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# FINDING GOD DURING A PANDEMIC: INSIGHTS ON SELF-CARE

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CARE OF BODY AND SOUL: A CONVERSATION WITH DR. KAREN SHIELDS WRIGHT

Love Thy Neighbor, as Thy Self

Prayer and Centering: An introduction and experience to evidence-based mind-body medicine  
methods for stress reduction and increased resiliency

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## OUTLINE

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- The theological framework is “Love thy Neighbor” as thyself.
- The context is the health crisis of COVID-19
- The medical/biological teachings are how God designed the body and the response to stress (and calm)
- Prayer including any momentary turning to God calms the body and brings us closer to God

### SLIDE 1. FINDING GOD DURING A PANDEMIC: INSIGHTS ON SELF-CARE

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3 – 4 PM, Thursday, April 16, 2020

#### Program Description

As our nation’s health crisis grinds on, the demands of managing life in a new reality is taking a toll. Known routines of prayer and self-care have fallen away leaving many feeling adrift and unmoored. We invite you to take the opportunity to re-center, however briefly, in the known positive connection between health and well-being, and spirituality and faith.

In this program, Dr. Karen Shields Wright will reflect on the commandment, “Love thy Neighbor as Thyself” and what that looks like in the midst of a pandemic. What is the spiritual call to care for self and how does honoring that call, in momentary and intentional ways, naturally support flourishing and balance in body and soul? What are the ways to access the peace that surpasses understanding and, in doing so, maintain balance in this time of collective uncertainty?

#### Presenter

Dr. Karen Shields Wright is an Ignatian Spiritual Director, Wellness Expert, Patient Advocate, Chaplain, Doctor of Chiropractic Medicine, and Health Consultant. Dr. Shields Wright received her advanced certificate training in spiritual direction ('03) at *Fordham University’s Graduate School of Religion*, after receiving her MS in Christian Spirituality ('98). Previously she received her undergraduate in Life Science at NYIT, and a Doctor of Chiropractic Medicine from *New York Chiropractic College*. In addition to her health practice, she ministers as a spiritual director at the *Murphy Center for Ignatian Spirituality at Fairfield University*. Dr. Shields Wright is married to Dmitri Wright, a fine artist, where she continues to take great delight in her children and grandson, in addition to their extended internationally based family, and friends.

## SLIDE 2. "LOVE THY NEIGHBOR" AS THYSELF

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### THE THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

*"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

*Matthew 22: 37-40*

- "Love thy Neighbor as Thyself" and what that looks like in the midst of a pandemic.
- What is the spiritual call to care for self, and how does honoring that call, in momentary and intentional ways, naturally support flourishing and balance in body and soul?
- What are the ways to access the peace that surpasses understanding and, in doing so, maintain balance in this time of collective uncertainty?

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TO SHARE HOW GOD DESIGNED US FROM A  
PHYSIOLOGICAL STANDPOINT AND HOW THE EFFECTS OF  
PRAYER ON OUR BODY CAN HELP US HELP OTHERS  
MORE

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## SITUATION: CRISIS CRITICAL

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We are living through a seismic history-making event. An event that will change forever how we live.

We ask: "How can I help?" and "Who is God calling me to be and do during and after this is over?"

The novel "SARS-CoV-2" virus is new to the human system now, causing the ("coronavirus disease 2019) COVID-19 disease, which we know little about its long term effects.

Overnight our life has been thrown into chaos; daily routines shredded destabilizing coping mechanisms, support system altered, or for some nonexistent. Even our most personal spaces have been disrupted, invaded, creating disorientation.

Economically for many, it is hard to plan for future basics in this uncertainty when living in a limbo.

Some you may know may be experiencing crippling levels of stress and anxiety now.

Before this pandemic, 60-90% of conditions that brought one to visit their primary doctor was related to stress in some way either directly or secondary to another condition. 22% of Americans prior to this were diagnosed with anxiety disorders. Now a 1/3 are experiencing anxiety; the physical isolation is causing much mental isolation, a sense of helplessness. And for many, spiritual isolation – leading to a sense of hopelessness.

Every one of us, who are aware of the threats of this disease with its higher rate of transmission of 2009 pandemic H1N1 and at least 10x deadly, has some level of protective emotions. There are just too many unknowns.

I have seen anxiety, panic, and fear in those patients/clients who I supported in my various roles – the shock of an acute injury or life-threatening illness, chronic debilitating disability.

With this as a new threat that we lack direct personal experience, our system goes into overdrive. The part of our brain – the amygdala, which I will note more later in this information, plays a role in detecting novelty, as well as processing fear. Your brain is on the hunt 24/7.

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## PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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Past to God's mercy  
Present to God's grace  
Future to God's providence

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## WHAT CAN WE DO FOR OTHERS?

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**Love thy neighbor, as thy self**

**Love is the desire for the good of the other and doing what one can to assist.**

Globally the motto is now: "It's not about me, it's about we"

**Prayer is primary and setting ourselves up to be ready for when we are called upon for action.**

Example:

- Solidarity – in self-isolation, social distancing, washing hands, etc
- Supporting the heroic selflessness of the front-line healthcare workers in any way we can.
- Expressing gratitude also for the essential workers who are stepping up to provide our food and other basic services who also are at risk for the infection

## FIRST, WE CAN REST IN THE FACT THAT GOD HAS A DESIGN

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We are proving as a society to be smart, tough, disciplined, unified, compassionate, and loving.

Disasters researchers know that brave behavior is the norm. Embodied in our allegiance to help each other is a self-sacrificial instinct that is being demonstrated today, our healthcare workers, and even those stocking our grocery shelves, as it has been throughout history. They know people just need to be given concrete, detailed action steps one can take to help reduce panic and overreaction since we are using more primitive parts of our brains, so visuals are also more useful

## GOD HAS CREATED ME TO DO HIM SOME DEFINITE SERVICE

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*“God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments. Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.”* John Henry Newman

## WHAT CAN WE DO FOR OURSELVES TO HELP OTHERS?

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What no longer serves you now that you used in the past could be used an opportunity to reevaluate... The question is what do we need now

Where am I in all of this?



## A FEW TOOLS

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I will share a few of the evidenced-based mind/body methods and other tools that I have shared with the patients and directees (or one of their loved ones') who have been traumatized by acute life-threatening illnesses or chronic debilitating disability. For directees, I have added or altered the methods and explanations in order to place the context within a growing supportive relationship with God.

