

10/Spirituality

I have never talked about spiritual issues in any college class. What does spirituality really mean and what does it have to do with managing my stress?

How can I bring spirituality into my daily life in a way that will help me cope with, or even prevent, stress?

Can I be spiritually healthy even though I don't go to church?

Can prayer change anything?

I was deeply hurt by my best friend and can't seem to get over it. My feelings are causing me great stress. How can I learn to forgive my friend so I can get on with my life?

REAL PEOPLE, REAL STORIES

Maria's Story I was in love with my high school sweetheart. We were going to get married and have six children. We were best friends. Our daily lives revolved around each other. After being together every possible moment for five years, he phoned me to say he didn't want to be together anymore. Giving no explanation, he was out of my life forever. At first I was in shock. We had been talking about marriage, and now he's out of my life. After the shock, I was in denial, then depression. How was I even supposed to live? My whole life was turned upside down. All my plans were ripped apart.

Though I may not sound like it, I'm not a stressed-out person and I've tried to avoid drama, but I didn't handle this situation well. I skipped classes and called in sick to work. I couldn't sleep and was unhealthy from lack of nutrition. I have a supportive family, yet I felt all alone. I couldn't eat, and sometimes I felt like I could hardly breathe. I felt like my life was over and I had no reason to live.

We are not human beings on a spiritual journey, but spiritual beings on a human journey.

—PIERRE TEILHARD DE
CHARDIN

There is light at the end of this story. When I felt I had no one, I prayed. I was comforted and gradually began to understand that no one knows why bad things happen. I learned to trust that everything has a reason. God showed me to be patient because He was trying to work in my life. Shortly after our breakup, I had an opportunity to go on a life-changing mission to Jamaica. Now my life is better than ever.

In hindsight, I learned some lessons about life that I wouldn't have learned any other way. I've become a better, more understanding

person because of this experience. I also have learned that because of my faith, I can handle the challenges that are part of life. I truly believe that all of the other aspects of life branch off from spirituality. I now feel fulfilled inside, and it reflects in all the other areas of my life. Spirituality is different for everyone, but for me, this is what it is and this is how I cope with stress, and with every situation in my life. This is a daily walk. I may have been happy at times before, but now I know what it feels like to be joyful.

Student Objectives

Study of this chapter will enable you to:

1. Describe the influence of spirituality on stress.
2. Differentiate between the terms *religiosity* and *spirituality*.
3. Discuss the research linking spirituality and health.
4. Summarize the barriers to research on spirituality.
5. Delineate five qualities of spiritual health.
6. Develop a personal plan to reduce stress through spiritual balance.

Spirituality

Spirituality is at the heart of stress management. Your spiritual life is a potent prescription for achieving balance and health. People with a deep sense of spirituality view life differently. They have a purpose, they enjoy a sense of meaning in life, and they have a broader perspective. Spirituality buffers stress. People with a deep sense of spirituality are not defeated by crises. They are able to relax their mind, elicit the relaxation response, and heal more quickly and completely.¹

Think back to the dimensions of health explained in Chapter 1. Here, in this chapter, we focus on the spiritual dimension. You will learn that the spiritual dimension generates a sense of peace with yourself and the world. Rather than searching outside yourself for answers, you realize that the source of your fulfillment is inside you.

Discovering the contemplative, spiritual life requires not so much a radical change in lifestyle as a shift in awareness, an inner change. It is the inner intention of our spiritual essence, rather than outward circumstances of our lives, that brings peace.²

Relaxation is part of spiritual healing. Peace is an outcome of spiritual health.



What is life all about? Pondering the vastness of the universe and what it is that brings meaning to our existence contributes to spiritual growth and inner peace.

Spirituality in America

A large majority of Americans (78%) say they believe in God and 15% say they don't believe in God, but do believe in a higher power.*

Does the trend toward spirituality apply to young adults as well? To help answer that question, a major University of California–Los Angeles (UCLA) research program tracked the spiritual growth of students during their college years (see the Research Highlight: Spiritual Changes in Students during the Undergraduate Years feature). The study revealed that today's college students have very high levels of spiritual interest and involvement. Many are actively engaged in a spiritual quest and report that to "some" or "a great" extent they are searching for meaning and purpose in life.**

Sources: * "Majority of Americans Believe in God," Gallup, July 28, 2008, retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/>, April 19, 2011.

** "Spirituality in Higher Education: Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose," A National Study of Spirituality in Higher Education, Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles, retrieved February 1, 2011 from www.spirituality.ucla.edu.

The Purpose Driven Life, and *There's a Spiritual Solution to Every Problem*.⁴ A *Wall Street Journal* article stated that the top-selling books to college students (other than textbooks) deal with spirituality.⁵

People may be tired of seeking pleasure through material gain. Some have found that they cannot buy enough to bring them peace. Turning to drugs, alcohol, and sex has not filled the void. Instead, it leaves an emptiness and continued searching. People of all ages are seeking guidance on the spiritual dimension of health in a quest for fulfillment and a meaningful life. This chapter has an emphasis on self-discovery, encouraging you to reflect on the information presented, complete the spiritual assessment, and develop an action plan to grow in the spiritual dimension of health.

Author Anecdote

We've Come a Long Way

For some of you, this may be the first serious discussion on spirituality in the academic university environment. Addressing spirituality from an academic/scientific perspective may help overcome some initial reluctance by considering some of the non-theological issues of spirituality. In my classes I have found that most students are willing, even eager, to explore the spiritual dimensions of their well-being. Many of them are interested in grappling with the large questions related to who they are and what matters to them. They clearly understand the relevance of spirituality to their lives as one of my students, Marsha, so insightfully shared:

Speaking from personal experience, I'm uplifted emotionally and physically when I attend to my spiritual needs. Our spirit is similar to our physical body, in requiring nutrition and exercise to sustain it. When I read devotions and study scripture, it is food for my spirit. When I make efforts to apply those principles in my daily life, I exercise my spirit. If I ignore my spiritual needs, my spirit becomes sick, as my physical body does when I am ill. Sometimes when I feel unhappy or sense that something is missing in my life, I reflect on scripture that has meaning for me. This scripture brings health to my spirit and comfort to my soul.⁶

Fifteen years ago it was considered inappropriate, in part because of separation of church and state, to discuss religion and spirituality in the health classes I taught at a state university. Finding a health book that mentioned spiritual health was difficult. Thankfully, we have come to understand that we can deal with questions about meaning and purpose without promoting a particular ideology. The spiritual dimension of health is just as real and valid as the physical dimension. We've come a long way!

—MH

The Spiritual Quest

At a time in history when stress is said to be epidemic, our nation not surprisingly is searching for answers about the meaning of life. With the dawn of a new century, spirituality has come to the forefront in the workplace, politics, education, and healthcare.³ Events such as the destruction of the World Trade Centers, Gulf Coast hurricanes, economic downturns, and the wildly fluctuating stock market, which change the lives of millions, cause us to pause and think about what is truly important in life.

Americans are looking for answers and seeking guidance on human spirituality, as evidenced by a surge in best-selling books such as *The Secret*, *The Power of Now*, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*,

Discussions of spirituality are no longer isolated in religious settings but are part of current events and daily life. Universities are offering courses such as "The Meaning of Life" and "Care of the Soul." Corporate health-promotion programs now offer courses on spiritual wellness along with courses on exercise and nutrition. Spiritual and "energy" therapies are becoming commonplace in our culture. Mainstream medical journals have begun to publish healing studies. Along with health care professionals' increasing acceptance of the spiritual dimension of health, we see a corresponding increase in research on prayer, meditation, and energy healing. We have come to acknowledge that wholeness of health incorporates body, mind, and spirit.

