Spiritual Rituals
by Barbara Leonard, Ph.D. and David Carlson, M.Div.

Touro Institute

In Conjunction with the

University of Minnesota
Spiritual Rituals

Course Description

– The spiritual rituals of prayer, meditation, guided imagery, gratitude, spending time in nature, and art can all help people connect to their inner being, to others, and to a divine spirit or higher power. A part of spiritual and cultural traditions, rituals help to provide awareness, meaning, intention, and purpose in life.

– The goal of this course is to provide health care professionals and spiritual care providers with an understanding of spiritually healing rituals that they can incorporate in the care of their clients and for themselves.

Learning Objectives

– Upon completing this course, you will be able to do the following:

1. Describe three phases of creating rituals.
2. Examine the spiritual ritual of prayer in health and healing.
3. Describe six different types of prayer.
4. Describe types and techniques of meditation, visualization, and guided imagery and describe their relationship to healing.
5. Explain the spiritual rituals of gratitude, spending time in nature, and art.
6. Describe the importance of storytelling in spiritual care.
7. Provide examples of why rituals work as a healing force.
Introduction

• Through immigration, international travel, and globalization, spiritual journeys can take people down paths that were not available to previous generations. Today, people are exposed to many different religious practices, spiritual practices, and rituals that they may never have seen before. These practices often have specific meaning.

• How does a spiritual practice differ from a ritual? While there is no one correct answer to the question, “What is a spiritual practice?” R. O. Scott (2001) provides the following perspective, demonstrating that most people view spiritual acts as part of everyday life:
  – 91% of people see praying as a spiritual practice
  – 81% view attending worship services as a spiritual practice
  – 80% believe that parenting is a spiritual practice
  – 67% consider a walk in the forest to be a divine spiritual practice
  – 52% of adults affirm that making love is a spiritual practice
Spiritual Rituals

Rituals, on the other hand, are practices that are often repeated and can provide a way for people to make life experiences meaningful. For example, rituals such as prayer and meditation may help individuals reconnect with their spirituality and thus support their spiritual health (Taylor, 2002). According to B. M. Dossey (1997), a ritual is an enactment of cultural beliefs and values.

- Rituals involve repetition, patterns, and behaviors that have personal, healing value.
- Rituals are significant aspects of many religious traditions and cultures.
- They are spiritual acts. They can be any activities done with awareness. Rituals allow people to honor and celebrate life.
- They are sacred spaces of mind that honor the core of human experience and the power of the Invisible Force.
- They are rites of separation. They are a rich resource in caring for the spirit.
- Rituals contain steps for recovery, reduce anxiety and fear, and reduce feelings of helplessness.
Rituals help awaken our spiritual self and help us to connect with our inner core, other people, nature, and everything in our world. They help us to remember, to honor, and to change, and they can involve actions, symbols, and ceremonies. Rituals are a part of historical, religious, spiritual, and cultural traditions. Traditional rituals are handed down from one generation to another, while self-generated rituals are begun by an individual or group and have no cultural history or tradition. The basic elements of rituals include actions, meaningful patterns, intention, awareness, and purpose.

Rituals can be sacred or secular. Examples of sacred rituals might include saying grace at mealtime, religious worship, spiritual ceremony within any tradition, prayer, and meditation. Examples of secular rituals might include parades, family picnics, kissing under the mistletoe, or taking a daily walk for the purpose of exercise (Burkhardt & Nagai-Jacobson, 2002).

The following sections will look at how rituals are created, then at the specific types of rituals and why they work as a healing force.
Creating Rituals

- There are many types of rituals, but an important aspect of healing is creating personalized rituals. According to Achterberg, Dossey, and Kolkmeier (1994), creating personalized rituals incorporates three phases:
  
  • **The separation phase** begins when the individual starts to relax, creates a positive healing intention for the experience, and then enters a healing state of consciousness.
  
  • **The transition phase** occurs when the individual becomes attuned to the relaxation process, uses imagery or imagination, and integrates the senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell with the condition that needs healing.
  
  • **The return phase** occurs when the individual gently returns to a wakeful state, experiences a deeper sense of relaxation, and feels renewed energy.
When preparing for a ritual, the individual can support its healing aspects by doing the following (Achterberg et al., 1994):
– Taking care of basic comfort needs
– Making sure the environment is supportive to the process (comfortable temperature, subtle lighting, soothing colors, etc.)
– Creating a sacred space or room
– Having all necessary materials available (such as candles, incense, music, etc.)
– Making sure there are no distractions or interruptions

If you are a health care provider, the key to providing spiritual care is communicating with clients to determine if they are comfortable using specific rituals and then working with them to design or incorporate a ritual that is healing for them.
Prayer
Prayer

Prayer
by Catherine Owens Duncan, MAT, Spiritual Director

This module provides an introduction to prayer and its role in mental and physical health.

In the section, you will find:

- Definitions
- Discussion of the scientific basis
- A brief examination of the role of prayer in healthcare
- A summary of the evidence base
Prayer

- People throughout the ages perceived a relationship between spiritual practices and health and healing long before modern science began.
- Although the power of prayer in health and healing cannot be underestimated, it has only recently been acknowledged by modern science (Dossey, 1993, 1999, 2001; Koenig, 1999; Matthews & Clark, 1998).
- Today, health care professionals are beginning to look beyond traditional ethics and science to better understand the power of prayer and the health effects of spirituality (Silva & DeLashmutt, 1998).
- Research has demonstrated that regular prayer, scripture reading, or study has provided health benefits (Koenig, 1999; Matthews, 2000).
- Research on the biological effects of prayer and spiritual healing is constantly growing and includes studies on microorganisms, plants, cancer cells, animals, and humans (Brown-Saltzman, 1997; Dossey, 1993; Matthews, 2000).
Prayer

What does the word "prayer" mean to you?

reflective

Prayer has a very personal meaning arising from an individual’s religious background or spiritual practice. For some, prayer will mean specific sacred words, for others, it may be a more informal talking to God, listening to God, or higher power.