Will introduced a few physiological processes that God designed which are behind the success of these methods in accomplishing an embodied

Through thousands of years of evolution, we have developed a propensity for negativity, so we have to be intentional on being aware of when 'nature' kicks in. Fear is a natural built-in mechanism, a signal that something is amiss, it automatic.

I hope these simple methods integrated into your day and prayer life will bring you comfort.

## A WAY OF PROCEEDING IN SELF-CARE FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD

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### Embodied souls

Notes: Having a disposition of the heart in being grateful for our life as gift from God, and responding with care for oneself as gift – as an embodied soul – care for our soul and also the body in this order - so as to be able to care for others in love – following the commandment love thy neighbor as thyself in helping to bring forth the kingdom heaven on earth, but not yet. For love is to desire the good for the other and doing what we can (with the Holy Spirit that resides within us) within our circumstances, can be spiritually meritorious if it is performed in order to give glory to God.

Many times the experience of being the beloved – as being the dream of God, being loved unconditionally by the One who loved us into existence, the One who sacrificed for us to have eternal life, the One who lives within us there ready to guide and support - is still an unfulfilled deep yearning - a grief ridden desire – I found this in successful business men and women, health care workers, homeless single mothers - one feels not valuable enough, not good enough, not worthy, ashamed, will care for others seeing them as more worthy ( not necessarily as self-sacrificing way).

We human beings were created with a body and soul. St. Thomas Aquinas used the term - Ensouled bodies or Embodied souls.

The outline I use here is as a model for an integrative self-care is taken from a program offered by the Thomistic Institute titled Aquinas 101.

## TOGETHER

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### **Morning**

Acknowledge God's presence with us and then ask what we need for the day – (that is self-care) and then move on?

### **Morning – what can 'we' do today?**

This way implies we acknowledged God's presence within, by asking what we can do together... Ignatian way is to start with offering the day -it sets our intentions righty and reminds our minds of the reality that God is within and with us – eventually it becomes an automatic – our go to – a reminder that we are not alone.

### **What did we do today? with Christ? for Christ?**

Co-laboring

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## DEFINITIONS

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### WHAT IS HEALTH?

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#### WHO DEFINITION

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"Health is a state of **complete** physical, mental, and social **well-being** and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.) The Definition has not been amended since 1948

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#### ST. JOHN PAUL II DEFINITION

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"Health is a **dynamic tension** towards physical, mental, social, and spiritual **harmony**, and not only the absence of illness, which **gives** man the ability to **fulfill the mission** which has been entrusted to him, **according to the state of life** in which he finds himself."

Definition given by St. Pope John Paul II to the attendees of the International Conference given by the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers for the members of the International Federations of Catholic Health Care Workers on February 11, 2000 World Day of the Sick, Year of the Jubilee, Vatican City

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#### THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THESE TWO DEFINITIONS OF HEALTH

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- WHO
  - Now recognizes the spiritual aspect of the human person,
- JP II
  - Dynamic tension...harmony" - implies a relational balance [if one is weak physically, yet one can be strong spiritually].
  - "Towards"- implies that a 'complete well-being' in each area may not be realistic or achievable; and we, as human persons, are in a continuing state of 'being' [growing, learning] and one that has been given a mission in life [we do have a purpose].
  - St. John Paul II placed the role of health in the perspective, as an aspect of the human person, but not one's ultimate fulfillment or one's ultimate goal or purpose in life to achieve.

## SELF-CARE

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**Self-care is a chosen behavior under one's control that is deliberate and self-initiated to support and promotes good health and general well-being.** It is an essential component of the management of chronic illness. Such is the role of a health care provider to support patient enablement. "Self-care is a proactive, holistic, and personalized approach to the promotion of health and well-being through a variety of strategies, in both personal and professional settings..." (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5907186/>)

## ALLOSTASIS

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- Allostasis is a physiological term used for the body's ability for stability through change. It is an essential component of maintaining homeostasis.
- Adaptation in the face of potentially stressful challenges involves activation of neural, neuroendocrine and neuroendocrine-immune mechanisms – interventions (called adaptive plasticity).
- When these adaptive systems are turned on and turned off again efficiently and not too frequently, the body is able to cope effectively.
- When areas are either overstimulated or not performing normally, this is called an "allostatic load" or the price of adaptation. Allostatic load is the cumulative measure of physiological dysregulations over multipled systems which can lead to disease over long periods.
- An 'AL' score is computed as the total number of biomarkers for which a participant values fall into high-risk

## RESILIENCY

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The ability to rebound or bounce back from adversity.

The capacity to maintain allostasis in face of mental and physical challenges to well-being.

Resiliency in the clinical sense is our capacity to recover from stress – mental or physical – our ability to cope or adapt. In the context of allostasis, resilience denotes the ability of an organism to respond to stressors in the environment by means of appropriate engagement and efficient termination of allostasis responses. ( Our body will reset back to a normal physiological state.

What can we do that will modulate our allostatic responses?

With less resiliency, we have a greater risk for downstream dementia.

When it gets out of control, we have deep trouble, you may be more prone to Metabolic Syndrome = 35-40% risk for obesity.

## NEUROPLASTICITY

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We have a brain that can change itself. Neuroplasticity is the 'muscle building process' part of the brain.

Neuroplasticity is the term used by scientists and clinicians to describe the brain's miraculous ability to rewire itself and create new connections that bypass areas that may be injured or damaged by disease. It's also the brain's ability to rewire itself when challenged in a positive way. Repetition of thought or action over and over again increases its staying power where over time, it becomes automatic; a part of us.

Our brains are continuously being shaped by our experiences throughout life. With every repetition of a thought or emotion (be it positive or negative), we reinforce a neural pathway. With small incremental changes, repeated frequently enough leads to changes in how our brains work. We actually become what we think and do. Therefore, what you think, do, and see matters.

We have the ability to change our attitudes, which changes the brain, thereby affecting how our body automatically reacts.

## WHAT IS STRESS?

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"Stress is an experience in which our body adjusts physically, cognitively, and emotionally to it; and depending upon what was the stimuli, its intensity and duration; and our response - it will have a positive or negative impact on our nervous system". KSW

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## STRESS IS A LIVED EXPERIENCE

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We are **bio-psycho-social-spiritual beings** who experience stress in multi ways. Stress is our body's responses to a stressor that stimulates the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems having short or long-term negative health effects - long term effects are harmful. Appropriate exercise is a positive stress.

