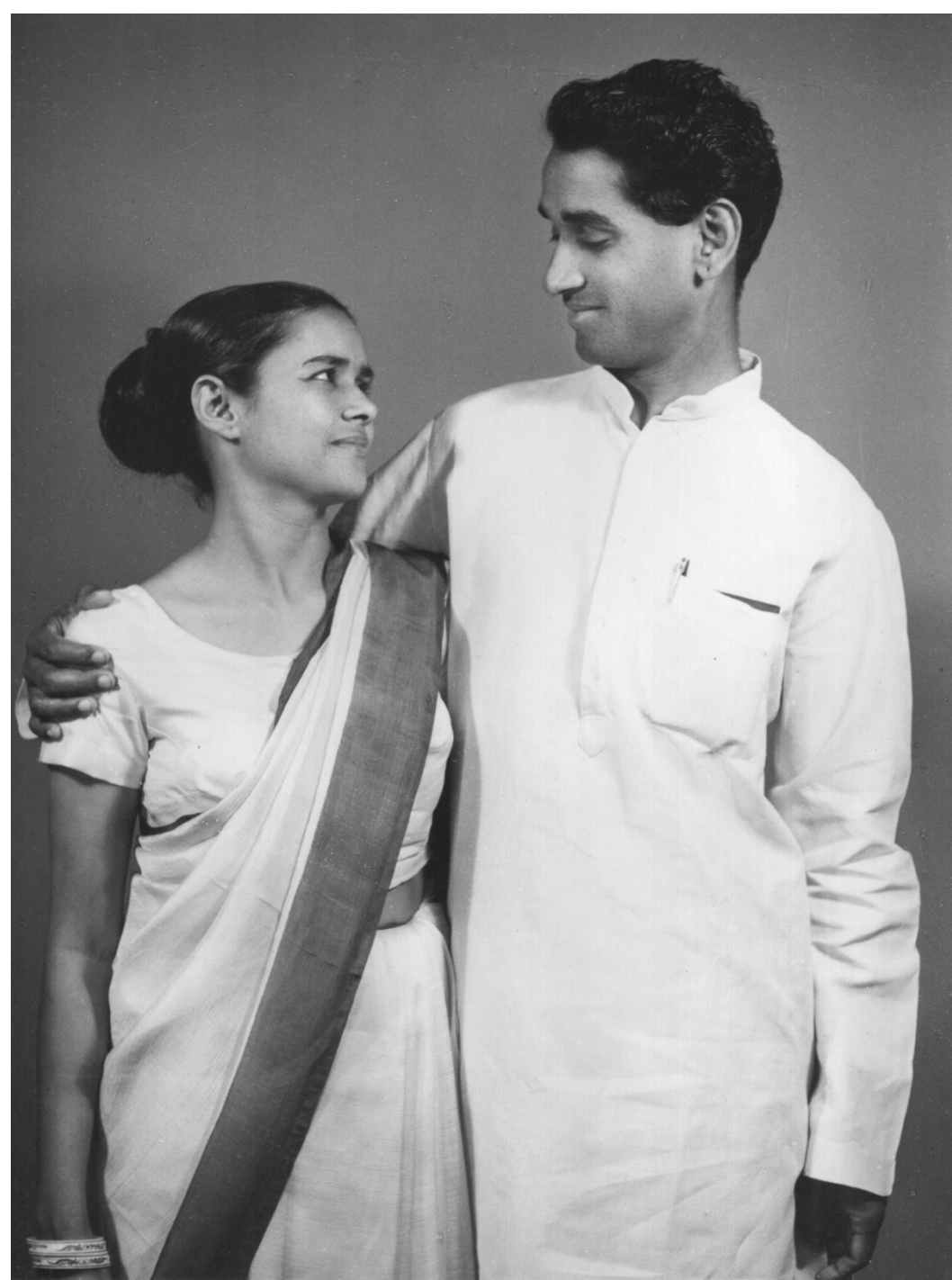
Older daughter

mainly tears and denial

Younger daughter

focus on medical details

*“Death is a messenger of joy;
wherefore dost thou grieve?”*

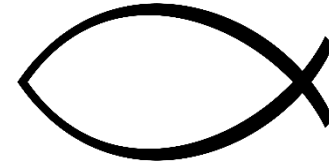


Learning points

Someone's religion doesn't tell you how they will react to illness or grief: assume nothing!