Spirituality and Religiosity

All humans have a **spiritual dimension**, a quality that goes beyond religious affiliation, which strives for inspiration, reverence, awe, meaning, and purpose even in those who do not believe in any god. The spiritual dimension tries to be in harmony with the universe, strives for answers about the infinite, and

Spiritual Changes in Students during the Undergraduate Years

In 2010, UCLA researchers concluded a seven-year study examining how students change during the college years and the role that college plays in facilitating the development of their spiritual and religious qualities. Funded by the John Templeton Foundation, *Spirituality in Higher Education: Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose* is the first national longitudinal study of students' spiritual growth.

The researchers report that the findings provide a powerful argument for the proposition that higher education should attend more to students' spiritual development, *because spirituality is essential to students' lives*.

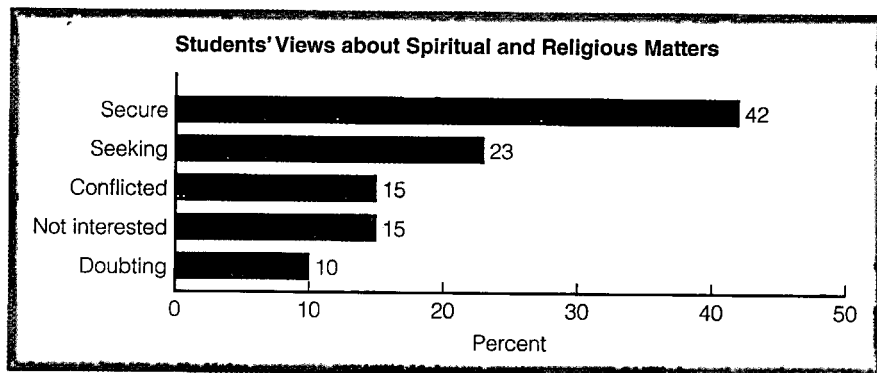
Assisting students' spiritual growth will help create a new generation that is more caring, more globally aware, and more committed to social justice than previous generations, while also enabling students to respond to the many stresses and tensions of our rapidly changing technological society with a greater sense of equanimity.

This national study reveals that religious engagement among students declines somewhat during college, but their spirituality

shows substantial growth. Students become more caring, more tolerant, more connected with others, and more actively engaged in a spiritual quest. The authors also found that spiritual growth enhances other outcomes, such as academic performance, psychological well-being, leadership development, and satisfaction with college.

The study identified a number of college activities that contribute to students' spiritual growth. Some of these—study abroad, interdisciplinary studies, and service learning—appear to be effective because they expose students to new and diverse people, cultures, and ideas. Spiritual development is also enhanced if students engage in “inner work” through activities such as meditation or self-reflection, or if their professors actively encourage them to explore questions of meaning and purpose. Spiritual development is impeded when students engage in activities that distract them from the ordinary experience of campus life—activities such as watching television and playing video games.

Sources: *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives*, by A. Astin, H. Astin, and J. Lindholm (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass: 2010). “Spirituality in Higher Education: Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose,” A National Study of Spirituality in Higher Education, Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles, retrieved February 1, 2011 from www.spirituality.ucla.edu.



Note: Figure adds up to more than 100% because students could choose more than one option.

FIGURE 10.1 Students' Views about Spiritual and Religious Matters

Source: UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, retrieved in 2005 from www.templeton.org.

especially comes into focus as a sustaining power when the person faces emotional stress, physical illness, or death. It goes outside a person's own power.⁷

Spirituality is a process, a journey, the essence of life principle of a person, a belief that relates a person to the world, and a way of giving meaning to existence. It is a personal quest to find meaning and purpose in life, and a relationship or sense of connection with a higher power.⁸ Think of spirituality as having both a vertical dimension, which involves a transcending relationship with a higher power, and a horizontal dimension, which involves a sense of purpose and meaning in life.⁹ This horizontal, human dimension involves a perspective on the self and the world within which you exist.

Spirituality is concerned with the values that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here—the meaning and purpose we see in our work and our life—and our sense of connectedness to each other and the world around us. It gives rise to the actions by which we deal with the realities that surround us. Spirituality is an integral dimension of the health and well-being of every individual.¹⁰

Religiosity refers to participation in or adherence to the beliefs and practices of an organized religion.¹¹ It relates to any person who accepts the tenets of, and actively participates in, an organized religion and its practices. A religious person is one who embraces specific religious beliefs and incorporates them into his or her own worldview.¹²



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Religiosity refers to participation in or adherence to the beliefs and practices of an organized religion.



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Spirituality is a personal quest to find meaning and purpose in life, and a relationship or sense of connection with a higher power.

The spiritual journey does not consist of arriving at a new destination where a person gains what he did not have, or becomes what he is not. It consists in the dissipation of one's own ignorance concerning oneself and life, and the gradual growth of that understanding which begins the spiritual awakening. The finding of God is a coming to one's self.

—ALDOUS HUXLEY

Spirituality is a much broader concept that also includes non-religious beliefs and expressions. Although spirituality may involve traditional religious beliefs and practices, a person may be deeply spiritual, yet not profess a religion. For example, he or she may have a belief in and devotion to an omniscient, all-powerful God or higher power but not be affiliated or involved with an organized religious denomination or group. An individual may be highly religious but not spiritual. Perhaps this individual attends church regularly, tithes, and lives by the tenets of that church but does not pray, meditate, or have a direct experience with an omniscient God or universal power.¹³

Certainly, many people are both religious and spiritual. Religious beliefs and practices can, and often do, contribute to spiritual health. We may or may not choose to participate in a religion. Everyone has a spiritual dimension, just as everyone has an emotional, mental, and physical dimension, and many people find their religious beliefs and practices to be an integral aspect of their spiritual development. See Figure 10.1 for students' views about spiritual and religious matters.

Does our logical, scientific-thinking mind interfere with our spiritual experience? Reflecting on some important questions can help guide our understanding of how to nurture the spiritual dimension. How do we best grow spiritually? Should faith, rather than science, guide our spiritual experience? Can we ever really explain, from a scientific perspective, concepts related to something as personal as spirituality?

Research on Spirituality

Scientific studies have yielded findings about factors that contribute to physical health. Can these studies also determine factors that contribute to spiritual health? Do "best practices" or "evidence-based practices" apply to spiritual health? With increasing rigor, studies are being conducted to increase our understanding of how the spiritual dimension relates to health. Although we can learn from these studies, we must first consider some of the challenges related to researching individual experience with the spiritual aspects of life.