Stress as a term came into the health conversation in the early 20th century. The term was introduced by Hans Selye, an endocrinologist who studied the responses of an organism to stressors.

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## DISTRESS

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Distress is secondary to acute overwhelming stress or chronic unremitting stress. It is pathogenetic.

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## STRESSOR EXAMPLES

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Stressors are events such as:

- Environmental – weather, loud sounds, pollution, too much lightness or darkness
- Daily stress - traffic jams, losing one's wallet
- Life change– birth, marriage, death, divorcee, job loss, moving
- Work place – long hours, high demands
- Chemical – alcohol, drugs, tobacco, malnutrition
- Social – poverty, family demands
- Spiritual – sin, lack of a prayer life, distance from God

Biological [physical], psychological, social or spiritual stressors will create a wide range of physical responses [stress] in our bodies causing an impact in the homeostasis [the allostasis balancing] of the body.

Since we have been designed to survive, today the modern daily stressors are different from primitive survival stressors of our ancestors, yet just as real to our bodies. Since we cannot remove all the stressors from our lives, and stress is inevitable, our reactions to the stressors and its effects on our health can be mitigated.

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## MITIGATING STRESS: THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

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*"The Relaxation Response is a state, elicited by mind-body techniques, characterized by decreased oxygen consumption, decreased heart rate, and decreased respiratory rate which offsets the effect of stress"* (Herbert Benson, 1971).

These techniques can be used to combat stress in a wide array of stress-initiated or stress-exacerbated illnesses. There are numerous writings on different methods of creating a physical, mental and emotional relaxation response.

Scientists and clinicians have studied through observations and testing the physiological changes and have cataloged its subsequent health benefits related to the method of 'centering' one's attention on a focusing element in either a meditative or mindful way.

## OUR BODY & GOD'S DESIGN

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Our body's nervous system is a complex interconnected, networked system that coordinates all of our voluntary and involuntary physiological activities via transmitting signals to all other parts of our body.

It has two main parts Central and Peripheral. When this system becomes overloaded due to a stressor, we experience stress. Becoming familiar with some of its functions will help us become more aware of the danger signals affecting our health.

## CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM

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The Central nervous system consists of the brain and spinal cord that play a crucial role in the psycho-biological sensory system. The interconnectivity of our body is designed for control and regulation, yet when a stressor becomes overwhelming, it creates a cascade effect, thereby affecting every part of our system.

This is important to note – one's perception of a situation is a critical factor in how one's body automatically responds to a stressor.

## PARTS OF THE CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM

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**Hypothalamus** This section governs our automatic responses; it maintains the body's status quo system-wide. It links the nervous system to the endocrine system. [When the nervous system is overloaded, it affects all our hormones].

**Pituitary gland** lies just under the hypothalamus. It secretes hormones that regulate i.e. growth, BP, breast milk, thyroid, our metabolism, temperature, pain relief, etc. During a stress response for example it releases ADRENOCORTICOTROPIC hormone to stimulate the adrenal glands.

**Adrenal glands** sit on top of our kidneys– one of its hormones is CORTISOL that is released during a stress response, which suppresses the body's immune system.

**Amygdala** plays a role in memory, decision making, processes our emotions, and modulates our stress responses. We will experience different levels of anxiety or fear depending how much of it is being stimulated.

As part of the limbic emotional tracking system, it is on guard 24/7 keeping your safe from threats, in its rapid deployment, it engages our stress response system autonomic nervous system affects our target tissues working on the brain's reward system.



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## AMYGDALA'S PRIMORDIAL INTELLIGENCE

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1. Sense its environment. where am I? what is out there?
2. Analyzes
3. incoming data
4. Effects a motor response: to mobilize or immobilize, to approach or avoid

Cognitive Behavior Therapy helps one to change negative thinking which is main driver in stimulating the amygdala, thus experiencing an increase of fear and anxiety. Reducing the load on the amygdala increases our ability to self-regulate.

**Hippocampus** plays a role in memory formation; it connects with the hypothalamus and amygdala. It modulates our response by enhancing it or suppressing memory. Chronic stress damages this part of the brain leading to a vicious cycle. In Alzheimer's disease this is one of the first regions to suffer.

**Prefrontal cortex** is the front part of our brain that regulates cognitive processing such as problem solving, planning, and attention. This part of our brain becomes impaired during a stress response. [Notice how when one is exhibiting stress one is less effective].

THE STRESS RESPONSE SUPPRESSES OUR ABILITY TO THINK CLEARLY, FIGHT OFF INFECTIONS, REMEMBER, IT INCREASES OUR FEELINGS OF ANXIETY AND FEAR, THUS NEGATIVELY AFFECTING THE BODY'S ENTIRE SYSTEM.

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## THE BRAIN'S FUNCTION

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There is no simple explanation of how our brains function. However, what scientists have discovered is that it consists of over 100 billion neurons – it is plastic, changeable. Each nerve cell has between 1000 – 500,000 synapses having about 100 trillion connections at any given time. Within these synapses are chemical neurotransmitters that express a particular message.

[The most familiar to us is the neurotransmitter adrenaline, which we experience in the FIGHT-OR-FLIGHT RESPONSE when under stress.] Even with the trillions of messages, your brain retains and recalls all these transmissions as a MEMORY by a nerve cell activation.

The brain responds to 3 sources of stimuli:

- The outside environment - external stimuli
- The inside environment of our body, which is a bottom-up stimuli
- The brain itself, which is a top-down stimuli – WHAT YOU THINK AFFECTS YOU

Stimuli from any of these three sources will then be matched to other similar nerve cell activations in the past, thereby reactivating a memory. This nerve cell activation then recreates a similar or the original physical sensation associated with that memory.

Major, repetitive or ongoing stressors create lasting memories that can be harmful unless we either reduce the stressor or intentionally 'reformat' our thinking and reactive behavior to readjust our body's responses, which includes becoming aware of our automatic responses.

Involuntary recurrent memories called FLASHBACKS are when a person 'relives' the experience as if happening in real-time, thus one experiences the same stress activation.