Prayer can include intercessory prayer, distant healing prayer, petition prayer, centering prayer, contemplative prayer, and meditation.
Prayer

What Is Prayer?

• Prayer has meaning for many individuals. It is the most common form of spiritual ritual and is practiced by religious as well nonreligious individuals throughout the world. Virtually every culture prays in one form or another, especially during times of stress and at the end of life (O’Hara, 2002). Even in Buddhism, which does not believe in a “person God” as creator, prayers are a central component.

• An expression of the spirit, prayer both influences and is affected by an individual’s spirituality (Meraviglia, 1999). It represents a desire to communicate with God or a higher power. B. M. Dossey, Keegan, and Guzzetta (2000) define prayer as “a deep human instinct that flows from the core of one’s being where the longing for and awareness of one’s connectedness with the source of life are blended” (p. 99). L. Dossey (2001) offers this broad and inclusive definition of prayer: “Prayer is communication with the Absolute” (p. 224).

• With a wide variety of forms and expressions, prayer is part of many religious traditions and rituals. It may be individual or communal, and public or private. Sometimes prayer is a conscious activity and at other times it is less conscious. Elements of prayer include speaking (often silently), listening, waiting, and being silent. Prayer also includes adoration, confession, invocation, intercession, lamentation, and thanksgiving (Dossey et al., 2000; Dossey, 1993, 2001).

• L. Dossey (1993) confirms that prayer is remarkably democratic, that no particular religion holds a monopoly on prayer’s efficacy, and that one does not need to be religious to pray effectively or to benefit medically from prayer. Although the exact mechanism is unknown, evidence supports that prayer works (Dossey, 1993, 2001; Taylor, 2002). L. Dossey (1993) proposes that prayer is “nonlocal” (not confined by time or space) and is derived from quantum physics.
Prayer

Perspectives on Prayer

The word "prayer" comes from the Latin *precarius*, which means "obtained by begging, to entreat."

Prayer is rooted in the belief that there is a power greater and larger than oneself that can influence one's life. It is the act of raising hearts and minds to God or a Higher Power.

It is also an opening to the sacred, an "urge toward wholeness." *(Dossey, L., 1993.)*

Prayer is an opening to the sacred.
Prayer

Forms of Prayer

There is no one set way to pray. Forms include spoken prayers, silent prayers, and prayers of the mind, the heart, and union with God. Prayers may be directed (e.g., prayers for specific things) or non-directed, with no specific outcome in mind.

Specific types of prayers include:

- Intercessory prayer
- Distant healing prayer
- Petition prayer
- Centering prayer
- Contemplative prayer
- Meditation
# Prayer

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intercessory prayer involves praying for someone else.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Distant healing prayer involves praying for someone or something at a distance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Petition prayer asks God for something.</td>
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<td>In centering prayer, one centers on a word or phrase for a minimum of 20 minutes in silence, usually in order to open to the sacred.</td>
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<td>Centering prayer leads to contemplative prayer, in which one is in union with God or the sacred.</td>
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Meditation is practiced in Western and Eastern faith traditions.

- In Christianity, union with God is often the ultimate goal of meditation.
- In Buddhism, meditation is practiced to expand awareness and gain insight into the nature of passing phenomenon.

Meditation may be practiced by sitting in silence (often while following one's breath), doing intentional movement, or using visualization, imagination, or a specific object or mantra as a focus.
Many techniques are used in praying, including the following (Capps, 1993; Dossey, 1993; Fontaine, 2000; O’Conner, 2001; Taylor, 2002):

- Relaxation, quieting, and breath awareness
- Attention training and focusing
- Imagery and visualization
- Intentionality
- Movement, such as dancing, walking, or drumming
- Inspirational or sacred readings
- Anointing with oil
- Singing
- Meditation
- Music
- Chanting
Prayer

Prayer in Religion and Spirituality

Prayer dates back to the beginning of human history: the use of prayer for physical healing appears in the Ebers' Papyrus Scrolls (circa 1500 B.C.E.). Most of the world's religions use some form of prayer, including the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, Hinduism, and some Buddhist traditions.

Today, as in the past, prayer is widely practiced all over the world. While prayer is often considered the cornerstone of religion, it may go beyond specific religions and be an expression of personal spirituality.

At the root of both religion and spirituality is the search for meaning. Religion is the construct of human beings who establish communities of faith seekers, while spirituality is vast and indefinable, where we meet the sacredness in all of life. Prayer informs and supports both.

Prayer is widely practiced all over the world.
Prayer

Experience It

Peace prayer  
(St. Francis of Assisi, Christian)

O our Father, the Sky, hear us  
(Sioux prayer)

There is a force within that gives you life  
(Rumi, Sufi Moslem)

Loving kindness meditation 
(Buddhist)

Adon Olam - Master Of The World 
(Jewish)

May all be happy  
(Hindu Prayer)
Prayer

Experience It

Peace prayer
(St. Francis of Assisi, Christian)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is discord, union;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is error, truth;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
Where there is sadness, joy.