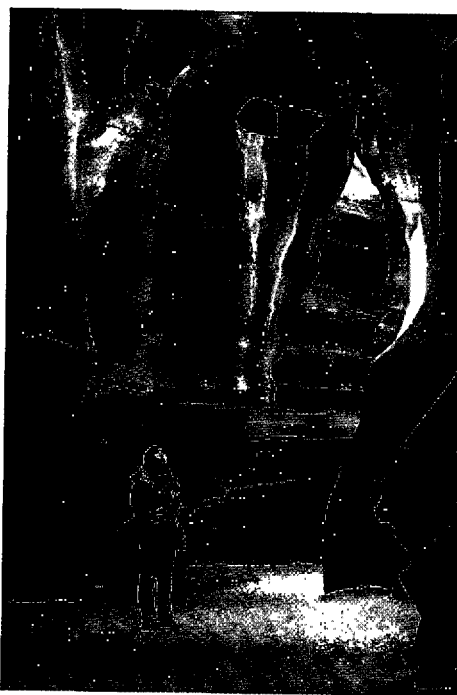
Theories abound as to why a strong spiritual faith promotes health and relieves stress. Do peace and healing result because of the intervention of a higher power or because these people believe so strongly that healing will occur that they succeed in changing their physiology and biochemistry in a beneficial way? Some key issues relate to research on spirituality, including definition of terms, the placebo effect, and lifestyle variables.

Tom Brown Jr., a Native American, writes of his understanding of the spiritual nature of man. He relates the following discussion he had with another Native American whom he simply calls Grandfather, in which he is learning about the way the logical mind gets in the way of focusing on the spiritual dimension: Grandfather said:

Man is like an island, a circle within circles. Man is separated from these outer circles by his mind, his beliefs, and the limitations put upon him by a life away from the Earth. The circle of man, the island of self, is the place of logic, the "I," the ego, and the physical self. That is the island that man has chosen to live within today, and in doing so he has created a prison for himself. The walls of the island prison are thick, made up of doubts, logic, and lack of belief. His isolation from his greater circles of self is suffocating and prevents him from seeing life clearly and purely. It is a world of ignorance where the flesh is the only reality, the only god.

Beyond man's island of ego, his prison, lays the spirit—that-moves-in-all-things, the force that is found in all things. It is a world that communicates to all entities of Creation and touches the Creator. It is a circle of life that houses all man's instinct, his deepest memory, his power to control his body and mind, and a bridge that helps man transcend flesh. It is a world that expands man's universe and helps him to fuse himself to the Earth. Most of all, it is a world that brings man to his higher self and to spiritual rapture.

As I settled back into my Quest, I began to fully understand what had been given to me. I realized that the power of the pure mind is what makes all spiritual communication pure and unrestricted. The logical mind I viewed as a barrier or filter to that communication. Any time that logical mind becomes active with its need to analyze, define, verbalize, or interpret in any way, it sets aside and imprisons the pure mind. As I sat contemplating this, I began to realize a deeper sense of duality. I now could understand that the pure mind



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Does our logical, scientific-thinking mind interfere with our spiritual experience? Native American spirituality includes honoring nature.

and the logical mind were almost two separate entities. When one was active, the other was sleeping or set aside.

So, too, did I begin to understand why the logical mind was so dominant and strangling. After all, it was that mind that society wanted us to nourish. It was that mind that was like a spoiled stepchild, fed constantly by society, thus overshadowing and smothering the spiritual mind.

Source: *Awakening Spirits: A Native American Path to Inner Peace, Healing and Spiritual Growth*, by Tom Brown (New York: Berkeley Publishing Group, 1994).

Defining Terms As we mentioned, spirituality and religion are different, yet the terminology often is used interchangeably. This leads to confusion and inaccuracies in interpreting the research on spiritual practices, religious activities or beliefs, and health outcomes.

Researchers do not always agree on the definitions of spiritual terms. Prayer, for example, has been defined in many different ways. Another issue is "dose-response": If a person prays a little, are the results different than if the person prays a lot? Spiritual health is not an exact science. Even the definition of spiritual health is not universally agreed upon. As terminology becomes standardized, studies on spirituality will yield more relevant, applicable findings.

What is evident, however, is that the spiritual dimension is equal to, and perhaps even more important than, the other dimensions of health and well-being. Spiritual health is finding its way into common healing modalities such as hypnosis, biofeedback, acupuncture, massage, and reflexology. Many energy and alternative therapies operate from a spiritual foundation with an emphasis on healing the spiritual aspects of the individual along with the emotional and physical. You will learn in Chapter 23, on complementary and alternative health, that these unconventional approaches to health and healing are gaining acceptance as Americans seek more holistic approaches to health.

Placebo Power A second challenge of spirituality research relates to the placebo effect. The term **placebo** describes the positive effects that are created when a person merely believes he or she will benefit from an intervention. It is generally believed that about 35% of people experience the placebo effect. For example, if a person believes a pill will make him better, he

actually may feel better even when given an inert substance such as a sugar pill. When someone believes that her prayers for healing will be answered, does the prayer result in healing, or does the strong belief that healing will occur alter the mind/body response in a positive manner?

Belief that one is being healed by a divine power can produce a conditioning effect that alters stress levels, physiologic responses, and immune activity.¹⁴ Placebo effects make the value of a treatment difficult to determine. Although the placebo effect complicates research, people receive very real benefits when they believe they will receive benefits from the intervention. The placebo effect—the power of belief—has substantial effects for many people. Theories support the premise that if modern medicine were able to bottle the placebo effects as a drug, it would be one of our most effective cures. When determining the outcomes of a spiritual intervention, the placebo effect cannot be discounted.

Variables in Religion, Health, and Lifestyle Research A third challenge for research on spirituality stems from alternative variables that may influence study results. A review of the research literature identifies a correlation between religious activities and health outcomes. Most studies suggest that religiosity is beneficial for mental and physical health and stress management, and that it supports a healthy lifestyle.¹⁵

Based on his research, Harold Koenig, director of the Duke University's Center for the Study of Religion, Spirituality, and Health, has estimated that regular participation in religious activities and practices adds 7 to 14 years to the life span and is equivalent in benefit to not smoking cigarettes. Much of this benefit comes from the health-promoting practices of most religious groups, such as honoring the body and abstaining from drugs and alcohol.¹⁶

Koenig's research raises the issue of variables that must be considered when evaluating any form of healing. Do the health benefits that derive from being religious come from the intervention of a higher power, or are the benefits related to variables such as social support or healthier lifestyle choices that many religions teach?

Bottom Line on Research Scientific methods are not always adequate for exploring concepts such as faith and spirituality. Although we cannot scientifically test the mechanisms by which higher-power healing occurs, we can assess how changes in perception brought about by religious and spiritual beliefs alter physiological and psychological health outcomes. Great strides are being made in applying scientific research methodology to understanding the impact of spiritual and religious variables on health and stress management. Still, people who turn to spirituality for comfort and healing do not need scientific studies to convince them. They believe some things to be true even if they cannot be proven scientifically.

A discussion of the limitations to research on spirituality is crucial to our understanding that the paths to spiritual well-being are many. We cannot write an exact prescription for spiritual health. Spirituality points to our interiors, our subjective life. The spiritual domain has to do with what we experience privately in our subjective awareness. We must take care not to generalize about such a highly personal perspective. You can consider the information presented in the chapter and assimilate it as you choose. Research and studies can guide your understanding, but ultimately only you can choose the path that is right for you.