## PERIPHERAL NERVOUS SYSTEM

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The Peripheral Nervous System is part of the nervous system that exists outside the brain and spinal cord. It connects the Central Nervous system to the organs and limbs, serving as a communication relay system. It has two main parts.

1. Somatic Nervous System – is the voluntary, conscious part that innervates our Muscles & Skin. It has two pathways:

- Sensory (Afferent) - this relays sensations from muscles and skin to the brain
- Motor (Efferent) this sends signals from brain to muscles and skin

2. Automatic Nervous System –has 3 parts each with the two pathways Sensory and Motor as in the Somatic Nervous System, is it involuntary and unconscious, it innervates our organs, also is called Visceral Nervous System

1. Enteric Nervous System – it is in the GI system only, and works independently from the other systems.
2. Sympathetic Nervous System – known for its FLIGHT OR FIGHT mechanism, it operates through the Thoracic and Lumbar nerves.
3. Parasympathetic Nervous System – known for REST & DIGEST activation, it operates through the Cranial and Sacrum nerves.

Sympathetic Nervous System and Parasympathetic Nervous System are complementary in nature; when one is activated, the other 'takes a back seat'.

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## OUR BODY'S REACTION TO STRESS

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The Sympathetic Nervous System is the quick response mobilizing system in which when it acknowledges a stressor, it will activate its 'flight and fight' mechanism:

- Dilates the pupils
- Inhibits salivation – DRY MOUTH
- Dilates the bronchioles to receive more oxygen
- Accelerates the heart
- Increases blood flow to the extremities and lungs
- Inhibits digestion
- Stimulates the release by the liver of glucose for energy – HIGH BLOOD SUGAR
- Activates the hormones of adrenals to be ready to take action

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## CHRONIC STRESS

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Chronic stress is one of the main reasons for diseases such as High Blood Pressure. Stress also produces a decline in our thought processes. We need to maintain homeostasis for the brain needs to continuously form new neural connections, to reorganize its pathways, and to fix the damage caused by injury and disease.

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## HEALTH & WELL-BEING

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Reducing the effects of stress using relaxation response methods for health reasons is critical. Utilizing techniques that operate how our body is designed should become part of our daily health routine.

For we are temples of the Holy Spirit and are called to be good stewards of this gift of life we received.

Well-being is a general term for the condition of an individual or group as used in health care or in economics that looks to evaluate the quality of life, measuring it subjectively and objectively. Assessing cognitive or affective well-being is represented negatively by anxiety; or positively by calmness, or an overall state of 'contentment' or a 'sense of peace'.

### 3 METHODS FOR INCREASING RESILIENCY

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Mind-body therapies: goal to reduce Sympathetic System response

Prayer: the goal is to be with God, yet as He designed us many times there is as a byproduct - a sense of peace which is an activation of the Parasympathetic System.

Cognitive Reappraisal – St. Ignatius “Act as if it depends upon you; Trust as if it depends upon God.”

#### CHANGING, MITIGATING AND OR REDUCING STIMULI

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1. External stimuli - Example: Quieter environment – why noise pollution such as in crowded inner-city living has negative effects on the body.
2. Eliciting the Relaxation Response helps reduce the ‘bottom-up’ stimuli while assisting in the ‘top-down’ stimuli [resting our body and mind] using Mind/body methods, especially is experienced during prayer.
3. Top-down stimuli – What we believe and do has effects. Spiritual care supports one’s knowledge and understanding of their faith’s beliefs and practices to discover and experience the loving true Creative God - such is similar to what we use today as a therapeutic intervention in pastoral counseling of ‘Cognitive Behavioral Therapy’.

## GOD'S DESIGN: THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

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There are different stress-reducing techniques that elicit a Relaxation Response with the goal of increasing one's health potential. Moreover, there are different meditative and contemplative prayer practices that also have a health benefit by-product of producing the physical relaxation response.

The Relaxation Response elicits signals to the nervous system producing physiological changes that ultimately produce a sense of well-being. It assists in regulating the body's homeostasis.

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### THE PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

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When using relaxation techniques or the different prayerful methods, your body responds uniquely different to daytime rest and to sleep, yet similar.

The Relaxation Response lowers the 'flight and fight' mechanism produced by the Sympathetic Nervous System (arousal) while it stimulates the Parasympathetic Nervous System (calm) that turns on the 'rest' mechanisms. Some of the physical changes are:

- Increase in salivation
- Reduction in heart rate
- Normalized rate of breathing
- Increase digestion
- Reduction in muscle tension\*
- Increase in sexual function
- Increase in alpha brain waves\*\*

Note: There is a metabolic downshifting by 10-17% during the Relaxation Response within the first 3 minutes, yet during sleep it takes 4-5 hours to obtain an average of 8%. In addition, there has been shown a marked decrease in blood lactate levels, a substance produced by contracting or tense\* muscles. Increased blood lactate levels has been associated with the feelings of anxiety. Alpha waves\*\* are found in the 'meditative' states are not found in sleep, and have been reported to be associated with a sense of well-being.

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### REMEMBERED WELLNESS

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Remembered Wellness is a term used in place of the 'placebo effect' because of the pejorative connotations associated with the latter. Scientists call this our body's natural built-in healing ability; some even see it is based upon our desire for health, as if to 'remember', thereby creating a change in our neurophysiology.

Can our body translate our beliefs into what brings about emotional, psychological, and physical wellness? This is the mechanism researchers believe is involved in the healing phenomenon – our desire or belief stimulates positive physiological changes.

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## THE FAITH FACTOR

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Research has also shown that when one relies on their faith-based beliefs to elicit the Relaxation Response during a 'meditative practice', one will have an increased health benefit. Also, one will have a greater sense of well-being, which could explain the reported increased sense of a 'spirituality'.

Years ago Herbert Benson, MD at Harvard concluded that the faith-beliefs help stimulate the body's Remembered Wellness - that is the cause of such unexplained healings. Benson concluded that we humans are genetically designed for spiritual beliefs. He still believes that we have the ability to harness the power of our religious convictions to enhance the effects of the Relaxation Response in order to achieve the fullest use of the Remembered Wellness mechanism.