O, Divine Master  
grant that I may not so much  
seek to be consoled as to console;  
To be understood, as to understand;  
To be loved, as to love;  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
And it is in dying that we are born  
to eternal life.
O our Father, the Sky, hear us and make us strong.
O our Mother the Earth, hear us and give us support.
O Spirit of the East, send us your Wisdom.
O Spirit of the South may we tread your path of life.
O Spirit of the West, may we always be ready for the long journey.
O Spirit of the North, purify us with your cleansing winds.
Experience It
There is a force within
(Rumi, Sufi Moslem)

There is a force within that gives you life—
Seek that.

In your body there lies a priceless jewel—
Seek that.

Oh wandering Sufi.
If you are in search of the greatest treasure,
don’t look outside,

Look within, and seek That.

Rumi
Translated by Jonathan Star
Prayer

Experience It

Loving kindness meditation
(Buddhist)

Metta
(Lovingkindness Meditation)

May I be at peace.
May my heart remain open.
May I awaken to the light
of my own true nature.
May I be healed.
May I be a source of healing
for all beings.
ADON OLAM - MASTER OF THE WORLD

Adon Olam (Master of the World) is a very old poem that is recited by Jews every day at the beginning of Shacharis, the morning prayers. While we are not certain who the author of this poem is, most authorities attribute it to Rabbi Shlemo ibn Gabirol, the great poet of 11th century Spain. The poem is recited before Shacharis to recall the memory of Avraham our Father, who was the first to call HaShem "Adoni" - "My Master" and who instituted the Shacharis prayers.

Master of the World who was king, before any form was created.
At the time when He made all through His will, then His name was called 'King'.
And after all is gone, He, the Awesome One, will reign alone.
And He was, and He is, and He will be in splendor.
And He is One, and there is no second, to compare to Him or be His equal.
Without beginning, without end, to Him is the power and rulership.
He is my G-d, my living Redeemer, and the Rock of my fate in times of distress.
He is my banner and He is a refuge for me, my portion on the day I cry out,
In His hand I entrust my spirit, when I sleep and when I wake.
And my soul shall remain with my body, HaShem is with me and I am not afraid.
Prayer

Experience It

May all be happy
(Hindu Prayer)

May all be happy;
May all be free from disease;
May all realize what is good;
May nobody be subject to sorrow.
May the wicked become virtuous;
May the virtuous attain peace;
May the peaceful be free;
May the free make others free.
Prayer and Healing

Prayer can profoundly affect the healing process. Research demonstrates that religious practices such as worship attendance and prayer may contribute to physical and emotional health. Although the studies have not demonstrated a cause-and-effect relationship, there is strong evidence of an important connection between religious practice and good health (Fontaine, 2000; Taylor, 2002). As Taylor (2002) writes, “Although experimental evidence of prayer’s curative effect is inconclusive, there have been several correlational studies that demonstrate relationships between prayer and psychological health benefits” (p. 207).

In addition to turning to medical care for their healing, people also turn to prayer. According to Matthews & Clark (1998):

1. **People cope with illness** through a learned process by using prayer and other forms of spiritual involvement when they are not completely cured of their illness.
2. **Individuals may experience the arrest of the progression of illnesses** with diseases such as cancer and heart disease.
3. **Individuals may experience remission or complete healing of illnesses** through the combination of prayer and medical care.
Prayer

Why is an awareness and understanding of prayer important for healthcare providers?

One important reason is that 90% of Americans pray daily and 70% believe that prayer can cure illness (Dusek, J. 2002).

The majority of patients would also like their physicians to address religious or spiritual issues in the context of a medical visit (Koenig, H. 2001).

70% of patients ask for religious counseling (Jonas, W. 2003).

Prayer

Prayer in Healthcare

Prayer is important in a healthcare context simply because it is used so widely. "Surveys indicate that nearly 90% of patients with serious illness will engage in prayer for the alleviation of their suffering or disease" (Jonas, W. 2003).

Prayer is the second most common method of pain management (after oral pain medication), and the most common non-drug method of pain management (Puchalski, C. 2004).

Among all forms of complementary medicine, prayer is the single most widely-practiced healing modality (Glazer, S. 2005).

Prayer is widely used as a healing modality.
Prayer

Prayer in Healthcare

Moreover, several studies correlate prayer with improved health and well-being. "Patient spirituality and religiosity have been shown to be correlated with reduced morbidity and mortality, better physical and mental health, healthier lifestyles, fewer required health services, improved coping skills, enhanced well-being, reduced stress and illness prevention" (McCord, G. 2004).

Similarly, it is well documented that hope, belief, and faith positively influence health outcomes (Palmer, R. 2004).

It is well documented that hope, belief, and faith positively influence health outcomes.
Prayer and the Health Care Provider

- Health care providers can incorporate prayer into the care of their clients. Health care professionals who are aware of individual ways of praying and meditating can help the patient or client consider the meaning of prayer in their lives and explore ways to reach out to their God or higher power during times of health care crises.

- Praying with clients is an intimate act and should be approached carefully and respectfully. It is important to pray in an appropriate manner. For example, a brief assessment of the client’s prayer habits and beliefs is necessary prior to praying with that client. Other suggestions for praying with clients include the following (Holt-Ashley, 2000; Taylor, 2002):
  - Obtain permission from the clients prior to praying with them.
  - Create personalized conversational prayers that reflect the client’s current concern.
  - Match the type of prayer experience with the client’s personality, preference, and current circumstance.
  - Establish privacy by closing doors or curtains.
  - Observe the client’s response.

