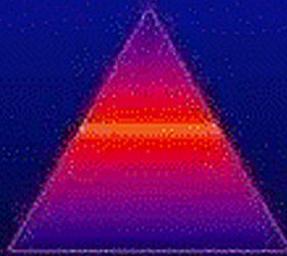

The Quest

Maximizing Health and Wellness
Through
Spiritual Healing



Raphael Ferraro

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First Printing, May 2000**

Dedicated to
Jane Barnfather MacPherson
whose determination
and courage have been
a source of strength and
inspiration to all
who knew her and loved her

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Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that life is sustained and nurtured by a *life force*. Whether this *life force* is called an energy, power, or substance does not matter as much as our particular relationship does to this all omnipotent power. It has been recorded that when our relationship to this force is weak—resulting in an insufficient energy flow between us and it—sickness or poor health occurs; while when the energy flow is strong, health and wellness abound.

In life, one important task an individual can accomplish is to promote health and wellness so that full potential may be achieved. This may be accomplished through a variety of methods and techniques, all of which aim to increase the *life force* to flow freely and abundantly, so that its healing effects can be realized.

The goal of *The Quest: Maximizing Health and Wellness Through Spiritual Healing* is to provide the tools to obtain and utilize a spiritual energy for the benefit of ourselves and others. Spiritual healing—a creative and benevolent energy working through us to heal both the body and mind—is not restrictive; it complements other forms of healing attained through medicine, science, and therapy. In attaining to achieve wellness, spiritual healing deepens the experiences of joy and contentment.

In this country and abroad, various movements in the religious and medical community reflect a continued growing interest in the role of spirituality on the healing process. As early as 1954, the Academy of Religion and Mental Health was established in the United States to further communication between the religious professions and healing. The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) was first established as the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. Among other topics, its research included the effect of prayer on healing. In 1960, the British Ministry of Health allowed certified healers to practice alongside medical doctors in England's hospitals. Besides adhering to a medical code of ethics, these healers were also required to work closely with clergy, hospital personnel, and physicians.

The 1960s, 70s, and 80s brought a surge of knowledge in spiritual healing in the United States. Reverend David Wilkerson, an influential preacher and author of more than 40 books including *The Cross and the Switchblade* (1963)—the bestselling book about his ministry work in New York City—believed in the importance of a spiritual presence in life and especially in healing. As a young pastor in Pennsylvania, Wilkerson learned about the trial of several teenagers accused of murder and was called to travel to New York, where he first

established Teen Challenge (now Adult & Teen Challenge USA), a spiritual-based program of holistic recovery from addiction. Prior studies show that seventy-five percent of the addicts he treated through prayer were cured of their addictions. *The Cross and the Switchblade* was made into a movie in 1970. Today, more than 200 locations throughout America provide residential programs that advocate the importance of “faith, community, and health.”

In his book, *Healing* (1974), Francis Macnutt—co-founder with his wife of Christian Healing Ministries—states that about half of those his group prayed for with physical illnesses were either healed or showed improvement, while the success rate for those with emotional problems was seventy-five percent. In 1975, the Association of Christian Therapists (ACT) was established, with a “holistic approach to integrating Christian healing practices with applied healthcare.”

Dr. Herbert Benson, “a pioneer in Mind Body Medicine,” founder of the Benson-Henry Institute, and Professor of Mind Body Medicine at Harvard Medical School, wrote *Beyond the Relaxation Response* (1985) introducing the term “Faith Factor,” a concept that can relieve many human ailments. Another of Dr. Benson’s books, *Timeless Healing* (1997), is filled with data and observations on the physical and mental effects of healing resulting from religion and spirituality. Noted physician, and past Executive Editor of *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, Dr. Larry Dossey is the author of numerous publications including *Recovering the Soul* (1989) and the bestselling *Healing Words* (1993) that provides multiple studies on the power of prayer in practicing medicine.

These twentieth-century religious leaders and physicians opened the doors for the healers of today, as spiritual healing continues to gain wider acceptance and credibility as a technique for healing. More than three-quarters of the nation’s medical schools now offer courses in spirituality. In earlier research, a study of American doctors conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago indicated that 81 percent of the doctors believed that “better clinical outcomes can result directly from a patient’s spirituality.” Informative seminars and workshops dealing with the role of spirituality in healing are increasingly offered nationwide.

Readers are invited to participate in a series of exercises aimed at spiritual growth, emphasizing in particular the means through which health and wellness can be achieved. Activities are presented in a sequential order to first remove unnecessary and detrimental thoughts and then to strengthen and aid the body and mind in developing new ways of thinking and acting. The methods presented also provide approaches to understanding the drawbacks that may obstruct and distract them from seeking and obtaining knowledge and experience from spirituality.

The Quest

Most of us journey through life filled with duties and responsibilities, desiring and sometimes seeking to develop a more meaningful path. We wish to realize our potential—expand our minds, reform our characters, stimulate our psyches—either through our own improvised methods, through other available sources, or by attending one of the many programs structured for self-improvement: yoga, meditation, and biofeedback, among others. This thrust to transform ourselves into more than we are has always motivated humans. In reality, this quest is the deeper Self, summoning us to comprehend our true nature, an invitation we seldom accept because of our involvement in everyday activity with its multitude of tasks, deeds, and deadlines. In our hectic pace, we become distracted by the constant demands of our jobs, families, and society. All too soon, we discover our minds have closed and our hearts have hardened to the beckoning of the spirit and the vibrations of other dimensions.

The drive to improve our lives is the inkling of a basic need to recognize our nature and fulfill our destinies. Even the thought to seek a better life is an achievement, and the start to that goal. It does not matter whether the calling is branded as “the forces of nature,” “a change in consciousness,” “the path for improvement,” or “seeking excellence” However expressed, this yearning to fulfill our potential is the soul’s need to unite itself with the power of the universe, the source from which all life springs and the source from which all life receives sustenance.



This power or force which we seek infuses all creation. Life and energy flow from it. It is above us, below us, around us, and within us. All embracing, this energy is present in a grain of sand, a blade of grass, a raindrop, or a rainbow. It is the driving force of the life-flowing through trees, flowers, and plants; it is the touch of the gentle wind that sustains the tiny wren in flight; it is the cosmic energy that rolls the countless planets and lights the myriad stars in the immense galaxies of the cosmos.

In ancient times, we find references to those who have studied and made use of this “universal energy,” men and women who knew the potent prayers and the required gestures to activate and utilize this power to bring about a healing of body, mind, and spirit. For instance, the early history of Hawaii recognizes Hawaiian medicine men called Kahunas who healed through the utilization of a life force they called *mana*. It was believed that health exists when *mana* is adequate, while illness results when it is insufficient. Trained to detect deficient or imbalanced *mana*, the Kahunas knew the techniques to strengthen energy in themselves and the methods to transmit it to others. In the literature of the Kahunas, *mana* is described as a stream of white luminous light capable of performing miraculous deeds, including healing.

Hindu philosophy recognizes *prana* as the life-giving substance in the universe, permeating all matter from atoms to stars. This energy is circulated and stored in the body through specific breathing techniques which activate a dormant inner force called *Kundalini*. With the completion of this process, the individual perceives a sublime vision of light and experiences a oneness with the life-giving force of the universe.

Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese system of natural healing based on the existence of a universal energy which constantly circulates in specific cycles within channels of the body called meridians. This vital energy is called *chi*; and, it is believed, a *chi* imbalance in the system is the cause of illness. Used in a specific and prescribed manner, short and long needles are positioned at particular locations in the body to equalize and harmonize the blocked flow of energy within the patient.

Throughout the ages, this widely acknowledged force or energy capable of influencing the well-being of all life forms has intrigued researchers who have sought both to substantiate its existence as well as to name it. The ancient Greeks called it “pneuma” (breath of life), and Hippocrates believed in nature as a healing power. In the early sixteenth century, the Swiss chemist and physician Paracelsus’s experiments led him to believe in harmony between the body and its environment, and claimed a universal essence called “archaeus.” Later in the 1500s, Jan Baprista van Helmont, a Flemish physician, wrote about a “universal fluid” uniting all phenomena and bonding all matter. In the seventeenth century, English physician Robert Fludd described the existence of a “supercelestial

force” inherent in all nature; and in the mid 1800s, German chemist Karl von Reichenback devoted more than thirty years experimenting to uncover the secrets of a universal power he termed “od” or “odic force.”



Twentieth-century researchers have sought to examine the healing properties of this universal force widely acknowledged in the writings of physicians and scientists of earlier times. Worldwide, research has showed that energy associated with life and change can be detected and observed; and studies substantiate the existence of an invisible but powerful field of energy about each of us, capable of being utilized and directed for healing.