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## THE FAITH FACTOR & GOD WELLNESS

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Those in Mind/Body research were surprised to find most people - 80% chose a religious word or phrase to elicit their Relaxation Response when using a relaxation technique to achieve Remembered Wellness. Benson reported 25% of those who did choose a faith-based word had fewer illnesses and symptoms than those who did not use a faith-based word or phrase as their focusing element.

Of those who did, they reported: A presence of an energy or force, a power they called God, something beyond themselves, and that this presence felt close to them.

This was a common experience for patients in which scientists believed provided the stimulus for the physical manifestations that wellness researches called a GOD WELLNESS. We can find in the writings of both Jewish and Christian mystics this same experience was felt during contemplative prayers. Neuroscientist like Andrew Newberg has looked at the neural changes related to a faith in God or Harold Koenig's a psychiatrist, work on Religion, Spirituality, and Health.

## MIND/BODY MEDICINE

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"Mind-body medicine focuses on the interactions among the brain, mind, body, and behavior, and on the powerful ways in which emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and behavioral factors can directly affect health. It regards as fundamental an approach that respects and enhances each person's capacity for self-knowledge and self-care, and it emphasizes techniques that are grounded in this approach."

National Center of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM)

## MIND-BODY TECHNIQUES

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Mind-Body techniques are a group of behavioral therapeutic exercises with approaches that may differ widely in their philosophical bases or in their methodologies and techniques.

Nevertheless, their primary objective is the achievement of non-directed relaxation, to elicit the relaxation response to enhance the body's remembered wellness rather than the direct achievement of a specific therapeutic goal, thus reducing the physiological and psychological effects of stress.

The intention and goal of any technique or method need to be set clear and upfront from the beginning. Mind/Body techniques should be used for health reasons and can be used to assist one in being more 'settled' to be able to experience more fully God who resides in us.

The health care system has moved from a biomedical model to a bio-pyscho-social model and has come around to acknowledging the bio-pyscho-social-spiritual model. Faith does play a part in health and wellness, as we all know.

Mind-body therapies can be used as effective adjuncts to conventional treatment for a number of common clinical conditions: headaches, high blood pressure, pain control, etc. The therapy techniques such as relaxation methods, cognitive-behavioral therapies, imagery, biofeedback, and 'meditation', which is the Relaxation Response technique.

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## MEDITATION

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Meditation has many definitions depending upon its context. Meditation it is either a brain exercise or an act of prayer. As an act of prayer, it is also a brain exercise.

Meditation is a SPIRITUAL EXERCISE if it's intended focus on or with God (one's Creator, Giver of all gifts, one who is Love loving unconditionally). As an act of prayer, its method would depend upon the particular religion and its different traditions. Many clinical scientists have now shared their conclusions – that we are wired for God.

It is A BRAIN EXERCISE if there is no one else but yourself being attentive to. Both have shown to have similar physiological changes. From the perspective of a humanist, it is promoted as an expanding 'felt-knowledge'.

## MINDFULNESS

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Mindfulness is a brain exercise since it focuses on one's outer world and inner landscape (thoughts, emotions, and feelings) practiced in a detached non-judgmental way (which helps to stop the internal critic from taking off and chattering away with abusive self-defeating thoughts). It can achieve a state of relaxation by a non-judgment response to one's present cognitive and emotional state.

In this 'meditative method' (spiritual {God focused} or non-material {brain activity}), it employs the concepts used in mind-body training as a way of dealing with intrusive thoughts that always come along.

Mindfulness is an excellent tool to increase 'awareness' of what is around and in us; which can lead to more of an awareness of God's creative ongoing action in our life.

## CENTERING

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There are numerous writings on different methods of creating a physical, mental, and emotional relaxation response. Scientists have studied and clinicians observed the physiological changes and have cataloged their subsequent health benefits related to a method of 'centering' one's attention on a focusing element as in a meditative practice.

## NOTE ON SAVORING

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Since we have a propensity for negativity due to an embedded evolutionary survival mechanism, we will store a negative event immediately in our long-term memory, while positive experiences most often are only in kept short-term memory. To help move positive experiences into our long-term memory, we need to spend a certain amount of time to allow them to sink in – in other words, hold them onto ourselves for 10-20 seconds in the form of savoring the images, feelings, and thoughts.



## WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

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Today the term spirituality is often used more to indicate a personal way of finding and acting on what is meaningful for us, which may or may not include God or others.

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## FINDING A HOME FOR THE SOUL

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Today the "body-mind-spirit" term is used in the self-help, wellness, and mind-body movements. More often than not, the 'spirit' is often presented as simply one's self-created driver that expresses one's personality in seeking meaning and purpose.

Finding a home for the term 'soul' in the integrative practices related to self-care, for me, it is the missing ingredient in the mind-body medicine and self-help care movement.

In my work, I have found too many who suffer from an existential and spiritual crisis that often produced depression, isolation, loneliness, and identity issues. Sharing with them about the reality of the eternal Soul, and Who created them helped to relieve some of the distress suffered.

- A definition I use is: **SPIRITUALITY IS AN EXTERNAL INTEGRATIVE MULTIDIMENSIONAL EXPRESSION OF ONE'S INTERIOR LANDSCAPE, ORIENTATION AND DISPOSITION OF THE HEART IN RELATION TO GOD, SELF, OTHERS, AND ALL OF CREATION.**

## AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL OF SELF-CARE FOR BODY AND SOUL

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An introduction evidence-based mind-body medicine methods to elicit the relaxation response for remembered wellness and increased resiliency supporting the goal of self-care to care for others through prayer and action.

