



The Spirit of Caring:

**A Volunteer
Education Resource**

Module 9 Prayer, Meditation and Rituals

**Developed by:
Provincial Spiritual Health Care Management Network**

Module 2 – Session Guide

Prayer, Meditation and Rituals

Facilitators Overview/Outline

TIME	ACTIVITY	RESOURCE	COMMENT
	http://www.professionalchaplains.org/uploadedfiles/pdf/learning-cultural-sensitivity.pdf This would be a good document to download and use in preparation for this module		
15 min	Reflection exercise		Have participants reflect on a time in their own life when prayer, meditation or the practice of some ritual was exceptionally meaningful. WHY?
5 min	Review objectives	Page 2	
10 min	Pray or Prey – a word of caution	Page 2-3	Many tend to use a prayer as a band-aide to gloss over spiritual issues or to end conversation about spiritual issues.
30 min	Exploring Prayer Meditation and Rituals	Pages 3-6	
BREAK			
15 min	Focus on Prayer – go to the website in the comment column where examples of prayers from a wide variety of traditions are provided	Pages 6-8	http://www.worldprayers.org/index.html
15 min	Focus on Meditation – ask members of the group who practice meditation to share their experience	Pages 8-13	Note that meditation is not exclusively an Eastern practice but has deep roots in the Jewish and Christian traditions as well
15 min	Focus on Ritual – after defining “rituals” list on a white board or the rituals that the participants find life giving	Pages 13-17	
10 min	Conclusion		

Module 9: Using Prayer, Meditation and Rituals in Spiritual Health Care

Karen Toole, Lindsay Drabiuk, Larry Hirst

Objectives:

1. To help volunteers understand the central role that prayer, meditation and rituals play in human spirituality.
2. To explore some of the primary spiritual practices and some that are less common.
3. To understand that these practices used indiscriminately can harm, but when used with wisdom can be healing and lead those we care for into

Introduction

"Prayer, ritual, meditation, and music have the power to heal, and yet we don't use them seriously and widely in medical practice because they lie outside the paradigm, the myth, and the accepted story of modern medicine."¹

Spiritual Health Care practitioners and volunteers will at times use prayer, meditation and spiritual rituals as therapeutic tools to help people move towards spiritual well-being and wholeness. There is much evidence to support the efficacy of these practices when used appropriately with those who are suffering.

Barbara Leonard, Ph.D. and David Carlson, M.Div. assert in a presentation titled ***Spiritual Rituals***: "Prayer, meditation, and rituals are spiritual practices that express belief. They can play an important role in emotional and spiritual wellness. ... Prayer, meditation, and rituals may be learned through specific religious traditions, or they may be created by smaller social groups, such as families. They may also be private and personal. Prayer, meditation, and rituals address basic human needs for reflection and connection. They give structure, continuity, and meaning to life."²

A cautionary word on prayer - TO PRAY AND TO PREY – Karen Toole

"Prayer is talking to yourself."

"Prayer is manipulating people with God talk."

"Prayer is what we do when we don't know what to do next."

"Prayer is for children."

"Prayer is the real opiate of the people."

Many people make many comments about prayer meaning or lack of meaning. It's not accidental that pray and prey are pronounced the same way. Prayer can become a

¹ Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul in Medicine: Healing Guidance for Patients, Families, and the People Who Care for Them*. New York: Hay House, Inc., 2010, p. xxi.

² <http://www.caringtotheend.ca/body.php?id=436>

means of control and a tool of abuse in relation to seconding the power of God to suit our exclusive definitions and descriptions of God's will.

Years ago one writer described prayer as "the soul's sincere desires unuttered or expressed." Definitions and dismals, affirmations and injunctions relating to prayer will abound. At its core prayer is a form of communication person to person, in community with a sense of the sacred. It can be carried out in word, in thought, in touch. It is a human means of touching that which is held to be holy, and in this sense prayer has been and will be one the healing therapies of spiritual health care. Any provider of spiritual health care must acquaint and inform themselves with prayer traditions, understandings, and practices. It is vital to appreciate the limitations, abuses and misuse of prayer, and it vital to appreciate the energy, effectiveness, use and power of prayer in peoples' lives.

A care provider must examine their own attitudes in relation to prayer, and come to their own comfort level with the practice. In this sense it is vital that he care giver equip themselves with some ability to both discern and respect prayer as a pathway to healing.

A person examination of what prayer means for oneself is vital in this regard. Prayer practiced unauthentically, without this self-examination, is not prayer, but a performance that can be seen as false.

How do prayer, meditation, and rituals help?

In the afore mentioned presentation Leonard and Carlson write, "Whether a person has long-standing spiritual beliefs or is exploring spiritual issues for the first time, spiritual practices like prayer, meditation, and rituals can help one cope with declining health and end of life in many ways. They can allow a person to:

- express pain, grief, anger, isolation, and need;
- relieve pain, fear, sadness, and guilt;
- find comfort and consolation;
- commune with your soul;
- connect with others;
- experience mystery, power, and divine presence in the universe;
- celebrate achievements;
- mark changes;
- mourn losses;
- connect with your past;
- find inner strength;
- draw on the strength of others;
- create order in chaos;
- find acceptance and peace".³

³ <http://www.caringtotheend.ca/body.php?id=437>

How might a person explore the use of these spiritual practices?