In the 1970s, the New Age movement formed on the foundation of nature, theology, and philosophy. Combined, these concepts shaped these beliefs and practices into a doctrine of thought focused on the connection of humanity and nature, charting the energy field surrounding humans.

It has been recorded that the energy within us, about us, and around us is a manifestation of spiritual power. It has been observed that the stronger our belief in this power, the more eagerly it strives to assert itself in our lives; and the more we recognize our oneness to it, the more open we become as channels of its beneficial workings. Those who have written about the nature of this energy also relate that our mental and physical states either activate or hinder this energy from performing its miraculous deeds. In every age and culture, there have been individuals who have experienced this energy.

Consider the comments of some well-known healers—of earlier times—concerning their understanding of this marvelous power. Agnes Sanford’s classic *The Healing Light* (1947) acquainted many to the art of healing. “In spiritual

healing," she writes, "one asks for God's energy, believing God will turn the energy on when needed and off when not needed." Sanford believes this energy or power is transmitted from a spiritual source to a physical target, namely the person who is in need of spiritual refurbishment.



Olga Worrall, co-author with her husband, Ambrose, of *The Gift of Healing: A Personal Story of Spiritual Therapy* (1965), practiced the healing ministry for more than 35 years. Willing to share her knowledge with others, Worrall lectured and demonstrated her gift for healing before various medical and scientific groups. To become a clear channel for God's power, Worrall prepared herself through prayer and visualization. Believing herself in the presence of the Divine, she first sensed this power working within her before visualizing spiritual energy flowing out from her hands and into the afflicted person.

Francis McNutt—who passed away earlier this year—was the author of numerous books, including *Healing* (1974), and shared his gift for healing both in this country and abroad. McNutt characterized the healing power as a gentle current, a warm heat, a sensation of electricity; an energy transmitted from one person to another through touch. "Whether one is healed," he wrote, "depends not only on the healer's faith but also on how much energy the healer channels into the healee." Some who received this energy were overwhelmed, falling to the floor as if asleep, "resting in the spirit" from a few minutes, up to six hours.

Starting in the 1970s and for almost 40 years, Reverend Ralph DiOrio was a well-known Catholic priest blessed with the gift of healing. During a healing service,

Reverend DiOrio first senses a warmth in his hands and then throughout his body. Alive with energy, Reverend DiOrio finds that the Spirit leads him to those who are to be healed. In the healing process, energy similar to an electric current passes from his body and then through his fingers into the person seeking to be healed. The well-known priest is emphatic—God is the source of his healing power, not himself. He is simply an instrument God uses to alleviate the pain and suffering of those in need.

These healers and others assure us that we can achieve health and wellness in ourselves and others through the activation of an immense energy inherent in each of us. Further, they emphasize that possessing spiritual faith, trust, and confidence will help us to gain access toward others. In seeking this beneficial power, we can profit from the words of those who have pursued this same grand adventure. To this end, references to relevant sources have been provided. From this information, readers can utilize various methods and techniques to expand consciousness, sharpen the intellect, and through trial and experimentation discover their own unique paths to realizing spiritual healing power.

On this inward journey, we can also learn much from an experienced mentor. If you desire such direction, seek a person knowledgeable of human nature and the ways of the spirit. A mentor can help avoid error and discouragement. Ultimately, our individual efforts and the grace of divinity working in our lives will determine our path of success in this most challenging and rewarding adventure, allowing us to heal and transform ourselves and others.



Tools for the Quest

Our quest for healing power can, on occasion, consume much of our time and strength, and may result in mental and physical fatigue. The demands of our search can sometimes cause stress, which obstructs the flow of energy and may hamper our ability to act quickly and effectively, preventing us from performing with any degree of success. Stress is unavoidable, but at times it is beneficial in challenging us to bring forth the best within us. So that we are not overcome by the sometimes overwhelming effects in seeing spiritual power, it is worthwhile to have some tools available for dealing with excessive stress.

Attitudes, Thoughts and Ideas

Negative attitudes, thoughts, and ideas can lead us far astray from the spiritual path. Our minds are the spectacles through which we view life. If our thoughts are selfish and materialistic, then our perceptions will hinder the development of our spiritual selves. Our thoughts will assist us or hinder us, keep us slaves to the ego, or help to set us free. The thoughts of those who seek inner growth should be selfless, sharing their lives, talents, and possessions with the needy, the hungry, and the poor. They should also revere all life, not only human life; they should recognize and respect the sacredness of the Earth and the universe of which it is a part; and, they should realize that whatever good we do for nature opens our hearts and minds wider to a healthy and respectable power.

Those on the quest for healing power must discipline themselves to pray, meditate, and focus on the energy growing within them each day. We must examine whether what we think, say, and do is for our good and for the good of others. We must reach out to the less fortunate, and oppose violence, hate, and prejudice; and be able to determine what is genuine in the riches of this world. To actualize these spiritual ways of thinking is difficult and may sometimes cause individuals to experience anxiety.

After we have identified undesirable attitudes, thoughts, and ideas, we must then alter them into constructive spiritual thought patterns. Through this process we attempt to correct detrimental thinking whenever it occurs. When thoughts which detract us from a spiritual goal persist, through prayer and affirmation, we must ask for assistance. Focusing our thinking on spiritual matters will not only improve the quality of our lives, it will also allow us to become more productive and more energetic.

Change

Change causes stress because it requires either slight or major adjustments to our environment and our everyday behavior. Any change calls for mental and physical adaptation; too many changes within a short time lead to a number of adjustment difficulties. An accurate instrument for predicting illnesses from change is the Social Readjustment Rating Scale of Dr. Thomas Holmes and Dr. Richard Rahe. This scale assigns numerical values to events we all experience. The most stressful is the death of a spouse (the highest numerical value) and the least stressful is a minor violation of the law (the lowest numerical value). The scale lists forty-two different life changes, both positive—marriage, job promotion, taking a vacation—as well as negative: job loss, illness, problems with in-laws. Whether or not we consult the events on the Holmes and Rahe Scale with their equivalent numerical values, we must always remember that any change requires a degree of adaptation, and the more severe the change the greater the demands required of us.



Suggestions for Dealing with Change

First, when possible, anticipate life changes. Also, whenever possible, pace yourself so that you need not cope with too many changes in a short time, remembering the more change in your life – whether positive or negative – the more stress you will experience and the greater the chances for illness. When dealing with unanticipated change, numerous changes, or severe change, practice stress-management techniques such as relaxation, meditation, proper nutrition, and adequate exercise. When necessary, consult a counselor or become part of a support group.

Relaxation

Many systems and techniques exist to diminish stress and increase relaxation. To some extent, all are beneficial and readers are invited to explore them further. Some of the more effective systems for relieving bodily tensions and promoting deep relaxation are Autogenic Training, Progressive Relaxation, and Tai Chi.

Autogenic Training was formulated by Johannes H. Schultz a German psychiatrist. This program combines suggestion with designated exercises to bring about deep relaxation. Through Schultz's prescribed activities, the body learns to respond to specific verbal cues aimed at achieving physical sensations such as rhythmic breathing, a regular and calm heartbeat, and a pleasant heaviness throughout the limbs. To be effective, Autogenic Training should be practiced three times a day, before and after lunch, and prior to sleep.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a widely used method of decreasing bodily tension by contracting and relaxing various muscle groups starting with the large muscles. In the early 1900s, Dr. Edmund Jacobson, a physiologist and physician, believed many illnesses were related to tension and advocated muscle relaxation as a remedy. His agenda of exercise begins by first tensing and seconds later relaxing, one at a time, the arms, legs, trunk, and then the neck, mouth, and finally the eyes. These exercises practiced fifteen minutes twice a day allow individuals to experience the body's rigidity in responding to stress and the means to release this tension to bring about a more harmonious balance of energy.

Tai Chi is another effective system for relaxing. This Chinese exercise system emphasizes slow, calm, and balance movements for relieving tension, developing strength, and increasing the flow of energy throughout the body. Tai Chi's movements are effortless and rhythmical, accentuating slow breathing and

balanced posture. In addition to fostering relaxation, these various body and mind-harmonizing activities also increase health and tranquility. Experts recommend practicing Tai Chi for twenty to twenty-five minutes twice a day.