Be aware of the hugely different cultural contexts that patients, families and colleagues may have as part of the fabric of their lives

Vignette 4



- Mr D, pancreatic cancer, no fixed abode
- Wanted to pray and attend Mass
- Matched with a Compassionate Neighbour with a similar faith
- Attended church together; met family; stayed in touch after re-homing
- She attended his funeral

Learning points

**One person
can make all
the difference**

**Not necessarily
a professional**

**Draw on
community
resources**



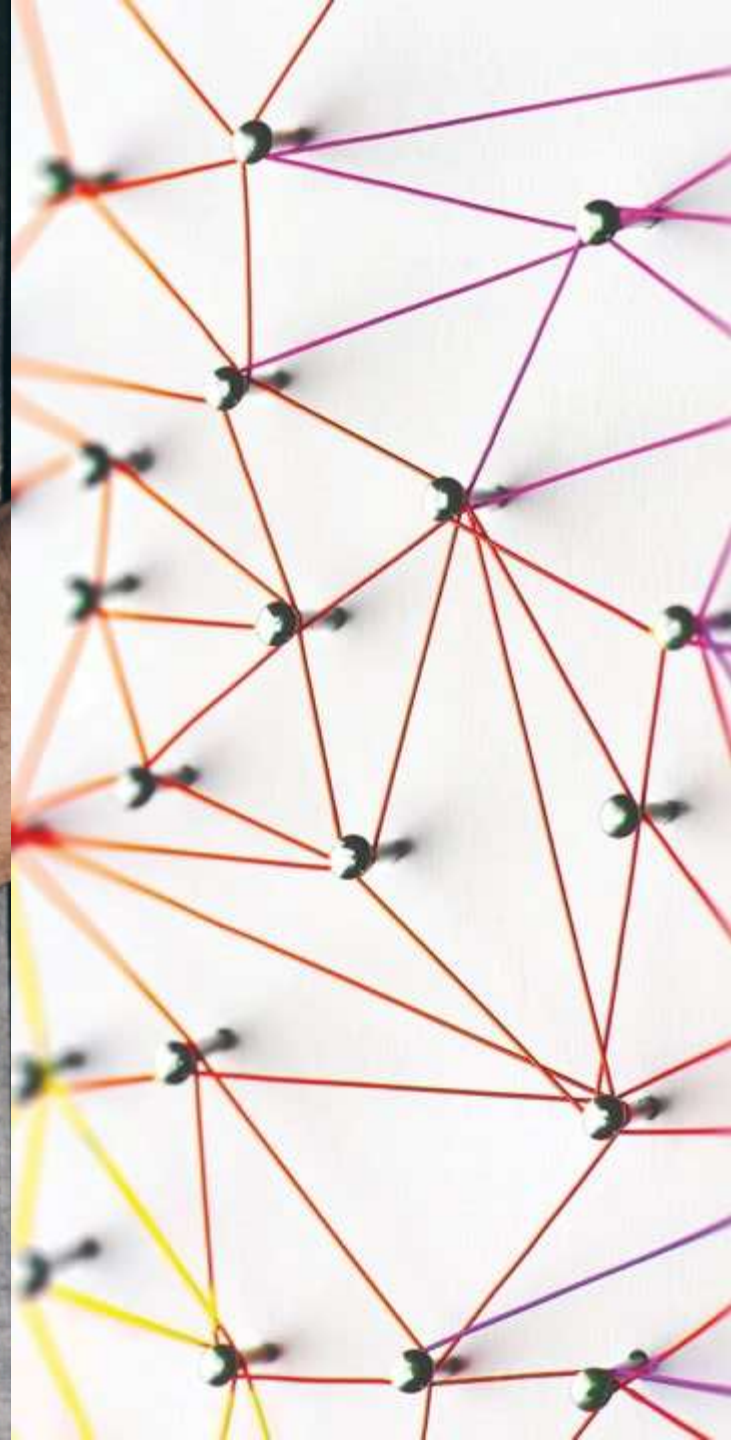
Only connect!

That was the whole of her sermon.

Only connect the prose and the passion,
and both will be exalted,
and human love will be seen at its height.
Live in fragments no longer.

Only connect and the beast
and the monk, robbed of
the isolation that is life
to either, will die.

Howards End
E. M. Forster



Life stories

Phenomenon of ‘duration neglect’

Group A: 60 seconds in very cold water

Group B: 60 seconds in very cold water...
then 30 seconds in cold water

**We want our stories to end well
and to have some meaning**

“Only connect”



**Next up:
Information
stands,
networking and
discussion**