“At all times of life, people may engage in a variety of spiritual practices. They may practice alone, with family, or with a larger religious community. They may practice regularly or at particular stages of life. These are some traditional and non-traditional spiritual practices are:

Praying

Whether you pray alone or with others, prayer connects you with your beliefs, your past, and God or the universe. If you pray with your family, prayer can help them connect with you.

Meditating

Whether you think about God, the universe, or philosophy, meditation can bring calm and focus in the most difficult times.

Reading

Whether you look to sacred or secular texts, reading can help you explore ancient questions about the meaning of life as you draw on the wisdom of others. Sacred texts of are often used such as the Bible, Talmud, Koran, Bagavad Gita, and Tibetan Book of the Dead, or classics by Plato and Marcus Aurelius. Other readings such a poetry, wisdom literature or meditative writings are also used.

Writing

Keep a journal of your memories, thoughts, and feelings. Writing can help you discover yourself and your spirit.”⁴

Spiritual Rituals

“Rituals 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.⁵

⁴ <http://www.caringtotheend.ca/body.php?id=438>

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).⁶

Creating Rituals⁷

“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

⁵ <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf>, page 4

⁶ <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf>, page 5

⁷ <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf>, pages 6-7

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

Adapted from Catherine Owens Duncan, MAT, Spiritual Director (Spiritual Rituals, Leonard and Carlson pages 9-30 – Prayer Module)

“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).”⁸

Questions for Reflection:

1. What does the word “prayer” mean to you?
2. What are some of the different kinds of prayer that you find healing?

What Is Prayer?⁹

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

⁸ <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf> , page 10

⁹ <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf> , page 12-16

(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.

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 and the Health Care Provider¹⁰

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

¹⁰ <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf> , page 29

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.

Meditation

Adapted from "Mindfulness Meditation" by Karen Toole and *Spiritual Rituals*, Leonard and Carlson pages 32-56 – Meditation Module by Mary Jo Kreitzer, PhD, RN

Meditation can bring calm and focus in the most difficult times. "Mindfulness meditation is also known as insight because the intention is to gain insight as to the true nature of reality. While concentration involves the practitioner focusing their attention on a single object, in mindfulness meditation practice, every aspect of experience is welcomed and appreciated.

With concentration practice, we give the attention a target that keeps us anchored in the present moment. The target can be a physical object, or more commonly, the breath. We give the mind something consistent to focus on and this becomes the object of the meditation."¹¹

What is Mindfulness meditation? – Karen Toole

It is the opposite of mindlessness. We live in two worlds; the outer world of tasks, responsibility, information, reaction; the inner world of experiencing our own being. This is the experience of what lies behind the thousand and one thoughts and emotions that usually clutter up life.

- *Mindfulness is not a brain exercise of concentration, memory or intellectual capacity. It is the act of focusing on being in the moment of the now.*

¹¹ <http://www.4mindfulnessmeditation.com/>

- *When we are in the outer world we are constantly preoccupied with outcome, but in mindfulness meditation we are simply open to increasing awareness.*
- *The world of medicine has embraced mindfulness as a practice of being fully present. Mindfulness is not paying more attention but paying attention differently and more wisely---with the whole mind and heart, using the full resources of the body and its senses.*
- *We cope with life by operating in the doing mode on automatic pilot. Mindfulness invites us to bring awareness into our routine activities. This will bring a fresh quality of perception and wholeness to the most mundane activities.*
- *Even a small practice of mindfulness brought to a single moment can break the chain of events that lead to persistent stress and disillusionment.*

What Is Mindfulness? – Karen Toole

- *Mindfulness is the intentional cultivation of the awareness of present reality.*
- *Mindfulness is experiential and focuses directly on the present moment experience.*
- *Mindfulness is non-judgmental. It allows us to see things as they are in the present moment and to allow them to be as they are.*
- *Mindfulness is not paying more attention but paying attention differently and more wisely, with the whole mind and heart, using the full resources of the body and its senses.*

Practicing mindfulness is more than just noticing things around us that we had not noticed before. It is learning to become aware of the particular mode of mind that gets us stuck when misapplied to ourselves and our emotional life. With an increasing ability to sustain mindfulness, we can explore what happens when our emotions are allowed to come and go in awareness with a non-judgmental attitude and self-compassion.

Why Practice Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a way of shifting from doing to being so that we are able to take in all that an experience offers us before we act.

- *Being mindful means that we suspend judgment for a time, set aside our immediate goals for the future, and take in the present moment as it is rather than as we would like it to be.*
- *Being mindfulness means we intentionally turn off the autopilot mode in which we operate much of the time. We no longer brood about the past, or worry about the future. We know our thoughts are passing mental events, not the fullness of reality itself.*
- *Being mindful means, we become more in touch with life as it is when we allow ourselves to experience things through the body and senses rather than largely through our unexamined and habitual thoughts.*
- *Being mindful opens to us the vividness of an experience as it unfolds.*

How to Practice Mindfulness:

To pay attention to the here and now we need intention, not force. Bring awareness to routine activities. It is the act of being, here, now.