Relaxation Exercises

Seated, breathe deeply, relaxing the various parts of the head—forehead, eyes, cheeks, jaws, and neck. Let your jaw hang loose with the upper teeth not touching the lower. With your fingertips—in circular motion—massage the cheekbones, the side of the ears, the chin, and the forehead. Feeling these parts of your face free from tension, rotate your neck in small circles and then in larger circles. Do this three times, and then shut your eyelids. When they are closed, do not press them together, but let them touch lightly. See a black screen in your mind. Feel your eyes rolling back into your head down as deep as they will fall. Imagine your head as light as a balloon. Open your eyes, breathe deeply, and enjoy the comfort you feel.

Lie motionless on your back with your arms by your sides, the palms up and the legs slightly extended. With the eyes closed, breathe gently inhaling through the nostrils and exhaling through the mouth. Do this three or four times. Once you are comfortable, inhale and tighten the muscles of the feet. Hold the tension to the count of three. Now exhale and release the muscle tension. Sense how relaxed the feet feel.

Repeating this procedure, concentrate your attention on the legs, hands, arms, trunk, face, and finally on the entire body.

Meditation

An excellent tool for relieving stress is meditation. Research indicates that this process offers a number of specific bodily benefits. Some of the better known physical advantages of meditation are slow heart beat, lower blood pressure, less muscle tension, and a decrease in the production of stress hormone.

Psychological studies indicate that individuals who meditate achieve various mental benefits as well. In *Meditative Techniques in Psychotherapy*, Wolfgang Kretschmer summarizes the specific meditative exercises psychiatrists and psychotherapists use to help their patients achieve richer, more meaningful, and more creative lives. Lawrence LaShan's *How to Meditate* lists the two major psychological effects of consistent meditation: a greater efficiency and enthusiasm in everyday life and the attainment of another way of perceiving and

relating to reality. The fields of psychology and psychiatry abound with positive data substantiating the positive results of meditation.

Meditation relaxes the body and mind while refurbishing our physical and mental strength. Many definitions exist for meditation as well as techniques for practicing it. A useful definition calls meditation simply the focusing of attention on a symbol, a sound, a chant, an object, or even the breathing process itself. The basics of meditation can be learned without a teacher, its fundamentals easily achieved without paying large fees or taking extended courses; but what is of utmost importance for success in meditation is daily practice.



Breathing—a basic element of the meditation process—plays a vital role in meditation as it does in the maintenance of a healthy mind and body. Deep, slow breathing drops the heartbeat five to ten beats below normal, thus relaxing the heart and enriching the blood with oxygen. This helps remove toxins, mucus, and other impurities from the body. These exercises should be done with as little strain as possible. The breath should never be held beyond the point of discomfort. Not only will breathing slowly and rhythmically improve our health, it will also increase our energy levels as well.

Breathing Exercise

To achieve the maximum results from breathing, find a comfortable position, relax the body, and clear the mind.

With the body relaxed and in a sitting position, practice breathing. Slowly take a deep breath through your nostrils. Hold the air without strain and then exhale slowly and evenly through the mouth, concentrating on the smooth flow of air. Timing is important.

One recognized technique for effective breathing is the 1-4-2 ratio. This simply means you take twice as long to exhale as to inhale, retaining your breath four times as long as it takes to inhale or twice the time it takes to exhale. Using this formula, take two seconds to inhale, hold the breath for eight seconds, and then exhale in four seconds. Do this three times. Each time you inhale, think of the air spreading relaxation through every fiber of your body. Each time you exhale, think of the air expelling tiredness and tension.

Selected memory, imagination, and motive often hold us captive to false beliefs. Dealing with these obstacles through a proper mental discipline allows us to break through the pretense and seek the inner workings of the spirit. The mind has often been compared to an untrained horse, a restless wind, a tumultuous sea. Our task is to free ourselves from diffusive, discursive, and disturbing thoughts. Training in meditation will help us to achieve detachment from cumbersome thoughts that block spiritual progress.

Emptying the mind allows us to no longer be disturbed by thoughts, images, and feelings, particularly those which drain our energy and keep us from pursuing our spiritual goal. In time, and with practice, suspension of mental activity will foster a stillness of mind, a serenity through which spiritual healing power will be accessible.

Meditation is a catalyst of the spirit, providing an environment for healing power to assert itself. It is a "psychic gateway" to a higher level of energy. The constant practice of meditation allows us to peer deeper into the subliminal realm of our lives, a place of darkness where a tiny flame of spirituality burns, waiting to be fanned by our love and effort. Meditation can ignite this flame.

Meditation Exercise

Though it requires much discipline and practice to become proficient in the more difficult aspects of meditation, the following simple beginning exercise will familiarize readers with a basic procedure for quieting the mind and building healing power.

Sit comfortably breathing slowly and evenly, practicing the 1-4-2 ratio. Think of nothing in particular. Do not identify with what you see or be drawn into the hopes, fears, and desires that come to your mind either through images or feelings. Practice detachment. Let the pictures in your mind flow gently out of view.

When the mental activity ceases, you will experience a comforting silence. As you continue breathing, vividly imagine the energy and power of the universe as white light entering into your bloodstream and spreading throughout your system with each breath you take. Feel this powerful energy permeating every extremity of your body, flowing through every organ. Soon you will feel a pleasant sensation of warmth, symptomatic of the stirrings of the spirit within you.

Nutrition

We must augment our mental and physical well-being by guarding the body's strength through healthy eating habits. Poor nutrition weakens our bodies, leaving us unable to cope with the tensions and demands of everyday life. An abundance of nutritional information is available through wider reading and research, as is information on specific types of food plans. However, a general knowledge of nutrition is important for improving and increasing energy levels through the food we eat.

In following these suggestions, seek professional advice before making any changes in eating habits, especially in respect to fasting and supplementation. Individuals considering a new nutritional plan should consult with a nutritionist.

Many people may claim their daily food intake is from the basic five food groups, but research indicates the opposite. According to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, "About three-fourths of the population has an eating pattern that is low in vegetables, fruits, dairy, and oils;" and "most Americans exceed the recommendations for added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium." Is it any wonder that large numbers of Americans suffer from diseases association with excessive intakes of these substances!



What we eat, how we eat, and when we eat all influence our energy level. Fresh unprocessed foods provide more nourishment than processed foods and are preferred to foods with preservatives and artificial ingredients. Foods associated with high energy levels and good health are vegetables and fruits, especially when consumed raw. Lean meat, seafood, beans, nuts, eggs, milk, yogurt, and cheese are excellent sources of protein. Greasy and fried foods should be avoided, while drinks containing caffeine such as coffee, tea, and soft drinks may stimulate the nervous system and—depending on tolerance—should be taken sparingly, if at all. The same restriction applies to alcoholic drinks that may act as depressants.

Fiber and roughage are most important, and chewing food thoroughly is helpful in digestion. Keeping our bodies cleansed of impurities and toxins will help reduce the amount of time waste materials remain in the intestinal system. As we grow older, we should eat less and lighter foods, for in later years proper elimination is most important since it takes longer for bodily waste products to leave the system. Many degenerative diseases are related to intestinal stasis; eating fruits, vegetables, and whole grains will help prevent this unhealthy physical condition.

Our state of mind while eating also influences digestion and assimilation. It helps to be cheerful and positive and to avoid criticism, ridicule, or arguments when eating. If we are angry, upset, or rushed, digestion will be affected.

Supplementation is important. The poisons sprayed and injected into our foods, the carcinogenic additives, and the artificial coloring all adversely affect the quality of our nutrition. Air and water are also hazardous to our health because of the carbon monoxide spewed into the air and the toxic metals poured into our drinking water. Our inner and outer environments vary so much from one another that our individual nutritional needs will differ. These differences may be in metabolic rates, bodily production and utilization of various enzymes, and the degree or lack of nutritional assimilation. We are all unique in our responses to stress and tension. For this reason, some will deplete bodily resources much more rapidly than others and become more prone to illness and disease.

Nutritional regimens abound from ancient beliefs to the current journals, magazines, and books containing information written by biochemists, doctors, psychiatrists, and other advocates of nutrition and well being. One of the earliest is the Ayurveda Diet that balances nutrition with mindful thinking. The more contemporary *Fit for Life* (1985) by Harvey and Marilyn Diamond, combines nutrition with lifestyle. Numerous spiritual diets can be found as well as other popular diets that focus on individual beliefs and eating habits.

Not to be neglected is the role of herbs in promoting health. With herbs, as with vitamins, the reader is advised to examine the medical literature available on the subject and to consult an expert with any questions or concerns about their proper use. The commonly recognized fact in nutritional regimens is that food choices are of the utmost importance to our health. Some foods increase our stamina, energy, and vitality, while other foods contribute to fatigue, hypertension, depression, illness, and disease.