- Prayer as a ritual can be healing and comforting. However, the health care provider should understand that praying may not be appropriate for everyone. If a client refuses prayer, the health care provider should not attempt to force personal beliefs on the client.
Prayer

Summary

Prayer is rooted in the belief that there is a power greater and larger than oneself that can influence one's life. It is an opening to the sacred, an "urge toward wholeness."

Specific types of prayers include intercessory prayer, distant healing prayer, petition prayer, centering prayer, contemplative prayer, and meditation.

Prayer informs and supports both religion and spirituality.

Prayer is important in a healthcare context simply because it is used so widely. Moreover, several studies correlate prayer with improved health and well being.
Meditation
Meditation
by Mary Jo Kreitzer, PhD, RN

This module provides an introduction to meditation and its role in mental and physical health.

In the section, you will find:

- Descriptions of different types of meditation
- Discussion of the scientific basis
- Practical tips on how to advise patients
- Discussion of useful applications
- A summary of the evidence base
What is Meditation?

Meditation is a self-directed practice for relaxing the body and calming the mind. In many traditions, meditation is used to achieve insight and expanded awareness.

Meditation has been used by people in many cultures since ancient times, most often as part of a religious or spiritual tradition. However, in the United States, it is also increasingly practiced in secular settings. Its mental and physical health benefits have been long recognized.
Varieties of Meditation

In the United States, the most common forms of meditation are sedentary and silent. (We describe four types in the Key Concepts section.) However, there is growing interest in many moving meditations such as yoga, the practices of tai chi or Qigong from China, the Japanese martial art of aikido, and walking meditation in Zen Buddhism.

Some forms of meditation also involve chanting or drumming or other repetitive sounds. Although specific meditative practices vary considerably, the ultimate goal is to promote a similar mental and physical calm.

Meditation can be an integral part of many of the other therapies and practices discussed in this course. For example, meditation is a fundamental aspect of Yoga. Meditative techniques can also be used in psychological counseling, guided imagery, biofeedback, and clinical hypnosis.
Benefits of Meditation

One type of meditation practice that has been extensively researched is the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program created by Jon Kabat-Zinn. He reports that data from the program at the University of Massachusetts show:

"a sharp drop over the eight weeks [of the program] in the number of medical symptoms patients report, as well as in such psychological problems as anxiety, depression, and hostility. These improvements occur reproducibly in the majority of patients in every class. They also occur regardless of diagnosis, suggesting that the program is relevant to people with a wide range of medical disorders and life situations."

Data from the MBSR program show improvements in medical symptoms and mood, regardless of diagnosis.
Meditation

Background

The resurgent interest in meditation has drawn largely from Eastern religious practices, particularly those of India, China, and Japan.

Records substantiate the use of meditation by Hindus in India as early as 1500 B.C. Taoists in China and Buddhists in India and China include meditation as an integral part of their religious life.

Zen Buddhists in China and Japan affirm the centrality of meditation and practice a sitting meditation which maintains a quiet, panoramic awareness of whatever is happening.

The resurgent interest in meditation has drawn largely from Eastern religious practices.
Definitions

Some definitions of meditation focus on the aspect of concentration and others emphasize the experience of insight and broader awareness.

For example, Goleman and Schwartz describe meditation as:

"The systematic and continued focusing of the attention on a single target percept—for example, a mantra or sound—or persistently holding a specific attentional set toward all percepts or mental contents as they spontaneously arise in the field of awareness."

Welwood, on the other hand, views meditation as a technique that allows the practitioner to investigate the process of his or her consciousness and discover the more basic underlying qualities of one's existence. Intense concentration blocks other stimuli, allowing the person to become more aware of self.

Some definitions of meditation focus on the aspect of concentration and others emphasize the experience of insight.
Meditation

Concentration Techniques

Everly and Rosenfeld enumerate four common concentration techniques used to calm the mind:

- Mental Repetition
- Physical Repetition
- Problem Concentration
- Visual Concentration

Many meditators choose the technique that works best for them (including others not listed here) and may vary it as they find necessary from day to day or as their practice evolves over time.

These are four common ways to concentrate, but there are others.
**Meditation**

**A Way of Being**

Kabat-Zinn encourages us to look beyond techniques and consider meditation as a way of being. He believes it is erroneous to assume that the goal of meditation is to achieve a specific, highly pleasant, meditative state akin to deep relaxation.

To begin, he maintains, there is no single meditative state. Moreover, instead of trying to achieve a particular goal, the overall orientation in meditation is one of non-striving and non-doing.

Meditation is a way of being that expands our capacity for awareness and for self-knowing. When a mindful state is cultivated, it ultimately frees people from routine thought patterns and relationships and the destructive mind-states and emotions that accompany them.

When people are able to escape from highly conditioned, reactive, and habitual thinking, they are able to respond in more effective and authentic ways.
Meditation

Specific Approaches

While there are a wide variety of meditation approaches described in the literature, in the following screens we describe four that are often used in research studies on the health benefits of meditation:

- Relaxation response
- Transcendental meditation
- Mindfulness meditation
- Centering prayer.

These four approaches to meditation are often used in research studies.
1. Relaxation Response

Relaxation response is the term coined by Dr. Herbert Benson at Harvard to describe the physiological changes he observed in practitioners of various forms of meditation and prayer.

In his research, he found that subjects can counter the fight or flight physiological response by focusing on the repetition of a word, sound, prayer, or muscular activity (such as the breath), and passively returning to the object of focus when other thoughts or things intrude.