- Soul - Prayer of Silent Love
  - A 2 Step Centering Meditation Method
  
- Body
  - Body-Breath Exercises
  - 8 Powers of the Soul
  - Other
  
- Mind - Two Integrative Methods for Mind-Soul Care
  - The Examen- Trinity
    - Jesuits of South Africa's in Finding God in all Things
  
  - Mind-Body Awareness & Cognitive Reappraisal
    - Stress Signals
    - Cognitive Reappraisal Exercise
    - Awareness & Cognitive Reappraisal Log

## COMMON STRESS WARNING SIGNALS

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### Physical Symptoms

Headaches	Back pain
Indigestion	Sleep difficulties
Stomachaches	Restlessness
Sweaty palms	Dizziness
Tight neck, shoulders	Tiredness
Racing heart	Ringing in ears

### Emotional Symptoms

Crying	Edginess - ready to explode
Nervousness, anxiety	Feeling powerless to change things
Boredom - no meaning to things	Anger or Loneliness
Easily upset	Unhappiness for no reason
Overwhelming sense of pressure	

### Cognitive Symptoms (Automatic Thoughts)

Trouble thinking clearly	Inability to make decision
Forgetfulness	Thoughts of running away
Lack of creativity	Constant worry
Memory loss	Loss of sense of humor

### Behavioral Symptoms

Excess smoking	Grinding of teeth at night
Bossiness	Overuse of Alcohol
Compulsive gum chewing	Compulsive Eating
Attitude critical of others	Inability to get things done

### Relational or Spiritual Symptoms

Isolating oneself  
Impatience  
Feeling a loss  
Loss of what gave comfort, and strength before  
Feeling hopeless or despair hope  
Questioning the meaning of life or suffering

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## BODY-SOUL-BREATH EXERCISES (WITH PRAYER)

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### MIND-BODY RESET

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A deep inhale and slow exhale, will create a **'reset'**

It is a way to **interrupt** the 'Fight or Flight' ( sympathetic system ) response and a way to trigger the body's relaxation response ( parasympathetic system).

Also:

- Stand up Straight - shoulder roll back
- Breathe Test – touch chest/then abdomen
- Breathe with sound - in ah and out ah haaaaaa

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### RELAXED BREATHING

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Abdominal Breathing Exercise is for anytime, or if you sense stress building up during the day.  
Take 1- 3minutes

- Sit quietly and rest hands on your stomach.
- Breathe in through your nose.
  - Feel your belly lift as you breathe in.
- Exhale through your mouth.

This is diaphragmatic breathing. It is part of any general relaxation and stress-reducing management method. Abdominal (or diaphragmatic) breathing is when we breathe in the diaphragm tightens, flattens and moves down, sucking air into the lungs. As the diaphragm moves down, it pushes the abdominal contents down, forcing the abdominal wall out.

**Try it**

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### WHEN RELAXED BREATHING BECOMES A PRAYER

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**A reminder of the reality – God is in here**

- Imagination- Genesis- God's breath
- Divine Milieu
- As Moment of Gratitude
- Calms the Interior Storms

## MIND-SOUL MINIS

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Anytime or if you sense stress building up during the day.

Take 1- 3minutes. Go into the silence.

Start off slowly take in several deep breaths through nose, and then out through your mouth then resume normal abdominal relaxed breathing

### **Mini-Centering**

Rest with your hand on your belly to use your breath as a focusing method.

Mentally say your favorite prayer or word or share with God you feelings and thoughts

### **Mini-Visualization** (Ignatian Contemplation)

Select a real or imaginary place

Imagine you are in your special place with Christ

Stay a while in this place while you breathe naturally yet slowly

Application of the Interior Senses

Use all your senses to see, touch, smell, taste : such as the breeze, the sounds, etc.

## BUILDING YOUR QUIETING REFLEX

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When you become aware of a stress reaction building up from a particular stressor, a long-standing worry, a new problem, or from a simple annoyance.

- Assume a relaxed position
- Go into the silence
- Inwardly gaze, to look at it the stressor
- **While looking at it, smile inwardly (ask God for assistance)**
- Inhale an easy slow natural breath
- While exhaling slowly, sense letting go of any tension in jaw, tongue, facial muscles, shoulders while you are imagining a warm wave flowing from head to toes (**leave it in God's hands for while**).

**Where is God when you look inward?**

Eventually, this will become a reflex – an automatic habit. Try it each and every time you feel stressed (even if it's a dozen times a day if you have to). **You will come to be greeted by God's loving embrace.**

## THE PSYCHOBIOLOGICAL FEEDBACK LOOP

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### THOUGHT-FEEL-BODY TEST

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Thoughts and feelings have corresponding reactions in our bodies.

- Did you know that when you think of a negative thought, for example, it produces negative sensations? Try it. Can you feel your body automatically tighten up?
- Next, change your thoughts to positive, do you feel your body automatically following?

When you find yourself thinking negatively, check where you sense tension in your body.

Or

When you become aware of the tension your body, check your thoughts. Change your thoughts to positive. ( See

**That is where talking to God comes in.**

### BODY-FEEL TEST

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Changing your posture will change your attitude.

Observe and sense how you feel about these two postures.

- Slump in your chair – how do you feel?
- Sit up or stand up straight with shoulder back – how do you feel?

If you find yourself 'down', sit up or stand up straight.  
And take a few deep breaths to reset yourself.

**Feel overwhelmed ? kneel down, let God take over.**

## BODY AWARENESS – NATURAL BIOFEEDBACK

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Training in body awareness, along with stretching and aerobic exercise, are tools that elicit the relaxation response in gaining a body understanding of yourself. You already have within an innate biofeedback system, called your autonomic nervous system.

Your body gives you physical cues when you are hungry or tired or stressed. You may choose to disregard or listen. Too many times, we ignore these cues. We try to ignore pain, just to cope with it. In the short run, this is not a positive coping strategy, and in the long run, it is detrimental since we 'shut it down' - as if chronically being detached from our body's cues.

How to become more in tune with your own biofeedback monitor is a body self-inquiry paying close attention to those tension spots.

Sit in a comfortable seated position or lie on the floor. Ask yourself these questions.

- What tension do I feel in my head?
- Tightness in my forehead?
- Am I clenching my jaw?
- Tightness in the back of my neck, throat, shoulders?
- Am I hot or cold?
- Am I holding my breath?
- Have I been clenching my fists?
- Do I have knots in my stomach?

Where you have tension, visualize the area, and take several Relaxed Abdominal Breaths. Wait it the tension to subside (**also time for a prayer of help**).

Muscle tension is natural to all movement and posture. Unnecessary tension wastes energy, leading to fatigue and other symptoms of dis-ease. What we are talking about is accumulated excessive muscle tension that may be related to emotional concerns, poor posture habits, or repetitive work habits.

Notice yourself throughout the day if you are building up tension since it comes in bit by bit. Chronic tension is less noticeable than an acute episode. Ask yourself those few questions to prevent buildup.

## BASIC MUSCLE RELAXATION TECHNIQUE

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Anytime or if you sense stress is building. Select a few muscle groups.

1. Tense a muscle, then let go of that tension.
- or
2. Stretch a muscle, then let go of the stretch.

Breathe in on tension or stretch, breathe out on release.