Though advice on diet is bountiful, practicing sound nutritional habits is often difficult. Self-indulgence and inactivity are our worst enemies, preventing us from achieving better health. Those on the quest must work to overcome these vices, realizing that in conjunction with exercise, meditation, and relaxation, nutrition is a powerful tool in strengthening our spiritual power.

Exercise

Our bodies must be strong to resist the wear and tear resulting from unexpected stress and the challenges fate and circumstances place between us and our goal. Maintaining physical fitness and stamina will help us to overcome these obstacles. At one time, physical activity was commonplace, but in modern society, insufficient physical activity is a leading threat to well-being throughout the world. Today's sedentary way of life adversely affects the major systems of the body. Unused muscles become limp, inflexible, and weak. Studies by NASA have found that for every three days of inactivity, individuals lose up to one-fifth

of their maximal muscle strength. Inactivity also affects metabolism, blood flow, and respiration.

Improving our physical condition will help us handle the unexpected difficulties of emotional crises and sudden illnesses, and will also strengthen us when dealing with emergencies. Exercise involving the muscles and joints, such as sit-ups, push-ups, weight lifting, and stretching, increases flexibility and keeps muscles firm and strong. Just as important as strength and flexibility is cardiorespiratory fitness. Aerobic exercises—jumping rope, cycling, walking, and swimming—increase lung capacity and keep blood vessels from weakening.

Though the human system is a reservoir of energy, specific areas of the body are considered *energy centers*, locations where energy is concentrated and potent. These centers include the brain, the spine, the muscles, and many of the organs and glands. It is beneficial to stimulate these areas. Instead of feeling weariness, fatigue, and exhaustion, we can experience strength, vitality, and energy. Any reliable sources on exercise, especially Yoga, lists suitable physical activities for releasing bodily tension and converting it into energy.

Energizing Physical Activities

Sit on the floor with your legs extended before you. Keeping your legs straight, slowly stretch your hands as far toward your feet as they will reach. As you extend your hands, bend your head and neck forward as far as you can. Stop at the furthest end of your legs that your hands can reach, letting them rest there without movement for about five seconds. Then very slowly cross your hands over your legs. As you do this, straighten your head and neck and return to an upright position. Rest and then repeat the exercise three times.

Lie comfortably on the floor with your arms along your sides. Keeping your knees stiff, raise your legs slowly, moving your hands against your lower back for support. Lift your body vertically in the air with the support of your arms and elbows. With your body in this position, rest your chin against your chest, and inhale and exhale very slowly. Hold this position for about one minute and then gradually lower your body to its original position. Rest for at least sixty seconds and repeat the exercise. Do this three times.

Recommended schedules to accomplish a reasonable level of physical fitness vary from exercising daily to several times a week. The schedule selected should suit one's circumstances with activities appropriate to personalities and physical conditions. Working out should be enjoyable, the activities performed without strain or excessive exertion, progressing from easy and simple exercises to more

complex and difficult ones. Stretching and warming up is recommended before exercising; relaxing and cooling down is suggested afterwards. Very important: get a doctor's approval before starting an exercise program and immediately cease exercising if there is a marked shortness of breath or any chest pains. Its best to exercise with a cheerful attitude, realizing that the positive results accrued through physical activity will serve you well in the quest.



Chiropractic

Acute and chronic back pain, stiffness or numbness, fatigue, and headaches can cause stress and anguish, which in turn will distract from focusing on goals. When health problems such as these do not respond to treatment by traditional medical practice with its reliance on prescription drugs, the value of chiropractic treatment should not be dismissed. Chiropractic practitioners believe that a misaligned spinal vertebra can cause a host of problems, resulting in an imbalance of the body's effective functioning and an insufficient energy flow throughout the system. Once this condition is corrected, individuals often experience a renewal of physical strength and an improved quality of life.

In addition to the many suggested activities and exercises to relieve stress and release the blocked energy within to flow more freely, we can also voice our frustrations—and not suppress them—by confiding in a trusted person or seeking individual or group therapy. When faced with a problem, obtain ample rest, develop a sense of humor, listen to motivational tapes with affirmative

messages, enjoy soothing music, and view difficulties in terms of challenges. Finally, going on spiritual retreats and finding a spiritual director can also be quite beneficial.

Habitually practicing time-proven, stress-management techniques and maintaining a positive and constructive attitude toward life and its shortcomings will help us cope with the debilitating effects of stress and significantly tame the turmoil in our lives, which often prevents us from experiencing a spiritual healing power.



Visualization

Visualization is creating pictures in the mind. It is the conscious production of mental imagery. Psychology and religion have long recognized this process as an effective means for shaping skills and talents, alleviating pain and illness, and activating one's spirituality.

Images—the building blocks of visualization—spring from deep within us. Possessing a dynamic drive with an enormous emotional power, they impact our bodies and minds in a positive or negative manner, depending on their vividness, repetition, and reception by the subconscious that externalizes those images. Since mental imagery triggers much of human behavior, it is advantageous to make every effort to influence the deeper levels of our minds with those constructive images we wish to actualize.

Visualization is most effective when practiced in a relaxed state of mind called *passive concentration*. Exertion inhibits success, often resulting in anxiety and stress. This undesirable response is called “Paradoxical Intention,” a process where our thoughts can prevent us achieving our goals. We can avoid this unproductive situation by relaxing our bodies and refraining from strenuous effort whenever we practice visualization.

Even with our goal to supply the mind with positive images, negative images will usurp the imagination from time to time. To cope with such situations, we can practice what Dr. Serge King, a visualization specialist, calls the *dream change* technique. Through this process we recall frightening or upsetting dreams and then consciously change them, transforming negative emotions or situations into positive or satisfying ones through the power of imagination. If, for instance, we dream of falling from a cliff, we later recall the dream and reconstruct it. Instead of falling, we picture our arms opening like wings and gliding us like eagles safely to the earth. If we dream of pursuing monsters, we can later recall the terrible creatures with their ugly, ferocious faces breaking into smiles as they extend their talons out in friendship.

We can also apply this technique to negative images that spontaneously appear during the day. For example, if we see ourselves as slouching, tension-strained, or anxious, we change the image into a positive one by visualizing ourselves standing tall, relaxed, and confident. When we change adverse dreams or negative everyday images into constructive images, we loosen the blocked

energy in them as well as freeing ourselves from experiencing their detrimental effects.

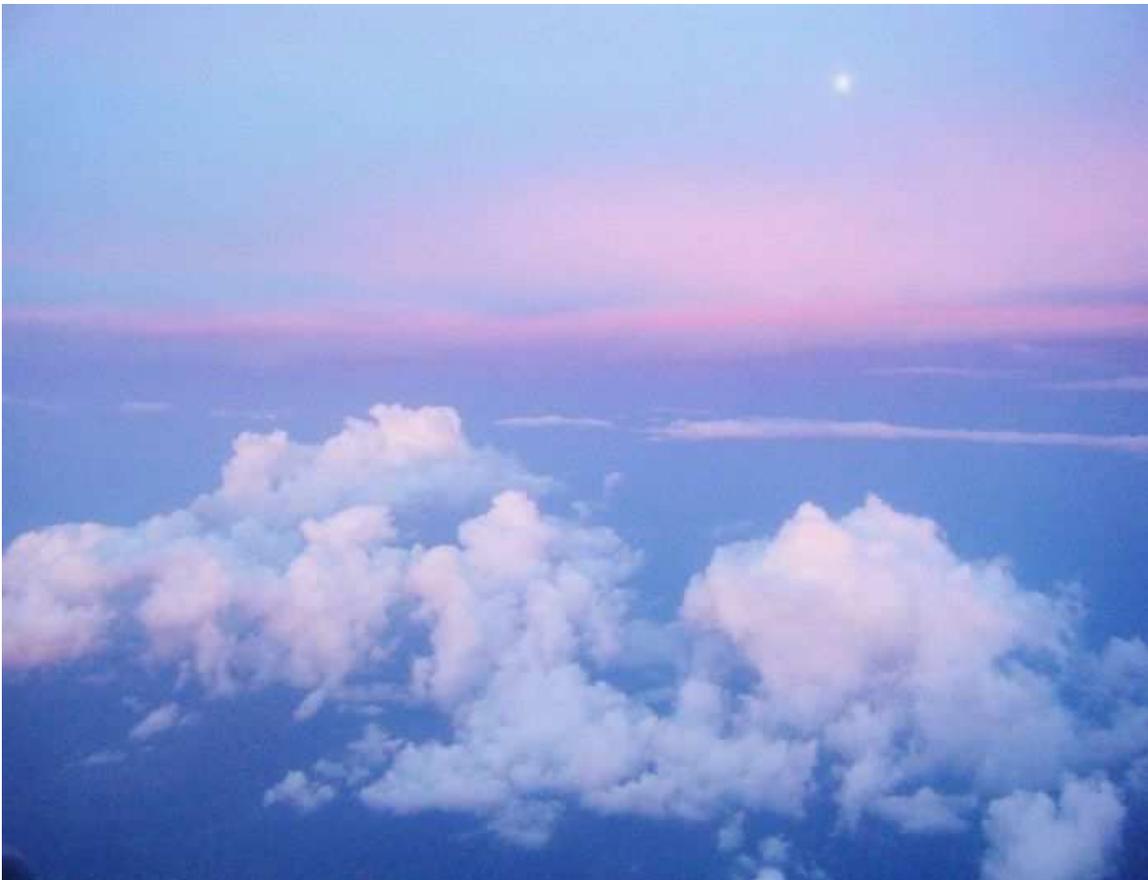
Powerful negative images do not release their clutch on us easily; their roots reach deep into the subconscious. Carl Jung suggests a technique called *active imagination* to deal with such wayward images. First, we visualize a meaningful image and hold it firmly and vividly in mind—a person, a scene, an object. Then we imagine the image developing a life and freedom of its own, its activity directed by the subconscious. The images created through *active imagination* can energize our thoughts, and based on our values, character, and human relationships, can provide insight to our needs, abilities, and frustrations.