The relaxation response incorporates four elements common in various traditions:

- Quiet environment
- Mental device
- Passive attitude
- Comfortable position

The relaxation response is generated by many forms of meditation and prayer.
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The relaxation response incorporates four elements common in various traditions:

- **Quiet environment**
- **Mental device**
- **Passive attitude**
- **Comfortable position**

A quiet environment eliminates outside stimuli and allows the person to concentrate on the mental device. Some people prefer a church or chapel for meditating, but if that is not readily accessible, any quiet place will do.

People should select a spot and use it consistently to eliminate having to adjust to new surroundings and stimuli each time. Playing music while meditating is not advocated because it may draw the person’s attention away from the internal processes.
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The relaxation response incorporates four elements common in various traditions:

- Quiet environment
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A mental device helps shift the mind from logical, externally oriented thought to inner rumination. The purpose of the mental device is to occupy oneself with an emotionally neutral, repetitive, and monotonous stimulus.

Benson’s technique requires the person to select a mental device that will be used whenever the person meditates. It may be a sound, word, or phrase that is repeated silently or aloud, a phrase or portion also sometimes used as the mental device of a religious prayer or psalm.

Practitioners can also focus on an object or physical movement, such as the breath.
Meditation

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The relaxation response incorporates four elements common in various traditions:

- Quiet environment
- Mental device
- **Passive attitude**
- Comfortable position

A passive attitude is necessary to keep the mind from becoming engaged. When thoughts wander from the mental device, the practitioner should passively return to the object without judging or figuring out why.
Meditation

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The relaxation response incorporates four elements common in various traditions:

- Quiet environment
- Mental device
- Passive attitude
- Comfortable position

A comfortable position allows the practitioner to focus more easily on the mental device and hold the attention.
2. Transcendental Meditation

Transcendental meditation (TM), was developed and introduced into the United States in the early 1960s by the Indian leader Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. It is estimated that there are now well over 2 million practitioners. Herbert Benson and others have done much research on the health effects of this type of meditation, in part because it was the first widely used meditation technique in the United States.

The concept of TM is relatively simple. Students are given the mental device of a personal mantra (a word or sound) to repeat silently over and over again while sitting in a comfortable position. The mantra is selected not for meaning but strictly for sound. It is the understanding that this sound alone attracts the mind and leads it effortlessly and naturally to a slightly subtler level of the thinking process.

If thoughts other than the mantra come to mind, the student is asked to notice them and return to the mantra.
3. Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness or insight meditation are Western terms used interchangeably to describe the Buddhist practice of vipassana meditation.

The goal of mindfulness meditation is to increase insight by becoming a detached observer of the stream of changing thoughts, feelings, drives, and visions until their nature and origin is recognized.

In this tradition, practitioners focus on moment-to-moment awareness of the predominant sensation. Practitioners initially focus on the breath and then practice a relaxed attention on feelings or perceptions as they arise. In this form of meditation, no thought or sensation is considered an intrusion. (Kutz et al., 1985).
Meditation

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

One form of mindfulness meditation is the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program that originated at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center and is currently used in more than 80 clinics, hospitals, and HMOs in the U.S. and abroad.

In MBSR training, participants generally receive instruction in three formal meditation techniques: a body scan, a sitting meditation, and mindful hatha yoga.

Hatha yoga is one of the techniques taught in the MBSR program.
Meditation

Mindful Breathing Meditation

We can decide to set aside some time each day for ourselves. A time when we can comfortably still the body. Setting aside activity and constant doing. Allowing ourselves to do non-doing. Just to simply be

Allow the body to become still. Sit in a chair; back straight, posture relaxed. Awake and dignified. Settle into this moment. Feel the body. The support of the floor; the chair. Settle into this seat.

Become aware that you are breathing. Become aware of the movement of the breath. Feel the breath coming in and breath leaving; flowing in and flowing out. Not controlling the breath; just aware of how the breath feels.

Allow yourself to be with this flow of breath. In and out. You may notice this breath in your nostrils as the breath enters your nose. You may notice this breath at the chest as the lungs fill with air as you breathe in and deflate as you breathe out. Perhaps you may feel the breath at the belly as the belly rises and fills on the in-breath and flattens and sinks on the out-breath.
Meditation

Allow your attention to ride on the sensations of each breath. Not thinking about breathing, but feeling the breath. Allow the breath to breathe itself. Give full care and attention to each breath. Observe the full cycle of each breath. Locate the very beginning of the in-breath and following it as it enters the nose and fills the lungs and belly. Then, coming to a tiny moment of stillness before it turns around and makes it’s journey out of the body.

Let your attention rest on the filling of the breath – the entire cycle of breathing. If your mind wanders off to thoughts or memories or regrets or planning, as soon as you become aware guide it back gently but firmly to this breath. Simply come back to this breath.

And now continue to follow your breath on your own. Say to yourself “in and out” on each breath.
Meditation

4. Centering Prayer

Though similar to TM in several respects, centering prayer is based in Christianity and is designed to reduce the obstacles to contemplative prayer and union with God.

Thomas Keating, founder of the centering prayer movement, describes it as a discipline to withdraw attention from the ordinary flow of thoughts. The understanding is that people tend to identify with their thoughts—the debris that floats along the surface of the river—rather than being in touch with the river itself—the source from which these mental objects are emerging.

In centering prayer, people are encouraged to find a comfortable position, to close their eyes, and to focus on a sacred word, such as Lord, Jesus, Love, or Peace for 20 to 30 minutes.