Five Qualities of Spiritual Health

Spiritual health refers to the ability to discover and articulate our own basic purpose in life and to learn how to experience love, joy, peace, and fulfillment. It is the experience of helping ourselves and others achieve full potential.¹⁷

Factors that seem to promote spiritual health include trust, honesty, integrity, altruism, compassion, and service. In addition, spiritually healthy people commune regularly with, or have some sort of personal relationship and experience with, a higher power or larger reality that transcends an observable physical reality.¹⁸

There are many expressions of spiritual health, just as there are many aspects of physical or emotional health. Regardless of religious affiliation, spiritual health and stress management have some qualities in common. Five qualities of spiritual health that cut across many religious and spiritual beliefs have special relevance in stress management:

1. A sense of meaning and purpose in life
2. Faith in God or a higher power—however you choose to define it

Stress Busting Behavior

WAYS TO ENHANCE SPIRITUAL HEALTH

In this chapter, you are learning about the qualities of spiritual health. To get you thinking about how this relates to you, from the following list of ways to enhance spiritual health, first, underline the two choices that you currently practice that contribute most to your spiritual well-being. Next, check the two choices that you most want to develop to enhance your sense of peace and well-being.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prayer | <input type="checkbox"/> Laughter, joyous expressions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reflection or quiet listening to one's intuition | <input type="checkbox"/> Participation in a caring community—a church, a support group, or any group that gives you a feeling of belonging |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communion with nature | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading about spiritual growth from any source you find inspiring (the insights of others can help you formulate your own meaning and purpose in life) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoyment of music, drama, art, dance | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet time each day for prayer, meditation, or thinking (silence can be healing and help restore a sense of balance) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inner dialogue with oneself or with a higher power | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loving relationships with others | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Service to others in need | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forgiveness | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Empathy, compassion, hope | |

Source: <http://wellness.uwsp.edu>

3. A feeling of connection to others and seeing oneself as part of something bigger
4. Compassion for others
5. Participation in religious behaviors or meaningful spiritual rituals

We will examine each of these components to increase our understanding of how each of these qualities can help you manage stress.

Meaning and Purpose

"Please sir, can you tell me which way I ought to go?" asked Alice. "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the cat. "I don't much care," said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the cat. "... so long as I go somewhere," Alice added as an explanation. "Oh you're sure to do that," said the cat, "if you only walk long enough." (From *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll)

Without some purpose in life, we wander aimlessly and our enthusiasm for life can be lost. Finding meaning in how we live and discovering our purpose for living brings spiritual growth and peace. Finding meaning in life can serve as a powerful inner drive for personal accomplishment and a stress-relieving sense of contentment that we are on the right path for ourselves.

One of the most influential books on finding meaning in life is *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl, the renowned Viennese psychoanalyst and survivor of the Holocaust. First published in 1946, this book is still life-changing for many, and millions of copies have been sold. Frankl emphasizes that although people may be powerless to modify their environment or even their physical condition, each person does have the ultimate power to fashion his or her reactions and find *interior meaning*, even in the most difficult of circumstances. In short, how one chooses to react throughout life can be the basis of ultimate personal triumph.

Frankl encountered a stress management principle in action. He found that if he could help fellow prisoners believe that their experience—horrendous though it was—nevertheless had some meaning, he could encourage them to maintain the will to survive. He writes: "There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions, as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one's life. . . . Suffering ceases to be suffering in some way at the moment it finds a meaning."¹⁹

Learning that even the most difficult times in life can bring meaning can change the experience in a positive direction, as demonstrated in a study on patients with recurring cancer.

Survivor's Story

This *USA Today* letter to the editor is a powerful testimonial of how something as devastating as cancer can actually bring peace and improve quality of living. The author writes:

I am a five-year breast cancer survivor, and my husband is a two-year prostate cancer survivor. Our lives before cancer were good. We enjoyed a loving family, a beautiful home, and successful careers. But everything was always urgent.

Our post-cancer lives are wonderful. We still have a loving family, a nice home, and rewarding careers, but we have put everything into perspective: We now look at our lives as gifts from God. Every day is special.

Has cancer made our lives better? Absolutely. Are we glad we had cancer? Of course not. The disease lurks in our minds daily. Are we going to let cancer control our lives and get us down? Never. We are working toward becoming better versions of ourselves—physically, mentally, and spiritually. We are enjoying life.

Source: "Post-Cancer Experience Improved Quality of Living," by J. Dancer, *USA Today*, April 18, 2005, 14A.

Researchers in this study found that nearly half of the respondents reported engaging in a search for meaning; the greater a person's sense of meaning, the lower the symptoms of distress.²⁰ Often, we search for meaning during the most difficult times.

Those who find meaning, even in their suffering, are able to find peace. Maria's story in the opening vignette showed how she was able to come through a difficult time and emerge with a new sense of confidence in her ability to handle the inevitable challenges of life. The words of the philosopher Camus describe this concept: "In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer." Believing that your life, and all that happens in life, has meaning for you strengthens the conviction that you can handle what life brings.

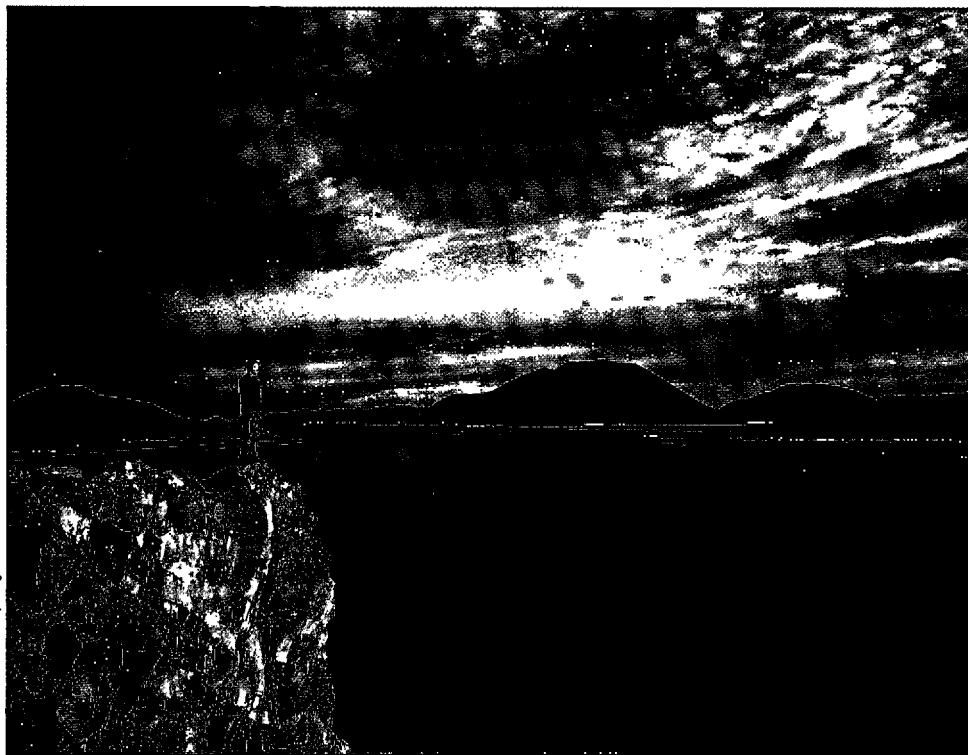
Think about a difficult time in your life when you were able to grow through the experience by finding meaning in your suffering. The key message is this: Peace does not come from a lack of problems and difficulties. Peace comes

from knowing that your life is in harmony with your values and beliefs and from growing and finding meaning in life's disruptions.