Active imagination creates a path for conflicts confined in the dark subconscious to gain access to the light of consciousness through these mental images. It releases inhibitions and frees the immobile energy trapped in them, allowing the individual access to a greater reserve of mental power. If the trauma associated with any particular image is excessive, caution is advised, since the emotions associated with past events brought to consciousness through powerful images can be severe. This precaution must be taken with any visualization of personal difficulties, but especially with involuntary images which repeatedly appear without the consent of the will.

Another useful therapeutic technique is *creative visualization* developed by Dr. Roberto Assagioli, an Italian psychiatrist, who pioneered the use of the imagination in fostering self-actualization—accomplishing personal fulfillment in society. This process involves reflecting on the symbolism of the images, identifying with them, and keeping them present in one's thoughts during the day. *Psychosynthesis*, Assagioli's scientific approach to helping us live healthier and more integrated lives, outlines a step-by-step procedure—starting with understanding our thoughts and actions and progressing to fulfillment—for practicing these and other useful imaging exercises.

Dr. Carl Happich, a German internist, developed a unique visualization technique based on Eastern literature and meditation which activates "symbolic consciousness," a state of mind existing between the conscious and subconscious. Happich's program begins by first relaxing the body and mind through breathing exercises. With that accomplished, various scenes are created. In this illustration, we visualize a large meadow, noting the particular surroundings—the grass, the flowers, the trees. Following this scene, we picture ourselves climbing a mountain, passing through a forest, and eventually reaching a scenic spot from which we view a valley and a vast stretch of countryside, and a chapel in the distance. We pass through a grove and enter the silent chapel to pray or simply to reflect. After leaving the chapel, we sit alone on a nearby wooden bench and listen to the soothing rippling sound of running water in an old fountain.

Happich's visualization exercises activate the deep levels of the mind through the evocation of typical images. For instance, climbing the mountain symbolizes our striving to develop our human potential, the forest signifies the dark and fearful aspects of our nature, and the chapel represents the innermost self where we confront the spiritual issues of our lives. The "dream change" technique, "active imagination," and the visualization exercises of Assagioli and Happich help to prevent oppressing images from inhibiting the free expression of spiritual power. These exercises allow us to deal with those images associated with feelings, attitudes, and experiences which not only hamper our ability to do good, but also result in unhappiness for ourselves and others. Positive change results from practicing these exercises, and enabling the healing power to rise within us like a phoenix from the ashes of our darker selves.



Below are suggested activities to expand visualization skills. Use the descriptions provided, expand on them, substitute your own images, or reflect on the images provided in this guide. Practice the various visualizations until the sensations they represent become as vivid as possible.

*Visualization Ideas***Sight**

- large green maple leaves
- snow-capped mountains
- ocean waves
- sparkling diamonds
- bright field of daisies
- a sky-filling rainbow
- the sun rising
- white chickens around a red wheelbarrow
- a chocolate frosted cake
- a full moon
- smiling face of someone you love

Sound

- raindrops on a metal roof
- melody played on the piano
- a fog horn
- the horn of a train approaching a crossroad
- cry of a seagull
- voices of people you love
- ticking of a pocket watch
- bouncing tennis ball
- jingle of sleigh bells
- burning logs crackling
- music of violins

Touch

- stroke your favorite pet
- walk barefoot through wet grass
- peel an orange or a tangerine
- stroke a baby's cheek
- brush a feather across your cheek
- hold a seashell
- squeeze a wet sponge
- stretch a rubber band
- roll a snowball
- pick up a handful of beach sand
- knead bread dough

Smell

- buttered popcorn
- freshly cut hay
- brewing coffee
- favorite perfume or cologne
- roses in bloom
- hot pizza
- roasted chestnuts
- chicken soup
- salty sea breeze
- rain
- fresh herbs

Taste

- a piece of toast
- a pear, apple, peach
- a cool glass of juice
- almonds, cashews, walnuts
- ice cream in a cone
- coconut milk
- peanut butter and jelly sandwich
- soup
- tomato sauce
- yogurt
- chocolate

Visualization Exercises

ONE: Select a peaceful spot where you will be relaxed and comfortable. Picture a real or imaginary place you would like to visit – a farm, a cabin, a seashore. For example, picture a farm. Visualize an open field, and the waves of yellow grain rippling in the wind. Observe the farm animals and hear the sounds of cows munching clumps of grass, horses neighing, chickens clucking, ducks quacking, and – in the distance – a tractor’s motor.

Watch the cows gather next to a rusty barbed wire fence, and notice the hens and ducks scattering dust as they peck and prance about a sandy yard. Pick a flower from beneath a cluster of tall white birches.

Feel the silkiness of its petals and smell its fragrance. Pick a few raspberries off a bush and taste their tart sweetness. Stand content

with the cool country air sweeping across your face, as you delight in the sight, sound, feel, smell, and taste of nature all about you.

TWO: Look carefully at a photograph or a painting for a while and then close your eyes and mentally reproduce every detail of it as vividly as possible. Jot down your recollections and compare them to the viewed image. Repeat until you recall all the details of the image.

From these simple exercises, go on to more difficult ones.

THREE: Visit a room of your house or apartment and then enter another room. Mentally reconstruct the room you visited, noting the items such as the number and the styles of chairs, the shapes and the locations of the windows, the design of the wallpaper, the particular color scheme of the room. When you have completed the visualization, visit the actual room and compare it with your imagined picture of it.

FOUR: As you visualize the following situations, observe the details of your surroundings, noting any physical sensations (hot, cold, damp, chilly) and feelings (excitement, anxiety, happiness).

- Look down at Earth from a mountain ridge on the moon.
- Drift slowly down from the sky in a parachute.
- Jump rope, ski, bowl, race, or roll down a grassy hill.
- Swim in a pool of cool water on a hot sticky day.
- Climb a mountain or sail on a blue lake.
- Visualize the words Love, God, Justice, Peace and Happiness written in bright yellow letters on a large green chalkboard. Hear each word spoken aloud and observe the mental pictures you associate with them.
- Visualize various symbols you are familiar with such as a dove, rainbow, and rose, noting the sequence of images that develop in association with them. Picture a cornucopia, imagining whatever items you desire to appear from it.
- Listen to the recordings of your favorite artists, watching the images that pass through your mind while listening to the music.

These Visualization Exercises promote flexibility and the connection of our neural and muscular systems, while simultaneously stimulating the brain's right hemisphere, an area of the brain associated with imaging, intuition, and creativity. Exercises such as these enhance all the senses, making us more susceptible and responsive to the workings of the spirit through our imagination.

The Cleansing Process

We cannot be open to a spiritual healing power if we are filled with resentment, hatred, and anger. These emotions hamper our ability to give freely and fully of ourselves. Harboring such feelings not only prevents us from loving our fellow humans and from ministering to their needs, it also hinders us from experiencing health and well-being. Negative feelings alienate us from one another, hinder us from achieving our potential as caring persons, and cause us to become emotionally unstable.

In many instances, we suppress or ignore our pent-up emotions rather than express them constructively through positive confrontation. Fearing rejection or retaliation, we become reluctant to communicate openly and freely. Further, when such powerful emotions remain unexpressed, we drive them into the subconscious where they fester, ready to wreck havoc on our lives. The suppression of emotions, such as anger or discontent, is not only harmful in deterring us from loving fully, it is also detrimental to our mental and physical health as well. Research indicates a high correlation between a number of diseases, repressed emotions, and specific personality traits. Studies have shown a close relationship between repressed anger and ulcers.