Centering prayer is a discipline to withdraw our attention from the ordinary flow of thoughts and experience God.
Meditation Summary

**Meditation, Visualization, and Guided Imagery**

- Meditation originated in ancient India about 3,000 years ago and has existed in some form in most major religions and many secular organizations. It is often distinguished from prayer by the lack of directedness toward the divine (Barrows & Jacobs, 2002). Because many individuals regularly practice meditation in a prescribed manner, it can also be considered a ritual and a process to spiritual transformation (Taylor, 2002).

- Meditation is a learned skill. When practiced in a disciplined manner, it provides many physiological benefits, such as stress reduction, decreased adrenaline flow, lowered metabolic rate, decreased heart rate, improved immune and cardiovascular function, relaxation, and decreased pain. The regular practice of meditation may lead to new insights about life issues, heightened creativity, inspiration, greater compassion for others, and a greater connection to one’s own inner guidance (Achterberg et al., 1994; Reynolds, 2001).

- There are many ways to meditate and many different forms of meditation, but they all share the characteristic of intentionally training a person’s attention and concentration. All meditative techniques involve conscious breathing and a focus on what is happening in each present moment until the mind becomes empty of thoughts, judgments, and past and future concerns (Dossey et al., 2000; Reynolds, 2001).

- Meditation can be performed while sitting or lying down or while walking or jogging.

- Examples of meditation practices include mindfulness meditation, transcendental meditation (TM), and relaxation response meditation. Another type of meditation is moving meditation. Yoga, Qi Gong, therapeutic touch, Sufi dancing, and Native American and shamanic ritual dance are all examples of moving mediation practices.

- Meditation can be an intensely spiritual experience. To enter into a meditative state, the following three methods may be helpful: breathing techniques, meditating with sound, and meditating with visualization (Reynolds, 2001).
Breathing Techniques

– Using breathing techniques is one of the simplest meditation practices and an important component of most forms of meditation. Breathing techniques involve counting each breath while breathing in and out. Each inhalation and exhalation together count as one breath. Usually the individual breathes in slowly through the nose (counting from the number one to ten) and breathes out slowly through the mouth (counting backward from the number ten to one).

– Another method is a technique called spaced breathing. This involves taking as much time as possible between breaths. The individual breathes gently and slowly and counts to five for each inhalation, holds the breath for a count of five, and then exhales to a count of five (Dossey et al., 2000; Reynolds, 2001; Taylor, 2002).
Meditating with Sound

Other forms of meditation use mantras, chanting, singing bowls, drums, and audiotapes to incorporate sound vibrations in the promotion of a meditative state of mind (Dossey et al., 2000; Reynolds, 2001).

- Mantras involve synchronizing the breathing with the silent repetition of a sound, word, or phrase (such as sacred Sanskrit syllables and words such as “om”).
- Chanting involves repeating certain words or sounds aloud.
- Singing bowls (usually made of a unique alloy or quartz crystal) are rubbed or struck with a wooden stick to create soothing sounds that invoke a meditative state.
- Drums are beaten in rhythm with the breath or heartbeat to create a deep meditative state.
- Audiotapes of music, nature sounds, or meditation instructions can help create a relaxed meditative state.
Meditating with Visualization

- The use of visualization techniques, another form of meditation, can include picturing a sacred place, focusing on an external object, or visualizing sacred symbols (Reynolds, 2001; Taylor, 2002).

- **Picturing a sacred place** may involve picturing a real or imaginary place, such as a stream with water flowing over the boulders, a mountain landscape, an ocean scene, or the image of a forest. Contemplating this scene “transports” the individual to a meditative state.

- **Focusing on an external object** may involve keeping the eyes open and focusing on a single object (such as a candle flame) for a specific period of time.

- **Visualizing sacred symbols** involves visualizing certain symbols and shapes regarded as sacred by many cultures. For example, Hindus and Buddhists use a *mandala*, a graphic representation depicting the universe. Sacred symbols can help individuals connect with their deep subconscious awareness and create a meditative state.
A Simple Meditation

• Sit comfortably erect with your eyes closed while paying attention to your breathing. Observe yourself inhaling and exhaling, allowing whatever thoughts you may have to leave your mind. In the beginning, your mind may wander, so each time this occurs, gently refocus on your breathing. To prevent your mind from wandering, try silently repeating a word, or mantra, such as love or peace. You will eventually experience longer periods of silence between each thought.

• This technique should be practiced 10 to 20 minutes, once or twice a day. With commitment and practice, the benefits of mediation will become apparent (Dossey et al., 2000; Reynolds, 2001; Taylor, 2002)
Other Forms of Spiritual Rituals
Guided Imagery

Barrows and Jacobs (2002) describe guided imagery as “the imaginative capacity of the mind to affect one’s physical, emotional, and spiritual state” (p. 18). Imagery has been defined as the thought process that invokes and uses the senses of vision, hearing, smell, taste, movement, position, and touch. It is the communication mechanism between perception, emotion, and bodily change (Achterberg et al., 1994; Brown-Saltzman, 1997). By using guided imagery, individuals can develop new patterns or ways of seeing, they can facilitate problem solving, and they can create a sense of control over their inner and outer life.