Belief in a Higher Power The term *spiritual* describes a belief in, and devotion to, a higher power beyond the physical realm. This belief in a higher power is the cornerstone of every major religion and social science. Christians call this higher power God; Hindus call it Prana; Chinese call it Chi; Native Americans call it the Great Spirit; Taoists call it the Tao; a philosopher may call it "infinite intelligence"; a psychologist may call it the "collective unconscious" or "superconscious";

a mental health counselor might call it our "higher self"; a quantum physicist might call it the "unified field." Jedi Masters of the *Star Wars* movies call this all-pervading energy the Force. All of these relate to a single unifying connecting spirit as the basis for all things in the universe.

Faith is the belief in or commitment to something or someone seen or unseen that helps a person realize a purpose. By definition, faith is belief without proof. Each person chooses what to believe. Faith is universal, a part of living, a part of acting, and a part of self-understanding.²¹ A strong spiritual faith can promote health and relieve stress by alleviating the stressors of uncertainty and insecurity. Cardiologist and author George Sheehan credits faith with an almost unequaled power to relieve stress by providing an inner sense of calm and tranquility and



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"When you come to the edge of all the light you know, and are about to step off into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing one of two things will happen: There will be something solid to stand on or you will be taught how to fly." (As quoted by Barbara J. Winter)

a sense that no defeat is final. The result is a sense of lasting security from making connection with a higher power.²²

Research with workers in the health and medical fields showed that faith is an important aspect of the spiritual dimension of health. It allows us to acknowledge that some power is at work, a power other than the natural and rational. We acknowledge that such a power is the cause behind the natural workings of the universe. Our perceptions and faith can bring pleasure and convince us of our ability to survive.²³ A strong faith can alleviate the stressors of uncertainty and insecurity.

Important to stress management is the question of control. On one hand, we have learned that we do have some control over things that happen in our lives. Feeling empowered and in control can be stress-relieving. On the other hand, believing that some things are not in our control is stress-relieving, too. Believing that we can release to a higher power some things that are beyond our control relieves stress by providing a sense of tranquility and security.

Author Leo Booth says about spirituality: "It is related to the word *spirit*—not a child's concept of a white-sheeted Holy Ghost flying in and out of our lives, but an inner attitude that emphasizes energy, creative choice, and a powerful force of living. It is a partnership with a Power greater than ourselves, a co-creatorship with God that allows us to be guided by God and yet take responsibility for our lives."²⁴

Reflect on your personal beliefs about a higher power and what impact your beliefs have on your perceived stress. Are some aspects of your life that cause you stress out of your control? Do you believe that releasing control of these stressors and believing that a higher power is in control would result in greater peace for you?

Connectedness As part of her doctoral dissertation, Dr. Judy Howden conducted extensive research on spirituality. She defined spirituality as "the dimension of one's being that is an integrating or unifying factor and that is manifested through unifying inter-connectedness, purpose and meaning in life, innerness or inner resources, and transcendence." She described **connectedness** as "the feeling of relatedness or attachment to others, a sense of relationship to all of life, a feeling of harmony with self and others, and a feeling of oneness with the universe and/or a universal element or Universal Being."²⁵

Connectedness implies that some aspect of humanity connects each of us with each other. We are one at a deeper level. Wayne Dyer accurately calls it the "universe," the "one song" of which we are all a part. The practical application of this understanding becomes immediately apparent. If you are a part of me and I am a part of you, I will be much more likely to treat you in loving and friendly ways. If we are made "of the same stuff," as Deepak Chopra has said, why would we want to hurt or cause pain to ourselves? Recognizing our oneness invites us to be more loving and caring with all things and all people around us. Functioning in more loving rather than hating ways toward everyone and everything is stress-relieving.

If we are all connected at the spiritual level, we are all part of the same whole. The Indian poet, philosopher, and Nobel Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore described this connectedness beautifully when he created this poem:

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow.

I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment.

Realizing that all we see and can experience in our awareness is part of our own nature, an aspect of ourselves, helps us choose behaviors that tend to enhance rather than destroy everything around us, including the animal and plant kingdoms, as well as fellow human beings. Behind all of our varied ideologies, cultures, classes, and religions, we are brothers and sisters on this planet.

Do you experience connectedness as a feeling of harmony with yourself and others and a feeling of oneness with the universe? We tend not to give questions like this much thought as we go about our daily life, yet conscious attention can have a significant impact on our

Heaven is my father and
Earth is my mother and
even such a small creature
as I find an intimate place
in its midst. That which
extends throughout the
universe, I regard as my
body and that which
directs the universe,
I regard as my nature. All
people are my brothers
and sisters and all things
are my companions.

—THE WESTERN
INSCRIPTION, CHANG TSAI,
11TH CENTURY, CHINA

Just like a sunbeam can't
separate itself from the
sun, and a wave can't
separate itself from the
ocean, we can't separate
ourselves from one
another. We are all part
of a vast sea of love, one
indivisible divine mind.

—MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

thoughts, choices, and contentment with life. Connectedness has to do with our connection to other human beings and also to our belief that we are part of a greater reality. Spiritually, knowing that you are part of something much larger than yourself, is comforting.

Compassion for Others His Holiness the Dalai Lama said:

Love, compassion, and tolerance are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive. If you have a particular faith or religion, that is good. But you can survive without it if you have love, compassion, and tolerance. The clear proof of a person's love of God is if that person genuinely shows love to fellow human beings.²⁶

A human being is a part of the whole called by us "universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us.

Because the spiritual dimension of health transcends the individual, it has the capacity to be a common bond between individuals. It rises above the individual and goes beyond the limits of the individual. With this common bond, we are motivated to share love, warmth, and compassion with other people. We choose to do unselfish and compassionate things for others. We are able to put someone else's life and interest before our own. This common bond also prompts us to follow a set of ethical principles, and to make a commitment to God or a higher power.²⁷ Two important qualities of compassion that have special relevance to stress management are forgiveness and altruism.

Forgiveness It has been said that forgiveness is a gift you give to yourself, and to the people who love you. We can forgive out of compassion for others, and in the process we also receive great benefits.

In a series of studies of the Stanford Forgiveness Project, Dr. Fred Luskin studied forgiveness and relationships. He defined **forgiveness** as the experience of psychological peace that occurs when injured people transform their grievances against others.²⁸ This transformation takes place by learning to take less personal offense, to attribute less blame to the offender, and to understand the personal harm that comes from unresolved anger.

Dr. Luskin and Dr. Carl Thoesen conducted a study at Stanford University in which they trained 55 college students to forgive someone who had hurt them. After 6 weeks, the students in the treatment group were significantly less angry, showed greater self-efficacy, were more hopeful, and showed greater emotional self-management than their peers in the control group. When they were tested 10 weeks later, they had maintained their improved mental health.

People who refuse to forgive harbor resentment, anger, and bitterness. This negative attitude is harmful both emotionally and physically because the release of potent stress-related hormones causes our heart to pound, muscles to tense, and blood pressure to soar. Mentally

CULTURE Connection Namaste

The people of India have an interesting way of relating to their understanding of connectedness. When they greet and when they part, they hold their hands close together in prayer position, bow briefly, and say, "Namaste." **Namaste** means "I honor the place in you where the entire universe resides. I honor the place in you where lies your love, your light, your truth and your beauty. I honor the place in you, where, if you are in that place in you, and I am in that place in me, then there is only one of us."



© Tim Graham/Getty Image

Royal Namaste greeting.