In group studies, Lawrence LeShan—psychologist, professor, and author of numerous publications including the best selling *How to Meditate*—notes unworthiness and low self-esteem as key factors in differentiating some cancer patients from others. Dr. Carl Simonton, recognized for his innovative treatment of cancer and author of *Getting Well Again*, a book addressing the impact of stress and negative emotions on disease, writes that predisposing negative personality traits in some cancer patients include holding resentment, finding it difficult to forgive, and feeling rejected. In the area of heart disease, researchers find hostility can damage the heart as much as smoking, cholesterol, or high blood pressure.

Forgiveness—excusing an offense and ceasing to feel resentment—is crucial in the cleansing process, allowing us to change for the better, and be more open and giving instead of closed and unyielding. To forgive is to build bridges from person to person; not to forgive is to tear those bridges down. Recognizing the importance of forgiveness, keep in mind certain facts. First, each of us is unique, some of us are able to forgive more easily than others. For this reason, time is a necessary consideration. We each need our own time to recuperate and come to

terms with our emotions, and to plan exactly what is necessary for the act of forgiveness to work in our lives.



When the process of forgiveness is longer than we wish or if we cannot find it within ourselves to forgive, we must seek spiritual assistance to help us deal with our anger and to strengthen our hearts to forgive those who have offended us. All too often, we focus on the insignificant instead of allowing for compassion, which will fortify us with the necessary desire to act.

Aside from day-to-day frustrations, we must also realize that certain periods of life are especially sensitive times when vulnerability to anger and other emotional difficulties is much greater than at other times. Like the seasons of the year, each of us passes through a series of stages, known as developmental tasks, during which we master specific types of behavior. Various theories of human development depicted in spiritual and psychological literature serve as guides to what individuals are expected to accomplish through these stages. None of us finishes all that we attempt, nor do we do everything well, for each of us has shortcomings and inadequacies. However, the hurt, anger, resentment, or frustration associated with such tasks hinders the full expression of our personalities and behavior, the detrimental effects ranging from minor to serious.

If we believe suppressed anger exists from prior incomplete or unpleasant tasks or situations, we must work to release the distressing emotion association with those circumstances in order to allow the free flow of spiritual energy within us.

Theories dealing with stages of development vary from Lawrence Kohlberg's six stages of moral growth to the four stages of Jean Piaget's Stage Theory of Cognitive Development. In personality theory, Sigmund Freud's sequential stages of development affect the formation of traits such as acquisition, aggression, and altruism. Further, as the child passes through these stages, his character formation is influenced by the types of conflict he confronts and his unique reactions to them. The psychologist Harry Stack Sullivan believes in what is called the Science of Interpersonal Relations. Sullivan's theory emphasizes specific qualities which shape interpersonal relationships developed in the six stages from Infancy through late Adolescence.

The psychoanalyst Erik Erikson's Stages of Development Theory lists eight crises the individual passes through, each stage requiring its own solution. For example, he writes that from birth to twelve children develop a positive self-image and attitudes of trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry if he has supportive, giving, and loving parents. Experiencing a lack of these positive qualities during the formative years will likely produce a child with feelings of mistrust, shame, doubt, and inferiority.

Literature on spiritual healing also refers to stages of development. *Healing Life's Hurt: Healing Through the Five Stages of Forgiveness* (1977) by Dennis and Matthew Linn lists five stages of inner healing: denial, anger, bargaining or conditional forgiveness, depression, and acceptance or unconditional forgiveness. Barbara Shlemon's *Healing the Hidden Self* (1982) relates the major time periods of a person's life to healing (Prenatal, Birth, Infancy, Childhood, Adolescence, and Adulthood), explaining the possible psychological problems associated with each stage as well as recommending specific prayers to resolve the difficulty which may have occurred in any particular stage.

We can become more loving and more charitable by releasing suppressed emotions associated with past experiences through a technique used in my workshops which I called *full sensorial visualization*: visualizing a past experience that caused a negative reaction and converting it into a positive result. We do this by recalling and examining our relationship with our family and others, our life values and goals, and our coping mechanisms in dealing with problems and people, and especially our spiritual relationship. By transforming images of past failure into images of success, *full sensorial visualization* offers us a way to get in touch with our feelings—such as anxiety and frustration—experienced in the past, as we work to obstruct the damaging influence of negative images.

While we practice this process, negative images will continue to surface from time to time. At such times, we must be careful not to allow detrimental images from the past to take over the imagination and reverse any beneficial results we have achieved.

This therapeutic technique is accomplished by vividly re-experiencing painful or disagreeable memories using all the senses and then concluding the visualizations with successful outcomes. While viewing any unpleasant experience, we react freely to it, attempting not to inhibit reactions in examining our past. *Full sensorial visualization* is enhanced by verbalizing what we feel, releasing repressed emotions associated with painful memories. As we visualize the selected scenes and verbalize the specific emotions felt at various times, we note our physical and mental reactions to those emotions and identify any erroneous ideas and beliefs which may have been responsible for our distress, realizing how irrational thoughts and beliefs can limit our freedom. We also remind ourselves that the particular thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs which we held in the past may have resulted in the difficulties we experienced at the time.

Once we have identified these negative and irrational beliefs, we replace them with truthful rational statements that shed light on positive experiences. In *A Guide to Rational Living*, Albert Ellis and Robert Harper include the following as samples of irrational beliefs: a desire to do everything well, continuing to worry over unpleasant situations, and telling oneself that life is terrible when things go wrong. This type of erroneous thinking creates emotional difficulties as well as stress and anxiety because of the constant unrealistic expectations it places on us. Such negative thinking is also a hindrance to realizing health and wellness.



Finally, we ask ourselves what we have learned from the experience that is conducive to our spiritual growth. In this process, we refrain from recreating any traumatic experiences without professional supervision. Also, we apply *full sensorial visualization* to recalled pleasant memories as well as negative ones, enjoying the uplifting feelings which arise.

Reviewing the Visualization Exercises is recommended for those readers wishing to improve their imaging skills before attempting *full sensorial visualization*.

Five Stages of Development

- | | |
|----------------|-------------|
| 1) Infancy | 0-2 years |
| 2) Childhood | 2-12 years |
| 3) Adolescence | 12-18 years |
| 4) Adulthood | 18-65 years |
| 5) Older Adult | 65 plus |

Directions for Visualizing the Five Stages of Development

Find a comfortable chair in an area where you will not be disturbed. Relax the body and the mind before visualizing a room with a large television screen with a DVD set up and ready to run. Turn off the imaginary lamp on the imaginary table next to you. Turn on the DVD. On the wide screen, visualize the events in your age bracket. For example, if you are in the Adulthood Stage (18-65), the segment on the screen will be entitled *Adulthood* and will contain recalled pleasant and unpleasant major events up to your present age. If, for instance, you are 33 years of age, imagine the events of the years from 18-33.

At the next session, view *Adolescence* (12-18). After *Adolescence*, view *Childhood* (2-12) and then *Infancy* (0-2). View only one stage of development at a sitting, although you can flashback into that time period as often as you wish to observe any forgotten incident or one you wish to see again or dwell on. Also, be certain to change any negative experiences from the past into positive ones, employing as many of the senses as possible. Remember, at each sitting, visualize only one video for each stage of development.

As a 33 year old, you have viewed your stage of development from its beginning age (18) to your present age (33) and working backwards you have visualized past stages of development down through *Infancy*. Next, you will visualize the completion of *Adulthood* (33-65) and *Older Adult* (65 plus) as you wish those years to be actualized. If your stage of development is other than *Adulthood*, then visualize

your future in those stages through which you have yet to pass. The future is also to be viewed in a separate sitting.

The concluding visualization consists of a much longer video than the previous videos and contains all five stages of your development in their correct chronological order, beginning with *Infancy* and ending with *Older Adult*, and the particular events you envision for your future. The scenes on this last video are all constructive, since all negative experiences were changed into positive ones during earlier sessions.

The Review

Besides *full sensorial visualization*, it is also beneficial to practice *The Review*, a retrospection, or examination of conscience. This exercise is simply reviewing each night the activities of the day. The transition from scene to scene should be like the passing frames of a movie, a smooth flowing summary of the general aspects of the day. Since—as in all visualization—a relaxed state affects our response to the scene, it is important to unwind before beginning.