Closely related to hypnosis, guided imagery has a presuggestion phase, which includes relaxation and the focus of attention; a suggestion phase, which usually involves images; and a postsuggestion reinforcement phase. The underlying premise is that an individual’s physiology and psychology are altered during hypnosis. Guided imagery has been investigated in the following areas (Barrows & Jacobs, 2002):

- Quality of life with a chronic illnesses, such as cancer
- Treatment of chronic pain
- Improvement of surgery outcomes

Guided imagery may have diverse applications in health care in the areas of infertility, childbirth, chronic and acute pain, psychotherapy, and grief work.
Gratitude

The spiritual practice of gratitude is a powerful force and can be a state of mind as well as a way of life. Being grateful for what one has, instead of worrying about what one lacks, enables the individual to let go of negative thoughts and attitudes and reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. Burkhardt and Nagai-Jacobson (2002) describe the origin of gratitude this way:

“Our experience of grace as a blessing that comes into our lives unearned, without merit, calls forth the response of gratitude” (p. 71).

One way to practice gratitude is to focus on the positive aspects of life. This can be accomplished by keeping a gratitude journal—an inventory of all the positive things that occur each day, week, and month. Keeping such a journal can set the stage for living a life that is more connected to Spirit (Fontaine, 2000).

Engaging in an act of gratitude may often restore balance and perspective (Burkhardt & Nagai-Jacobson, 2002; Fontaine, 2000).

Grateful acts might include any or all of the following:

• Making a list of things you are grateful for in your life
• Creating opportunities to help others
• Calling a special friend
• Being aware that life is a gift
• Saying grace before meals
• Engaging in daily prayers
• Always remembering to say thank you when someone helps you, gives you a compliment, or gives you a gift
Spending Time in Nature

Have you ever been moved by the site of a spectacular sunset? Have you ever walked barefoot through leaves and experienced their rustling and crunching sounds beneath your feet? Experiencing the pleasure of the natural environment—whether it be a deserted beach, a shimmering wheat field, a majestic mountain, a vivid sky at sunset, a lush forest, a beautiful waterfall, or a quiet stream—may be considered a spiritual experience. The desire for aesthetic pleasure on a deep level is a strong human craving, and aesthetic experiences, or even the act of contemplating nature, can confer numerous health benefits (Matthews & Clark, 1998; Taylor, 2002).

Throughout history, most religious, spiritual, and cultural traditions have had strong connections and relationships with nature. According to Taylor (2002), “Many religious traditions consider nature, or the outdoors and its world of living things, to be the handiwork or a literal illustration of God” (p. 262). For example, Native American religious traditions express a positive relationship to nature that is called nature-centered spirituality. It is found in many other religious traditions worldwide (Dossey, 1997).
Being in natural environments and viewing or experiencing nature can foster reconnection with the self physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Nature is the most visible manifestation of Spirit, whereby individuals interact with primal energies in the forms of earth, water, fire, and air (Ruffing, 1997; Taylor, 2002)

- **Earth**: To connect with nature and the earth, individuals can take a walk in a park, hike through the woods, garden, ride a bike, camp, or take a sailing trip. Spending time in nature helps to restore balance in one’s life and, at the same time, deepens the connection with Spirit.
- **Water**: Spending time near or in the water can contribute to feelings of well-being. Swimming in the ocean, a lake, or a river, as well as soaking in a mineral hot spring, are excellent ways to benefit from this life-enhancing energy.
- **Fire**: Exposure to fire around a campground or before a fireplace may have health benefits. To Native Americans, fire is an important part of the vision quest ritual used to connect with the Great Spirit.
- **Air**: Exposure to air is a potent force for restoring energy and for connecting with Spirit as it flows through the body. Of all of nature’s elements, air may be the purest manifestation of Spirit. Air is essential to life and health on all levels.
Helping clients experience a positive connection with nature promotes spiritual health as well as other dimensions of physical health. Approaches to using nature as a resource in providing spiritual care may include the following (Taylor, 2002):

- Providing a window view of natural surroundings
- Displaying an aquarium of beautiful fish
- Providing access to animals or an animal-assisted therapy program
- Providing flower boxes in a client’s room
- Displaying photographs, pictures, or illustrations that depict natural settings
Art

The origin of art lies in religion and spirituality. Used as a healing force, the arts have been around since the beginning of humankind, with the earliest humans using pictures, stories, dances, and chants as healing rituals. Art has been called an expression of the soul, and it is experiencing renewed interest as an important aspect of the spirit. The arts are now viewed as an integral component of holistic and spiritual care (Bailey, 1997; Rollins & Riccio, 2002).

Art can be a powerful tool in promoting healing even when cure is no longer an option. For many, healing art is a spiritual path, a transformational process, and a way of being. Many individuals find that the numerous forms of art are doors to, and expressions of, the spirit (Dossey et al., 2000; Tate & Longo, 2002; Taylor, 2002).
Art can nurture the spirit and can take the following forms (Dossey et al., 2000; Rollins & Riccio, 2002; Tate & Longo, 2002; Taylor, 2002):

- Drawing
- Painting
- Sculpting
- Cooking
- Sewing
- Designing and building
- Conducting a symphony
- Listening to or creating music
- Writing or reading literature
- Writing or reading poetry
- Puppetry
- Dancing
- Drumming
- Gardening
- Storytelling
Engaging in these activities may provide a sense of accomplishment or the opportunity to be creative, which, in itself, expresses spirituality, connects people to other cultures, or provides a means of transcendence.

Art aids in healing in various ways (Taylor, 2002):
- It releases inner images that increase self-awareness.
- It helps make sense of experiences.
- It provides the viewer of art objects with a means for accessing mental images of healing.