- 1. Sit comfortably, with both feet on the floor.*
- 2. Get in touch with your breath. Do not control it. Let your body breath by itself. As best you can practice an attitude of allowing. Nothing needs to be fixed. Surrender to the experience without requiring it to be different.*
- 3. Let your mind wander away. Do not force it back. Gently return to your breathing, the in-breath and the out-breath.*
- 4. As best you can bring a quality of kindness, acceptance and compassion to your awareness. See the wanderings as opportunities for patience.*
- 5. Continue with the practice ten minutes or longer. Remind yourself from time to time that the intention is simply to be aware of your experience moment by moment. Let your breath anchor you to gently reconnect with the here and now.*

.....

In many ways, many of us practice mindfulness without being aware of it as a conscious practice.

How many of us “count to ten” before we act?

How many of us have a voice that says “slow down...think about this?”

How many of us tell ourselves to “just breathe”?

All of these methods of centering ourselves are doorways into the practice of mindfulness.

Why would we bother to do this at all?

Again in the common sense of life, we have all at some stage learned that it pays to “stop...look and listen” before we cross the street. It connects to proverb, “Look before you leap”. In life we are always “crossing streets” (making decisions, choosing our words, wondering about our actions, being in relationship with others). Mindfulness enables us to be aware of why we do, what we do. Mindfulness affirms that we can BE before we DO anything, and that when we take this time our doing will be less scattered, more intentional, less stressful, more grounded, less confusing, more meaningful, less distracted and more focused.

Meditation, Visualization, and Guided Imagery¹²

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 meditation 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 in Meditation¹³

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).

¹² <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf> , page 52

¹³ <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf> , page 53

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 Sound¹⁴

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 Visualization¹⁵

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.

¹⁴ <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf> , page 54

¹⁵ <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf> , page 55

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 Rituals¹⁶

Adapted from *Spiritual Rituals*, Leonard and Carlson pages 5832-56 – Meditation Module by Mary Jo Kreitzer, PhD, RN

Guided Imagery¹⁷

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.

Gratitude¹⁸

The spiritual practice of gratitude is a powerful force and can be a state of mind as well 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:

¹⁶ <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf> , page 58-70

¹⁷ <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf> , 58

¹⁸ <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf> , 59

“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 Nature¹⁹

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)

¹⁹ <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf> , page 60-62

- **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

Art²⁰

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).

²⁰ <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf> , page 63-65

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

Story Telling²¹

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.

²¹ <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf> , page 66-70

- 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.

Rituals as a Healing Force²²

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).

Conclusion

Prayer, meditation and spiritual rituals; whether they be rituals developed by a religious tradition, or rituals developed by the individual or group; are important because these provide structure and a means to find meaning in the face of life’s uncertainties and struggles.

Prayer, meditation and spiritual rituals provide tangible, mechanisms that enable the individual to connect with their deepest beliefs. In every culture, these practices have demonstrated their healing power a power to move a person from stress and distress to peace in face of the uncertainties of life’s storms.

Used well, used sensitively, used appropriately, these practices can be powerful tools in the hands of spiritual care providers as we journey with others through the stress inducing realities of life.

²² <http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf> , page 72

Resources

<http://www.touroinstitute.com/2%20Spiritual%20Rituals.pdf> - Spiritual Rituals by Barbara Leonard, Ph.D. and David Carlson, M.Div.

<http://www.professionalchaplains.org/uploadedfiles/pdf/learning-cultural-sensitivity.pdf> - Learning Module: Cultural and Spiritual Sensitivity - *A Quick Guide to Cultures and Spiritual Traditions* – *this is a manual that provides a fast reference to many of the beliefs and rituals of many of the religious traditions around the world.*

<http://www.worldprayers.org/index.html> - this site provides examples of prayers from 18 different world religious traditions.

- [African Traditional](#)
- [Asatru](#)
- [Baha'i Faith](#)
- [Buddhism](#)
- [Celtic](#)
- [Children](#)
- [Christianity](#)
- [Confucianism](#)
- [Gaian](#)
- [Hinduism](#)
- [Islam](#)
- [Jainism](#)
- [Judaism](#)
- [Native American](#)
- [Sikhism](#)
- [Sufism](#)
- [Taoism](#)
- [Zoroastrian](#)

<http://ri.bne.catholic.edu.au/ree/RE/CLT/spiritualityandritual/Documents/Core%20Content%20Area%20new%20style%202.pdf> – an interesting site that provides a tutorial style learning experience related to prayer, meditation and rituals. Although it is written by a Catholic writer, it also refers to the prayers, mediation and rituals of other major world religions.

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/tib/ritual.htm> - An informative article titled “The Culture of Ritual and the Quest for Enlightenment by David Frawley, originally published in *The Quest* magazine, Summer 1994 issue.