Besides training the imagination, the discipline of *The Review* allows us to see the consequences arising from our daily activities and to understand how our actions and thoughts are the causal points from which future incidents arise.

Through this activity, we prevent the daily accumulation of tension and stress by re-experiencing the negative aspects of the day. Consequently, we rest better and avoid the detrimental effects of stress and tension which may work havoc on us during the night. Releasing such feelings as guilt, shame, and anger through the imagination helps the system to more easily direct its full resources toward energizing the body and mind during sleep.

Directions for Practicing the Review

Prior to beginning *The Review* of the day's occurrences, relax the body and the mind by taking several deep breaths. Starting with the events of the morning, review the experiences of the day. Practice *full sensorial visualization* on negative incidents. While viewing each scene ask yourself if you have acted, thought, or felt in any way contrary to your spiritual objectives. Think about any rudeness or thoughtfulness you may have committed during the day, visualizing how you could have acted in a more positive manner.

Repeating the process, visualize each event from morning to evening with no negative scenes passing before the mind's eye, since these

images were “desensitized” and “discharged” earlier. Enjoy the reconstructed images that come to mind, realizing that these are imprinting the consciousness with positive attributes that inspire spiritual growth and behavior.

Viewing, experiencing, and reconstructing negative images of the past will diminish their damaging affects and influence present and future behavior toward more constructive spiritual thoughts and actions. It will help free us of unconscious conflicts and internalized images which may have caused past difficulty and heartache and would have continued to influence us adversely in the present. Focusing the will, memory, and imagination on spiritual values and behavior will improve our lives. With the release of inner energy once clogged by negative emotions such as resentment and anger, we will experience a greater openness to people, a willingness to forgive, and a sense of acting to direct our lives toward the greater good.



Prayer

Prayer comes in many forms, in many languages, and in many beliefs. It is a request to a higher power to fulfill a special need or desire.

We seek to experience a spiritual healing energy both for ourselves and for the good of others. Relying on our beliefs of divine grace, we work diligently and wait patiently for a sign that we have been heard and acknowledged. The exercises in this guide aim to reduce turmoil, anxiety, and distractions, and to calm the mind, rendering it more receptive.

For those who feel the need or have an interest, this chapter provides material on how prayer can assist in providing additional energy and determination during life's more difficult times. This section focuses on Christian prayer, but can be adapted to any belief.



Let us examine various aspects of prayer. First, true prayer is always answered. In the Christian faith, Jesus tells us, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you shall find." The answers we receive, however, may not be what we expect. When the outcome of prayer is other than what we desire, we must continue trusting. As stated in Matthew 26:29, we must remember that at times the answer to one's prayer will be, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." When a prayer appears to be unanswered, God has something other in mind for us than what we prayed for, difficult as this reconciliation may be.

Accepting that we may not obtain the results we desire when we pray, let us look at those practices found to improve the effectiveness of prayer. Since the outcome of healing prayer is often more tangible than the results of other forms of prayer, much of our discussion will focus on healing prayer, though many of the principles involved are applicable to prayer in general.

Most important, when we pray for the good of ourselves and others, we must believe we will receive the power that will work within us and through us to fulfill our plea. When faith is lacking, prayer is often insufficient in breaking through negativity. Consciously or unconsciously, for one reason or another, when affirmative emotions and positive attitudes are of insufficient strength, a barrier is constructed deterring the power of prayer from performing its beneficial work.

Another important consideration in prayer is discernment. Discernment means knowing not only when to pray for a particular outcome but also whether to pray alone, with someone else, through another, or in a group; it also involves what things to pray for such as an inner healing, a physical healing, for another person's illness, or for a cure. Discernment is usually revealed through a spontaneous or recurring image, idea, or feeling. We should seek discernment when we feel our prayer is not being conveyed.

An excellent example of discernment is given by Francis MacNutt in *Healing*, where he writes about a man whose tobacco addiction was incurable until realizing that the man's poor relationship with his father needed improvement first. Another example is how the healing of a woman occurred only after discovering an unpleasant and painful incident needed to be resolved.

Before seeking discernment, we should be relaxed and open to the suggestions that may enter into our conscious or subconscious mind. This is accomplished through a visualization, a Psalm, a mantra, or an inspiring prayer of our choosing, remembering that the words we speak influence our state of mind as well as the movement of spiritual guidance.

Besides the intent of our prayers, it must be remembered that specific words and sounds have a physical effect on our bodies. Mantras, for example, are single

words or phrases whose sounds initiate vibrations in the body and play a significant role in prayer and meditation. The vibrations of these sounds create a calmness, enabling powerful inner forces to flow into the proper physical and psychic channels of our systems.

Practiced in the various religious traditions, repetitive prayer and other expressions as the single word *Om* or *Om Tat Sat* (loosely translated to “all that is”) are powerful mantras utilized for centuries to focus attention and to awaken spiritual energy within us. Other powerful mantras are *shalom* (peace), *insha’Allah* (God willing), and *kyre eleison* (Lord have mercy).



Intercessory Prayer

With intercessory prayer—referred to as *absent healing* or *distant healing*—it is not necessary to be physically present when praying for others. Whether praying for one person or a group, intercessory prayer requires empathy for those we pray for, and can be more successful at times, especially when requesting comfort for those who are experiencing difficulties that we have already gone through.

The power of prayer is weakened when we are tense or worried, since anxiety often blocks the flow of energy within us and communicates itself— instead of healing power—to the person we are praying for. For these reasons, the prayers of others can be more effective than our own prayers. Healer Agnes Sanford relates how she was unable to heal her child because of anxiety, so she called a minister who prayed over the child and made him well. It is hard for us to pray for sick persons we love without undue concern and apprehension, for it is difficult to watch those we love cope with their pain and suffering. In *Healing Prayer: Spiritual Pathways to Health and Wellness* (1975), Barbara Shlemon tells about a mother whose apprehension prevented the healing of her child who was dying from a kidney failure; but, once the healer alleviated the mother's anxiety, the son was healed of his illness.

Even saints have benefited from the prayers of others. Acts 9:1-22 relates the story of St. Paul who fell to the ground on the road to Damascus, overcome by a blinding light. He remained blind for three days, his prayers unable to cure him. The prayers of Ananias, a stranger, healed St. Paul of his blindness. Even St. Francis of Assisi sought the prayers of others. St. Francis asked two trusted friends, Sister Clare and Brother Sylvester, to pray for him. Only when they both received the same answer to their prayers did St. Francis accept his mission to serve God by traveling about and preaching His word to others. In case after case of unanswered prayer, anxiety hinders the flow of God's power, interfering with the healing process and preventing the answering of our prayers. In such situations, the prayers of others often are more fruitful than our own.

The expectations of those desiring a healing also influence the outcome of healing prayer. Lack of a positive attitude creates a barrier, an obstacle which blocks the healing energy. Many reasons exist why those who seek healing do not possess the necessary faith and trust required for recovery. At times persons coping with debilitating illnesses find it difficult, if not impossible, to summon the strength to be affirmative or positive. Family and friends may influence their thoughts on the benefits of a healing. Others consider their illness a punishment for their sins.

The ability to visualize the outcome of our prayers can also determine whether or not our prayers will be answered. Energy is directed by thought. A lucid mental image channels energy to flow more easily within us toward actualizing the vividly pictured outcome of our prayers. Additionally, when praying for a healing, we must see the person we are praying for as well, not ill, trusting that the spiritual power is working to correct the situation by curing the illness.



Guidelines to Effective Prayer

When praying, trust in the answers you receive, whether or not they are the answers you expect or desire. To become calm and relaxed before praying, quiet the mind and body by breathing deeply and making a passive effort to release any tension you may feel.

Favorite prayers or mantras help to achieve this necessary peaceful and receptive state of mind. Pray with a calm, confident, and trusting attitude, realizing your thoughts and feelings toward those for whom you pray also influence the outcome of your prayers.

Ask for the spirit within to fill you with energy, choosing from the various visualization exercises most suitable. If you feel an unknown obstacle is preventing your prayers from being answered, ask what must be done to correct it.

If your prayers do not have the sufficient spiritual strength to accomplish their purposes, request the knowledge to seek for aid in praying.

Continue to visualize the desired outcome of your prayer, picturing it clearly and vividly, utilizing all the senses whenever possible. See the outcome occurring in the present, not in the future.

Confident that your prayers will be answered, give thanks for this blessing. At the end of a healing session of intercessory prayer, give thanks to the divine spirit for working through you for the good of another.

Only after much discipline can we learn how to pray effectively. In the Christian tradition, to say we practice prayer is a misnomer, for according to Scripture and tradition, God alone teaches us to pray. When we call on the Lord in prayer, it is really the Lord beckoning us. As Christ taught his disciples, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." Calling on God demands a special grace, one which not only draws us nearer to Him, but also brings Him closer to us.