Artists can play an important role as part of the interdisciplinary team in providing spiritual care in the health care setting.
Storytelling

Within the United States, there is a resurgent interest in the use of storytelling for both clinical practice and research (Banks-Wallace, 1999). According to G. F. Lawlis (1995), storytelling is an “art developed during the beginnings of human history, probably to teach the wisdom of generations past, including basic mental and physical health principles” (p. 40). The art of storytelling is a human phenomenon. It is an intrinsic component of most cultures, and it is a means of preserving common characteristics of a culture and passing them to subsequent generations (Anderson, 1998; Banks-Wallace, 1999; Rice, 1999).

History, values, and cultures are often preserved through storytelling. In addition, storytelling promotes critical thinking, enhances communication, improves education, inspires creativity, strengthens collegiality and collaboration, builds self-esteem and rapport, enhances human sensitivity skills, and helps a person to understand and explain his or her unique view of the meaning of life (Anderson, 1998; Bowles, 1995; Kirkpatrick, Ford, & Castelloe, 1997; Lindesmith & McWeeny, 1994).

A story has been defined as a narrative of events arranged in a time sequence, as a way of knowing. A story unifies singular, disconnected elements of life experience into a whole, and it provides a descriptive account of human experience as told by its original storyteller (Anderson, 1998; Taylor, 1997). A story is about characters, relationships, plots, places, and events. In the health care setting, stories are embedded in everyday conversations (Anderson, 1998). Sharing stories with clients and colleagues is a natural way of connecting and communicating caring (Rice, 1999).
Storytelling is both an art and a science. However, according to Lawlis (1995), a story has four basic features that are essential to its success:

- The way the storyteller tells the story
- The relaxation skills achieved by concentrating on the story
- The imagery of an obstacle or challenge to the hero
- The participation of the listener

Storytelling nurtures the spirit and can include life reviews, reminiscence, and oral stories. Storytelling needs to be a meaningful experience for participants.
Because storytelling promotes spiritual as well as physical well-being, these guidelines for storytelling may be helpful (Lindesmith & McWeeny, 1994; Taylor, 1997):

- Create an environment that is conducive to storytelling by providing a comfortable area for the participants.
- Plan group size according to the amount of time allowed for the story so participants can share and reflect on the story and its message.
- Darken the room slightly and avoid interruptions while the story and discussions are in progress.
- Provide oral or written directions to participants.
- Invite participants to voluntarily share stories.
- Help participants to connect the story to the present context.
- Ask participants to use their best listening skills and attentiveness.
- Initiate a group discussion about the experience so participants can gain a deeper understanding of the story.
Analyzing the Story

When all stories have been shared in a group, the following questions can help the facilitator initiate a group discussion about the process of storytelling, not about the stories that were told. The following questions may help in describing the experience (Lindesmith & McWeeny, 1994; Taylor, 1997):

• What values and beliefs are revealed in the story?
• What was your storytelling experience?
• What are the applications for storytelling in your life?
• What life themes emerged in the story?
• Why did the story get told now?
Storytelling can be a valuable tool and help in planning and providing spiritual care. Storytelling can be incorporated by being aware of the following (Burkhardt & Nagai-Jacobson, 2002, p. 311):

- Recognizing that each person (including ourselves) is an ongoing, unfinished story
- Understanding our own stories and their influence on the hearing of another person’s story
- Appreciating the breadth and depth of another person’s story, even though we can know only a brief part of the story that has brought another to this particular time and place
- Recognizing connections and relationships that enhance the understanding of the story
- Developing an understanding of the theory and research on the story as related to health care
- Eliciting and listening for and to the stories of others
Rituals as a Healing Force
Achterberg et al. (1994) explain that “Healing rituals both reflect and create the values of an individual and a culture” (p. 4). During the experience of an illness, which challenges the whole being—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual—rituals help individuals to connect with the deeper resources within themselves and with family, community, Divine Spirit, strength, and wisdom.

This connection supports and contributes to the healing process (Burkhardt & Nagai-Jacobson, 2002).
In Summary
Summary

The spiritual rituals of prayer, meditation, guided imagery, gratitude, spending time in nature, and art help people connect to their inner being, to others, and to the Divine Spirit. A part of spiritual and cultural traditions, rituals help to provide awareness, meaning, intention, and purpose in life. Health care professionals and spiritual care providers can incorporate the use of spiritually healing rituals in the care of their clients and for themselves.

Key Concepts

• Rituals help people connect with their inner core, other people, nature, and everything in the world and help them to remember, honor, and change. They can involve actions, symbols, and ceremonies.
• Prayer is the most common form of spiritual ritual practiced by religious as well as nonreligious individuals throughout the world. The power of prayer and healing has now been acknowledged by modern science.
• Meditation and guided imagery have diverse applications in health care and can provide physiological, psychological, and spiritual benefits.
• The spiritual practice of gratitude may restore balance and perspective and alleviate stress, anxiety, and depression in an individual’s life.
• Spending time in nature nurtures the spirit and contributes to positive health outcomes.
• Art as a healing force is an important aspect of the spirit and is an expression of the soul.
• Storytelling nurtures the spirit, promotes critical thinking, enhances communication, and helps an individual to understand and explain meaning in life.
Questions for Reflection

• Take a few minutes to think about the rituals or spiritual practices you use in your own life. In what ways do they help you connect with your spirituality or support your spiritual health?

• Everyone has unique gifts and abilities that can be utilized in developing spiritual practices and rituals. Some people are natural storytellers, while others have artistic or musical ability. What gifts, talents, or abilities could you utilize to help your clients with their spiritual practices or healing rituals?