This resets the muscle.

## A FULL-BODY PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION

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This helps relieve muscle tension and increases our awareness of where we tend to hold our tension. It may take several sessions to master.

This is a technique that focuses on the slow, steady shortening or tensing of a muscle, flowed by a gradual relaxation phase in which you lengthen and release the muscle. The process is then repeated on other groups of muscles in succession.

Here you learn to identify areas in which extra stress or tension is being stored in your muscles and then you deliberately relieve that tension. Sit in a comfortable position or supine on a padded matt.

Contract/tighten each on inhalation, then release it on exhalation.

After release, then concentrate on the area to become aware of the relaxation.

Do the muscle groups top to bottom.

Each section should be tightened twice in each session.



## MIND-BODY CENTERING

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Two component parts:

1. A focusing element – for the mind, for the body - a word, sound, prayer, phrase.
2. The adoption of a passive attitude towards intruding thoughts and a return to the focusing element.

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### RESEARCH ON THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF A CENTERING ‘MEDITATION’

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#### Neuroplasticity and the Elicitation of the Relaxation Response

##### Physiological Changes

- Evokes an overall quieted in the brain, tested under Functional Brain Mapping
- Cortical Thickness – MRI Brain showed an increase in size in certain regions.
- Decreases hyperarousal reactivity of the Sympathetic Nervous System – Amygdala
- Enhanced immune response and endocrine function
- Promoted increased healing time
- Increased focus and attention in students
- Reduced high blood pressure

##### Treatment for

- Depression, Pain, Eating Disorders, Anxiety, Hypertension, Insomnia, Smoking cessation, Rumination, Worry, other stress related conditions
- Note: its complementary care not an alternative

##### Ongoing Research

- Increasing Resiliency
- Reduces Allostatic Loading
- Improves self-regulation
- Stress Buffering Effects
- Counters oxidative stress
- Slows rate of cellular aging
- Telomeres (end of chromosomes)
- Positive impact on others\*  
(increased wellness in self-reporting from patients on caregivers who meditated)

##### Self - Reported Effects

- Sense of calm and well-being that extends beyond time spent
- Increased capacity to handle difficult situation and emotions
- Better memory and attentional capacity
- Increased quality of life

## THERAPEUTIC PROCESS

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Behavior ← → Brain Activity ← → Brain Structure

MEDITATION IS A BEHAVIOR, A BIDIRECTIONAL PROCESS

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## NEUROSCIENCE OF MEDITATION

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Meditation changes brain structure as we see in practice dependent cortical plasticity such activities that are repetitive – music, sports.

Mediators had more activities in areas of sensory processing, had increased somatosensory activity, were better able to describe they could describe what it feels like – for example: sadness feels like heaviness in the chest, not just they were more in touch with their feeling.

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## MRI STUDIES

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### **Amygdala function roles:**

- In memory, decision making, processes our emotions and modulates our stress responses.
- As part of the limbic emotional tracking system it is on guard 24/7 keeping you safe from threats, in its rapid deployment, it engage our stress response system autonomic nervous system effects your target tissues working on the brains reward system.
- Amygdala's Promordial Intelligence
  - Sense its environment where am I; what is out there
  - Analyze incoming data
  - Effects a motor response: to mobilize or immobilize, to approach or avoid
  - Note: Meditation decreases the activity of the amygdala (it will respond to one's internal environment). It offers a sense of well-being and changes in perceived stress.

### **Prefrontal cortex function roles:**

- Working memory and selective attention
- Emotional-cognition interaction
- Moral decision-making

### **Insula thickening–functional roles of:**

- Integration of thoughts, senses and emotions
- Awareness and control of visceral processes – heart and breathing rates, hunger etc.
- Recognition of facial emotions
- It is smaller in bipolar and schizophrenic patients

### Other effects of Centering

- Increases selective attention and decreased distraction
- Faster reaction times, better sustained attention.

### Double blind study

Double blind study of therapist-in-training randomly assigned to learn meditation or waitlist. Continued giving standard treatment. Patients of therapist trained in meditation had better outcomes from the non mediators (controlled groups).

### Note:

Need 10-20 minutes in centering for the biological benefits

Need 10-20 seconds of savoring for positive thoughts to enter the long term memory

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## 2 STEP CENTERING CLINICAL MEDITATION

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1. The repetition of a word, phrase, sound, thought, image
2. The passive (non-judgmental) return to the repetition when other thoughts intrude.

### Entering into the Silence to elicits the Relaxation Response

Silence, Solitude, Stillness for Intention to Relax

Sit comfortable, feet on floor, hands on lap (best for circulation)

Take 2-3 deep breaths – slowly in through nose out mouth

Start your you Attention on Centering element

As thoughts intrude, passively return to you repetition Centering element

Best for 10-20minutes - daily after rising in the morning (and or early evening)

COMPARISON OF PRAYER OF SILENT LOVE MEDITATION VS.  
CONTEMPORARY MEDITATION/MINDFULNESS

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	<b>The Prayer of Silent Love Meditation</b>	<b>Contemporary Meditation &amp; Mindfulness</b>
Intention	To be with God and Self	To be with one's Self
Attention	On God	On Self
Focus Element	Sacred & Meaningful	Meaningful
Spiritual Exercise	Yes	No
Brain Exercise	Yes	Yes
Mind/Body/Soul	Mind/Body/Soul	Mind/Body
Elicits the Relaxation Response	Yes	Yes
Elicits the Remembered Wellness	Yes	Yes
Health Benefits	Yes	Yes
Evidenced Based	Thousands of Years of Human Experience in Various Religious Traditions / Current Science	Recent History ~ 50 years of Human Experience as a Health Intervention / Current Science
Satisfying Social Needs	with Another (God)	Alone
Transcendental/Mystical Experience	Transcendental and or Mystical Experience	Researched Transcendental Experience

## CENTERING: A MYSTICAL PRAYER FOR EVERY DAY

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Spend 1.4% of your 24 hours in a day to sit with God to experience an amazing gift of grace: one that is free, natural, and ecologically safe to benefit from its long-term effects to be healthier. Discover the science behind this most profound evidence-based method for prayer life.