The Forgiveness Factor

Evolving research based on data from positron emission tomography (PET) is showing that different parts of the brain are activated when we contemplate forgiveness rather than revenge or retaliation. Pietro Pietrini, M.D., Ph.D., in the Cognitive Neuroscience Section at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, is assessing the neurobiological response associated with forgiveness and unforgiveness. He is testing his hypothesis that forgiveness allows a person to overcome a situation that otherwise would be a major source of stress both mentally and neurobiologically. Forgiveness is thought to dramatically change the individual's biological homeostatic equilibrium.

Source: "Study of the Brain Functional Correlates of Forgiveness in Humans by Using Positron Emission Tomography (PET)," by P. Pietrini, retrieved April 20, 2005, from www.forgiving.org.

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Different parts of the brain are activated when we contemplate forgiveness rather than revenge or retaliation.

replaying situations in which we felt wronged or misunderstood activates the stress response. "When people hold on to anger and past trauma so strongly that the stress response never goes away, they pay a toll in their physical and emotional well-being," says psychologist Ann Webster, director of the Mind/Body Cancer Program at the Mind/Body Medical Institute.²⁹

Researcher Charlotte Witvliet of Hope College in Michigan found that when we mentally replay a hurtful memory or nurse a grudge against a person who mistreated or offended us, our body reacts with a stress response. Our brow muscles tense, sweating increases, heart rate and blood pressure rise, and other measures indicate that the nervous system is on high alert. If we imagine granting forgiveness instead—or simply picture how that person might have felt or what might have contributed to hurtful behavior—our physical stress indicators remain fairly steady. You can't change the past, but this study shows that changing how you think about past hurt can reduce its impact on you, and the resulting likelihood of stress-related illness.³⁰

Psychotherapist Robin Casarjian says:

Forgiveness is a relationship with life that frees the forgiver from the psychological bondage of chronic fear, hostility, anger, and unhealthy grief. Forgiveness is an attitude that implies that you are willing to accept responsibility for your perceptions, realizing that your perceptions are a choice and not an objective fact.³¹

Forgiveness is a decision and a choice not to let past grievances compromise our future by filling our mind with negative thoughts and emotions. It is a skill to be learned.

When you forgive someone, you make yourself, rather than the person who hurt you, responsible for your future happiness. When we learn to forgive by realizing that our perception is what allows another person to hurt us, and refusing to take offense from others' actions, the consequence is inner peace. This is powerful stress management.

The following list tells us what forgiveness is not:³²

- Pretending everything is fine
- Stuffing away angry or hurt feelings
- Condoning hurtful behavior
- Necessarily reconciling or having contact with an offender
- Something you can be pressured to do
- Forgetting—you can picture a past hurt without dwelling in the emotions

Once you begin to acknowledge random acts of kindness—both the ones you have received and the ones you have given—you can no longer believe that what you do does not matter.

—DAWNA MARKOVA

Author Gerald Jampolsky indicates that if we want to have inner peace in our life, our focus should be forgiveness.

Through selective forgetting, through taking of the tinted glasses that superimpose the fearful past upon the present, we can begin to know that the truth of Love is forever present and that by perceiving only Love, we can experience happiness. Forgiveness then becomes a process of letting go and overlooking whatever we thought other people may have done to us, or whatever we may think we have done to them.

When we cherish grievances, we allow our mind to be fed by fear and we become imprisoned by these distortions. When we see our only function as forgiveness and are willing to practice it consistently by directing our minds to be forgiving, we will find ourselves released and set free. Forgiveness corrects the misperception that we are separate from each other and allows us to experience a sense of unity and “at-one-ment” with each other. The unforgiving mind sees itself as innocent and others as guilty. It thrives on conflict and on being right, and it sees inner peace as its enemy. It perceives everything as separate.³³

Try this forgiveness exercise: Find a comfortable, quiet place to sit. Take a couple of deep, cleansing breaths. Imagine someone you feel resentment toward or who has hurt you. Start with something small. Invite that person into your heart, noticing any emotions that block his or her entrance. Silently say, “I forgive you,” for whatever he or she may have done to hurt you. As you breathe and relax, forgive and let go of the resentment. After a few minutes, imagine letting the person depart, touched by your forgiveness and compassion. You can repeat the exercise with the image of asking someone you may have hurt to forgive you. See yourself thankfully accepting his or her forgiveness.³⁴

Author Anecdote

Random Acts of Kindness

Several years ago I read a little book called *Random Acts of Kindness*. A random act of kindness (RAK) is a little, out-of-the-ordinary thing we do to help someone who isn't expecting it. It is acting out of love and caring and expecting nothing in return. It feels good. You feel connected to humanity in a way that is hard to explain.

The idea of doing something for someone while expecting nothing in return was not a new idea to me—just an idea I needed to be reminded of. When I was a young girl, my mom frequently committed RAKs. Although she didn't call them random acts of kindness, that's what they were. For instance, on May Day each year we made baskets filled with flowers and cookies and brightly colored homemade cards. The idea was to sneak up to a neighbor's houses and leave a May basket at their door without getting caught. The recipients were not to know who delivered this gift. I still remember the excitement as Mom would wait in the car for my sisters, brother, and me to deliver the basket and race for the car without getting noticed.

Years later, I still remembered how good it felt to help others, so I assigned students in one of my classes to commit two or three RAKs, then report back to the class later in the semester. One student, Nik, related that he had become a RAK addict. He said it felt so good that he found himself planning and committing RAKs nearly every day. He had been planning a Halloween party and decided he could combine fun and altruism. He asked those he invited to the party to bring a couple of cans of food for the local food pantry. In addition, they went out in teams with a list of needed supplies prepared by the food pantry. They trick-or-treated for the food pantry and were amazed at the generous response. It was a win/win idea. The people giving the food felt good, the workers at the food pantry were inspired by the good works of the students, the recipients of food appreciated the support and food, and the students felt great about being able to help others in a time of need.

Another student paid for the coffee of the person behind her at the Starbucks drive-up window. When she returned the next day for her daily coffee, the person working at the drive-up window shared with her that the person she bought the coffee for the day prior also decided to pay for the coffee of the person behind him. The kindness spread.

—MH

Altruism How different would the world be if people gave of themselves simply because they wanted to? Not out of a sense of obligation or because they want something in return. No ulterior motives. No guilt feelings. Just a desire to give for the sake of giving. What could you do to make this kind of world a reality? Commit a random act of kindness. Volunteer your time to improve your community. Give back to the world that gives so much to you. And if it happens to make you feel good, that's all right. Feeling good is the one ulterior motive that's acceptable.

Altruism is the act of helping or giving to others without thought of self-benefit. Altruism enhances self-esteem, relieves physical and mental stress, and protects psychological well-being.³⁵ In the previous chapter, you learned about altruism as a value. You learned how giving of ourselves benefits the giver and the receiver alike. Many colleges offer community service or service-learning courses to provide students with an opportunity to give to their community. Students who participate report increased self-esteem, a belief that they can make a difference, and a greater commitment to do more volunteer work.

Many people report that when they do something for someone else without seeking any external reward, they feel inwardly happier and more content. When we take our mind off our own troubles as we try to help someone else with theirs, our difficulties seem

to be less significant and our stress is reduced. Ralph Waldo Emerson expressed the benefit of altruism this way, "It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no men can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."

