Spirituality has been widely recognized as a strong protective factor against suicidality. However, much less attention seems to be paid to its value to those struggling to come to terms with a suicide. Smith’s well-written paperback addresses this gap. His text relates how one can live a spiritual life as a survivor and examine how faith is affected by suicide.

Smith adheres to his purpose, but prospective readers should know that the book’s themes are religious spirituality and religiosity rather than spirituality as a general sense of a power greater than one’s self outside any organized religion or liturgy. Smith ably outlines the benefits of religious beliefs, practices, and experiences as resources for those bereaved by suicide. With very few exceptions, Smith’s religious references are from Christianity, which may limit its utility to survivors from other faiths.

Smith identifies himself as a survivor of his cousin’s suicide as well as someone whose own suicidality reached the point of a doable lethal plan beginning after his divorce and persisting for a period when he found life to be intolerable. It was during an episode of suicidality that Smith discovered the palliative nature of spirituality while listening to a radio evangelist in his car. Smith’s background also includes work as a funeral director, grief educator, and counselor. He has authored other books on the subjects of death and dying.

Smith writes convincingly and compellingly of how spirituality grounded on religious concepts can aid survivors who are struggling with the “Why?” question, wrestling with the impact of their loss on their beliefs and values, feeling the hurt of the residual stigma that touches everyone who experiences a suicide, and drifting into depression and/or experiencing other reactions to unresolved grief. The essence of this book is that suicide is a spiritual experience.

Along the way, Smith offers several interesting conceptualizations of the survivor experience. Perhaps most intriguing are the “levels of why.” The “initial whys” are the tentative answers arising early on, which usually are shed as grieving progresses. Then come the “transitional whys” that Smith sees as “rough drafts” of insights that may be retained, but are initially incomplete. Finally we arrive at the “transformative whys” or answers with the power to change us. Smith notes that not all survivors travel the full continuum of “whys.”

A Long Shadowed Grief would be ideally suited to a suicide survivor trying to cope with her or his loss within a religious and spiritual context. Smith starts with a workable orientation to the nature of suicide and then turns to how a suicide can literally stunt the grieving process of those it touches. He then proceeds to look at the need to imbue loss with meaning and other steps necessary to restore one’s emotional well-being. Smith’s perspective on suicide loss as a survivor and as a grief counselor would seem to be useful to another potential audience for this text: clergy and pastoral counselors. Like many other helping professionals they too tend to learn about suicide and suicide survivors “on the job.” Survivors may wish to recommend A Long Shadowed Grief to church and faith-based helpers who may encounter suicide survivors in the course of their ministry.