Visualization and Healing

Those who practice the healing arts have, from earliest times, utilized visualization. Healing methods, today, still use this process. In biofeedback, for example, imaging affects physiological functions and brings about relief from a number of physical ailments. Cancer specialist Dr. Carl Simonton used mental pictures as part of his program for helping cancer patients. His technique—used today at the Simonton Cancer Center in California—centers on positive thinking and health-inducing imagery practiced on a regular basis. Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP), a controversial science of mind educational process, uses visualization for a variety of purposes, including the alleviation of pain. These and other techniques for self healing emphasize that to achieve what we desire we must follow the proper sequence of first relaxing the body and then visualizing what we wish the body and mind to accomplish.

Visualization is also a part of spiritual healing. When relaxed and in touch with spiritual power, the necessary conditions are created for the healing power to flow. During this process, through prayer and anticipation, healing energy passes from the healer into the recipient, opening the deeper levels of the mind. Along with this energy the healer's mental image is also projected.



The crucial role of visualization in healing is widely acknowledged. The healer Olga Worrall, for example, wrote that before coming into contact with patients she allowed herself time to become a clear channel for a spiritual healing power through the practice of prayer and visualization. Francis MacNutt wrote that when we act as instruments for a healing power, we must visualize the person to be healed as healthy and vibrant, not in the present illness. Further, he tells us that some healers who seek discernment before a healing obtain special knowledge of what to pray for through spontaneous images.

Agnes Sanford also spoke highly of the role of visualization in healing. For a time, she was unsuccessful in intercessory prayer. Advised to use visualization in her prayers, Sanford did so and found her patients experienced positive results. Sanford wrote that images influence the subconscious, the area of mind from which spiritual energy is transmitted. When Sanford prays for a healing, she creates a clear picture of the sick person as healthy and radiant and gratefully exclaims, "Amen."

The visualization of Jesus, the Blessed Mother, the saints, or other religious figures plays a prominent part in Christian spiritual healing. Some healers commonly visualize Jesus healing, picturing the scenes as vividly as possible, imaging the transfer of healing energy from Jesus into the afflicted person. Scenes from the Gospels in which the sick person is present at one of Jesus's many healings are recreated in the healer's mind; in self-healing, the recipients place themselves in the biblical scene. In her book *Healing Prayer*, Barbara Shlemon explains the use of this visualization technique. First, she visualizes Jesus touching the sick person making him healthy and whole. Then, she thanks Jesus for the healing, picturing the process occurring in the present, even when there is no visible sign of improvement in the recipient, knowing God heals in subtle and sundry ways often neither observed nor understood by us.

Use of the Hands

The use of the hands is practiced in a variety of healing techniques. Disciplines ranging from massage and rolfing (deep manipulation of soft tissue) to shiatsu (acupressure) and reiki (energy healing) utilize the hands for various treatments such as aligning the body, relieving muscle tension, or releasing energy trapped in various parts of the body. A gesture of affection, even the mere act of touch is considered beneficial in communicating care and concern for the individual. In his acclaimed book, *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin* (1986), Ashley Montagu gives ample evidence supporting the therapeutic benefits of touch as well as the serious impairment to those children who experience a lack of touch in their formative years.



Though visualization is an integral part of the spiritual healing process, the hands are primarily the means for transmitting healing energy. When used to convey healing power, hands should be warm. If cold, warm by rubbing hands briskly before applying them to the body. Hawaiian and African healers rub their hands to also increase the flow of energy.

In *The Science of Psychic Healing* (1987) written by William Walker Atkinson under the pen name Yoga Ramacharaka, the author states that the most effective way to transfer power from one person to another is through the hands. Atkinson was an early advocate of spiritual healing, having gone through a program to relieve stress from his occupation as an attorney. He was involved in the formation of the New Thought, a spiritual movement founded in the late nineteenth century that focused on the healing relationship between the mind and spirituality.

Healing energy can flow through the hands using several methods, from placing the hands over an area on the body to placing the hands directly on the body. A variety of techniques are provided through books and other sources.

The Healing Process

Visualization has a significant role in spiritual healing, and it's important to have tranquility before seeking healing energy. When relaxed, imagine streams of spiritual energy flowing into the body and filling it with vitality, or visualize a glowing sphere of light just above the head. Picture this light descending into the head and down through the limbs spreading energy to every part of the body.

An effective practice for drawing energy is the Star Exercise, named because the body assumes the position of a geometrical figure, a star. First, visualize rays of radiant light above you. With your feet slightly spread, stand with your arms outstretched at shoulder level, the right hand turned downward, and the palm and the fingers of the left hand turned upward to receive spiritual energy, which will flow into the left hand, and spread through the body, strengthening and vitalizing it. Excessive energy will flow through the fingers of the right hand, allowing the body to maintain a harmonious energy level.



At this time, discernment is important. Feeling the spirit at work, ask for a successful outcome of the healing. If no answer comes through a word, an image, or an intuition, visualize the person or yourself to be healed, pictured in a healthy state. When you have formed a clear picture of a healthy person, place your hands on or near the recipient and verbally call on the spiritual healing power to act through you and set free the affliction..

The reliable healer takes every step to insure that when needed, the recipient seek not only the advice but also the treatment of a doctor, psychologist, counselor, or member of the clergy. Such a healer knows that at times a medical remedy or approach to a particular illness may be more appropriate than or should complement a spiritual healing treatment. A healer acknowledges the power that flows through to the afflicted person is from a higher spiritual force, and trusts that anyone is capable of experiencing a healing even if it is not physical; instead a healing through which the afflicted will find courage, patience, and strength to bear and triumph over inner anguish and physical pain.

Around the world, daily spiritual healings occur, on both an individual and group level. These spiritual healings are rooted in ancient civilizations based on the actions of religious scholars, studies from therapeutic practices, and the traditions of pagan rituals throughout the centuries that have combined to create a holistic approach to healing.

In this guide, we have examined those techniques identified as effective for achieving health, wellness, and healing by disciplining ourselves to focus on spiritual matters as we release our entanglement from emotional obstacles. We have also learned how to improve our mental and emotional states by examining our conscience and adjusting our thoughts to free ourselves of tension, anxiety, and fear which block the spirit

To assist us further in this goal, we have looked at those techniques which can keep us healthy and well such as relaxation, nutrition, exercise, and meditation; techniques which can also strengthen us when we are weak and motivate us when we are discouraged. Finally, we have examined the role of visualization and the use of prayer, discernment, and the position of the hands in the healing process. We have also discussed the characteristics of the responsible healer.

As with any discipline, spiritual healing will take time, practice, and patience; and in the process, we will discover that our compassion will open our hearts, creating receptive channels within us through which the spirit can freely perform its beneficent deeds in our lives and in the lives of others.



Conclusion

The intensity and the duration of the various events associated with experiencing the power and energy of spiritual healing vary from person to person. "Supernatural insight" happens in a flash or it may last seconds or minutes. Although it is more developed in some than in others, all people possess an innate ability for viewing transcendental reality.

We have sought through the power of prayer and the influence of imagination to transcend ourselves in order to encounter spiritual healing. Whether our quest is short or long, we will discover that no easy path exists and no guarantees can be given whether or not we will achieve our goal. Further, we will come to understand that to experience spiritual healing, we must look inward, a task requiring time, effort, and discipline. Additionally, our lives must be committed, as we experience the necessity of keeping our hearts and minds open and sensitive to the stirrings of the spirit. Our efforts and divine grace will guide us toward our destination, enriching our lives and providing us with new vistas of promise and hope.

About the Author

A high school teacher of English, reading, and psychology for 32 years, Raphael Ferraro was also acting Health Director of the West Springfield School System, and supervised the writing of one of the first comprehensive K-12 health education curriculums in the state of Massachusetts. As health supervisor, he created and directed the implementation of a Community Crises Program for the schools and the town of West Springfield, receiving accolades from former Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts, who praised this accomplishment as the most effective crisis prevention program of its kind in the state.

Mr. Ferraro has conducted adult workshops and seminars on stress-management, self-actualization, creative writing, and spiritual healing. For providing services to the community, he and his wife, Anne Marie, received the Servium Award from the Springfield Italian American Culture Center.

He is the author of several books, the most recent *Royanna: An Extraterrestrial Affair*, a science fiction novella blending adventure, mystery, and religion.

This free download is compliments of Raphael Ferraro and the
Italian American Press in collaboration with

Rich DiSilvio, DV Books

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