The Random Acts of Kindness movement started when Ann Herbert began promoting the idea of altruism.³⁶ The idea spread, and one night as a college professor was listening to TV, the phrase "another random act of senseless violence" stuck in his mind. In a moment of inspiration, he decided to assign his human relations students an essay on random acts of "senseless kindness." Students were asked to do something out of the ordinary to help someone who wasn't expecting it, and then write about it. One student bought 30 blankets from the Salvation Army and took them to the homeless people who were living under a bridge near his home. Another pulled out of a parking place she had just pulled into and motioned for a motorist who appeared to be frantically in a hurry to take her place. Challenge yourself to commit a random act of kindness today—and in the days to come. The possibilities are endless. Here are a few ideas:

- Write an anonymous thank-you note to an instructor.
- Pick out someone behind you in line at the movies and inform the ticket seller that you want to pay for that movie-goer's ticket. Make sure the person does not know who paid for the ticket.
- Ask a couple who has been married for over 25 years to share with you their five best tips for a successful marriage.
- Buy a cold drink for your entire row at the baseball game.
- Ask an older person to tell you a story about his or her youth, such as his or her favorite song or how he or she met his or her spouse.
- Drop off a geranium plant and a thank-you note at your local fire station.

Sir John Templeton said, "Know that there is no power in the universe greater than love, and no act more important than loving. **Agape** is the unselfish love that gives of itself and expects nothing in return. It is the love that grows as you give it to others." Think about how much of the distress between people—and nations—could be eliminated if altruism were a guiding principle for behavior.³⁷

In his book *The Ways and Power of Love*, Pitirim Sorokin said, "If unselfish love does not extend over the whole of mankind, if it is confined within one group—a given family, tribe, nation, race, religious denomination, political party, trade union, caste, social class or any part of humanity—such an in-group altruism tends to generate an out-group antagonism."³⁸

The rise in volunteer work world-wide indicates that people want to help others. Altruism can point the way to a new future, a future in which we are less focused on what we can get from others and more focused on what we can contribute to their lives. Altruism grows out of compassion for others.

Religious Behaviors and Meaningful Spiritual Rituals

The final quality of spiritual health relates to meaningful spiritual practices that we integrate into our lives. Author and psychiatrist Paul Tournier said he used to live a restless life, always racing the clock. But since he began to devote an hour a day to quiet reflection, devotional meditation, and prayer, he has been happier, healthier, and better able to distinguish between priorities, and he has actually accomplished more.³⁹

Dr. Kenneth Ferraro, a medical sociologist at Purdue University, examined 1,473 people to determine how their religious practice, or lack of it, had affected their health. Those who prayed regularly, read religious literature, attended church or synagogue, and considered themselves strong and active in their religious faith reported only half the health problems as non-practicing people did.⁴⁰

FYI

The World of Doing Good

More than 60 million Americans are involved in volunteer efforts. As Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give."

Source: "Inside the World of Doing Good," by B. Kelly, *U.S. News and World Report*, November 4 2010.



TIME TIP

"I spend 15 minutes every morning in prayerful meditation. For me, this is the best possible use of 15 minutes because it helps me make better decisions all day."

—Chris W.



Virtually every culture includes some form of prayer as a meaningful spiritual ritual, especially during times of stress.

Numerous studies have found lower rates of depression and less anxiety-related illness among those who are religiously committed. Non-churchgoers have been found to have a suicide rate four times higher than church regulars.⁴¹ Spiritual rituals with a strong connection to peace include prayer and an appreciation of nature.

Prayer The ritual of prayer has special relevance in stress reduction. Prayer—communication with a higher power—has meaning for many individuals. The most common form of spiritual ritual, prayer is practiced by religious and non-religious individuals alike throughout the world.⁴² Virtually every culture includes prayer in one form or another, especially during times of stress and at the end of life.⁴³

Author, educator, and researcher Dr. Lyn Freeman specializes in the practices of relaxation, meditation, and imagery. Many clients have told her that prayer is the ultimate form of relaxation therapy for them. In prayer, they put their trust in a divine power, relax, let go of their fears, and experience great peace. She believes that relaxation is not the end product but, instead, part of the experience. She says:

Spiritual healers often describe becoming still and entering into a deeply relaxed state as part of their healing practice. I hear this from traditional healers in Alaska all the time; they turn inward to "Speak to the Grandfather." Other spiritual practitioners or energy healers talk about "centering" themselves, turning inward, becoming relaxed and calm. Relaxation seems to be a part of all these disciplines.⁴⁴

Prayer has powerful beneficial physiological and psychological effects, as these studies demonstrate:

- According to research from Mayo Clinic, people who consider themselves spiritual and use prayer are often better able to cope with daily stress and to heal from illness or addiction.⁴⁵
- Research documented that among women who were about to undergo breast biopsies, those with the lowest stress hormone levels were those who used faith and prayer to cope with stress.⁴⁶
- Lyn Freeman reported on the findings of numerous studies on the outcomes of prayer that prayer has modulated stress levels in the face of cardiovascular surgery, loss of spouse, and chronic and intractable pain. The intensity levels of pain, stress, distress, or impairment predicted how likely a patient was to turn to prayer as a source of coping.⁴⁷

Research HIGHLIGHT

Prayer in the Coronary Care Unit

Over a 10-month period, a computer assigned 393 patients admitted to the coronary care unit at San Francisco General Hospital to either a group that was prayed for by home prayer groups (192 patients) or to a group that was not remembered in prayer (201 patients). The study was a randomized, double-blind experiment in which neither the patients nor the nurses and other health care providers knew the group to which the patients had been assigned.*

Researcher Randolph Byrd recruited various religious groups to pray for members of the designated prayed-for group. The prayer groups were given the first names of their patients, as well as a brief description of their diagnosis and condition. They were asked to pray each day but were given no instructions on how to pray. "Each person prayed for many different patients, but each patient in the experiment had between five and seven people praying for him or her," Byrd explained.

The results indicated that the prayed-for patients differed in several areas:

1. They were five times less likely than the unremembered group to require antibiotics.

2. Fewer members of the prayed-for group developed pneumonia or had cardiac arrests.
3. They were three times less likely to develop pulmonary edema.
4. None of the prayed-for group required endotracheal intubation, while 12 patients in the unremembered group required the support of a mechanical ventilator.
5. Fewer patients in the prayed-for group died (although this difference was not statistically significant).

If the technique being studied had been a new drug or a surgical procedure instead of prayer, it almost certainly would have been heralded as some sort of "breakthrough." Even some hardboiled skeptics agreed on the significance of Byrd's findings. Dr. William Nolan, who has written a book debunking faith healing, acknowledged, "It sounds like this study will stand up to scrutiny. Maybe we doctors ought to write on our order sheets, 'Pray three times a day.' If it works, it works."^{**}

Sources: *"Positive Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer in a Coronary Care Unit Population," by R. Byrd, *Southern Medical Journal*, 81(7) (1988) 826-829.

^{**}Cited in *Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine*, by L. Dossey (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers: 1993).

- Larry Dossey, a physician of internal medicine, has written extensively on the healing power of prayer. In his book, *Healing Words*, he reported on his research on the studies on prayer, stating that he found more than 100 different studies demonstrating that when a person prays for someone or something else, a real effect takes place for the person or object being prayed for.⁴⁸

Can prayer heal? Providing scientific proof is a challenge at best. Can prayer bring peace? The evidence is strong that prayer—as well as other spiritual rituals such as meditation, spending time in nature, music, storytelling, and art—provides comfort for many.

Nature Spending time in nature can be a profound spiritual experience. The vivid sky at sunset, a shimmering waterfall, the majestic forest, a quiet stream—these manifestations of nature can remind us that we are part of something much greater than ourselves. Throughout history, most religious and cultural traditions have included a connection with nature. We discuss nature in more detail in Chapter 14 but a mention is important here so we understand that spending time in nature is a meaningful spiritual practice for many.

Spending time in nature helps restore balance in our life and also deepens our connection with a higher power. Many people consider nature to be the most visible manifestation of the spirit.

Ecospirituality *Ecospirituality* is a relationship that an individual experiences personally with the environment. A spiritual view provides a context for living with the Earth and the universe. This relationship arises from a personal, inner experience and reflects an acquired state of inner harmony.

Native American religious tradition honors the sacredness of special places. This expression of a positive relationship with nature is called *nature-centered spirituality*. This connection with nature is not limited to Native Americans. It is found in many other religious traditions worldwide.

Think about your experiences being nurtured by nature. Also think about your responsibilities to honor nature and the environment. What do you do to sustain the environment?

Two of the spiritual rituals that have special relevance in managing stress are prayer and an appreciation for nature. Think about other rituals that provide emotional and spiritual renewal in your daily life.

Now that you have learned about the five qualities of spiritual health, we will suggest an action plan for you. You will learn how to apply spirituality in your daily life to reduce stress and enhance wellness.

An Action Plan for Stress Management Through Spiritual Wellness

Surveys indicate that over 50% of students place strong importance on “integrating spirituality into my life.” What about you? Where should you begin in your quest to manage stress through spiritual wellness? How do you put this knowledge into action? The challenge may seem daunting. Certain tools to reduce stress are tangible, for example, talking with friends, managing your money, and exercising more. But as you have learned in this chapter, there is another tool for helping you manage life challenges that can be just as beneficial—embracing your spirituality. Although wellness of spirit comes to people in different ways and spiritual growth can take many paths, this growth starts with a single step:

1. Begin by defining what spirituality means to you.
2. Next, close your eyes and take a few minutes to reflect on some spiritual moments in your life—times when you were keenly aware of your spirituality. As clearly as you possibly can, reflect on these spiritual experiences.

FYI

Students and Prayer

According to a UCLA Higher Education Research Institute study, 69% of college students say they pray; 61% pray at least weekly, and 28% pray daily. They frequently pray for loved ones (68%), to express gratitude (59%), for forgiveness (58%), and for help in solving problems (58%).

Source: “Spirituality in Higher Education: Students’ Search for Meaning and Purpose,” A National Study of Spirituality in Higher Education, Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles, retrieved February 1, 2011 from www.spirituality.ucla.edu.

At a certain point you say to the woods, to the sea, to the mountains, the world, “Now I am ready. Now I will stop and be wholly attentive.” You empty yourself and wait, listening.

—ANNIE DILLARD

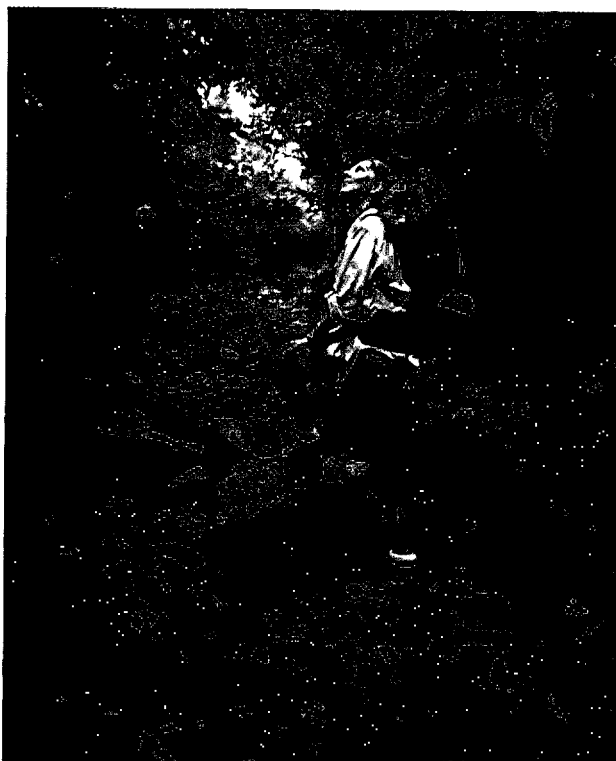
Author Anecdote

Solo Time Is Renewal Time

Several years ago I started taking one day each season for what I call solo time. For one day each spring, summer, fall, and winter I escape by myself for a day of solitude. I plan for the day and write it in my schedule book, or it probably would not happen.

Solitude is the experience of being by yourself without feeling lonely or alone. Invariably I end up in nature for my day of rest and rejuvenation. We live in the beautiful Black Hills of South Dakota, so I’m fortunate to enjoy hiking in the autumn; cross-country skiing in the winter; swimming in cool, clear lakes in the summer; and long, relaxing bike rides in the spring. But mostly on my solo days I walk, sit, think, listen, and *be*, instead of *do*. I can hardly put into words how these days of solitude restore my sense of balance. When was the last time you spent a day or two completely alone for the sole purpose of self-renewal?

—MH



I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in tune once more. (John Burroughs).

3. Based on your definition of spirituality, reflect on how spirituality relates to stress in your life. Examine the values that guide your life. Do you see a relationship between your spiritual beliefs and the values you prioritized in Chapter 9? Spirituality determines values, and values determine actions. When our actions are consistent with our values and beliefs, the outcome is balance, peace, and fulfillment.
4. Complete the Stress Management Lab, Spiritual Wellness Assessment and Response, at the end of this chapter, to guide you in your action plan for stress management through spiritual wellness.

Conclusion

The path to spiritual health is not prescribed. The right way is the one that works for you. Based on your cultural beliefs, your experiences in life, and your values, only you can decide on the path that will lead to greater peace for you. Spiritual well-being is not an endpoint or a prescribed set of activities to accomplish on a one-time basis. Spiritual health involves a lifetime of deliberate choices and an intentional inner focus on matters of the spirit. Making choices that fulfill your purpose in life will bring the ultimate stress-relievers—peace, joy, and love—into your life. The overriding message is not to ignore the spiritual dimension. Peace comes from deliberate balance in body, mind, and spirit.

The intent of the chapter is not to support or promote any specific religious or spiritual perspective but, instead, for you to reflect on the role of spirituality and religion in your life. Commitment to a whole-person way of living prevents and relieves negative stress. The spiritual dimension of health acts as the force that unifies the other dimensions of health: intellectual, emotional, physical, and social.

At the beginning of this chapter, you learned that discovering the contemplative, spiritual life requires not so much a radical change in lifestyle as a shift in awareness, an inner change. Spirituality is the inner intention of our spiritual essence, rather than the outward circumstances of our lives. Take a minute to think about what this means for you. This inner stability enables you to be a self-fulfilling person despite all life's changes and challenges. You are able to find meaning, and therefore grow, from even the most difficult times in life. Spiritual health is the quality of existence in which you are at peace with yourself and in harmony with the environment.

The Hebrew language has a word, **shalom**, that cannot be translated fully into a single English word. Shalom is more than wellness or wholeness. It can best be translated as *peace*. Shalom involves the total person and the person's environment. To have shalom involves spirituality. Peace is an outcome of spiritual health.