### Into the Silence

What has been used on for over 2000 years Christians is the most profound yet simple method of being with God that is rooted in our Jewish heritage thousands of years before, and in many other religions just as long. one which Jesus must have prayed when in the desert for 40 days, or when He took respite time during those intense 3 years of ministering calling on Abba.

The method has had many variations: the *Jesus Prayer* or Prayer of the Heart (repeating a word or phrase), while in these contemporary times, we have *Centering Prayer* ( begins with a word or phrase but leave it as we rest).

I refer to this minor variation as *the prayer of Silent Love* – it is one of just holding our hearts and souls with God.

Note: Researchers have studied the effects of centering on the mind and body of TM meditators, Catholic monastic nuns, Buddhist priests, long term lay meditators for health, and patients using it for health on a short term basis.

## CENTERING: A PRAYER OF SILENT LOVE

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*The Intention is to be with God, the Holy Spirit as the centering Attention*

**A Centering** is a prayer time of intentional silence (outward and inward) to rest into the experience of just being with God as the beloved of our Creator, the Life, and Giver of grace.

- ‘Centering’ as in moving our Attention towards our breathing or a focusing element which will allow our minds, filled with multiple layers of thoughts and images, so as to not be scattering off on its own.
- ‘Prayer’ as in an Intentional time spent acknowledging Whose (God) we are in relationship to who we are, always in union, and within a communication that has no need for words or actions.

**A 2 Step Method** (as written in secular meditation practices to elicit the Relaxation Response)

1. The repetition of a word, phrase, sound, thought, image
2. The passive (non-judgmental) return to the repetition when other thoughts intrude (it is not repeated over and over again during our time in prayer.)

**The 3 Avenues for a Centering Element for the repetition**

- A prechosen Word or Image or Sound for the Centering element that reminds you of Love loving (select which fits best for you since each uses a different part of brain)
- Lectio Divina’s Contemplatio phase – a chosen or listen for what word or phrase God has for you in ‘sitting with’ as the Centering element
- Your Breath as the Centering element

**Word Examples of Centering Element**

- Jesus, Abba, Peace, Shalom, Christos, Ave Maria, Deo Gratia, Love, Joy

**Method for Disposition of the Heart in the Prayer of Silent Love**

Entering into the Silence elicits the Relaxation Response during a prayerful time.

- Silence, Solitude, Stillness for Intention
- Sit comfortable, feet on floor, hands on lap (best for circulation)
- Take 2-3 deep breaths – slowly in through nose for count of 3– then out mouth 5 count
- Start your Centering Element to allow for Attention
- As thoughts intrude, passively return to your repetition Centering Element
- Best for 10-20minutes - daily after rising in the morning (and or early evening)

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## MINI-CENTERING

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- Anytime or if you sense stress building up during the day
- Assume a relaxed position. Go into the silence
- Take 1- 3minutes
- Start off slowly take in several deep breaths through nose, and then out through your mouth
- Then resume normal abdominal relaxed breathing
- Mentally pray a phrase or a word that directs you towards God as you breathe out, or
- Just sit in silence holding your hearts together.

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## HELPFUL HINTS

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Sitting with eyes ½ opened is not suggested for beginners; it will be too distracting.

Select a focusing element on what has meaning for you or just your breath.

How to stop the wandering or busyness of your mind. Monkey Mind is a term used to describe the excessive brain activity that can interrupt the elicitation of the relaxation response [RR] during a mediation. Just let your feelings, thoughts, and images drift away from your awareness. Do not entertain them or follow them.

When we have an overloaded, stressed life, we can find it hard to concentrate, learn new things, or fall asleep. Even our muscles clench out of habit. The first thing we must acquire is a passive attitude for our thoughts. Think of your mind as a calm lake with birds flying over. The lake is your mind, and the birds are your thoughts. Our brains are always functioning evening sleep; they do not shut off if so we would be brain dead.

The brain will always be feeding up thoughts, images, and feelings; that is its job. It's on 24/7. But that does not mean we have to pay attention to all of them all of the time. We are tempted.

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## AN INTERGRATIVE SELF-AWARENESS ASSESSMENT FOR MIND & SOUL

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Practicing appreciations can generate a sense of balance, especially when life is being influenced by difficulties that generate much stress. It is also helpful to cultivate appreciation in relation to oneself, others, and life in general since these categories are often a source of our stress.

Appreciation is a central component of this work in reducing the effects of stress. And more importantly is savoring, spending time in reflecting upon the good.

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WE NEED 5 POSITIVE EXPERIENCES TO OFFSET 1 NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE. NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES GO RIGHT INTO OUR LONG-TERM MEMORY, WHILE POSITIVE ONE REMAIN IN SHORT TERM MEMORY UNLESS WE SAVOR THEM FOR 10-20 SECTIONS.

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## THE TRINITY: AN EXAMEN PRAYER OF GRACED AWARENESS

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The Examen is a prayer of graced awareness in reflecting upon encountering God's presence and action in our everyday: to see the day as it was through the eyes of Christ; to discern the Holy Spirit's leading direction for us; and to respond to the Father's loving invitation for renewal and rejoicing.

### 5 Steps of the Examen

1. **Review** (Awareness)
2. **Reflect** (Insight)
3. **Respond** (Reappraise)
4. **Gratitude** (Disposition)
5. **Commitment** (Hope)



## JESUITS OF SOUTH AFRICA EXAMEN

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The Daily Examen is a prayerful experience of God. Experience alone does not teach us much, it is when we reflect on our experience that we really begin to learn. The Examen can help us see God's hand in our daily-lived experience. It's a simple prayer that has the capacity to transform our lives by helping us become more aware – of the gifts.

### Step 1 Preparation

- Slow your mind and calm your body and gently relax into God's presence. Imagine God welcoming you.

### Step 2 Review the Day with Gratitude

- Ask God to show you the day through God's eyes. Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God.
- Notice any joys and delights, and focus on the day's gifts.
- Look at the day, look at the work you did, look at the people you interacted with. What did you receive from them? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details.

### Step 3 Review the Day Again Notice Your Feelings

- Notice moments when you were fully alive, times when you felt at peace, joyful, happy, comforted, whole, your best self, and moments when you feel close to God. Allow some of these moments to come to mind. These are times of consolation.
  - Pick a moment that you feel **most grateful for** and stay with it, savor it.
  - Notice how God is drawing you to more of those experiences. Take some time to give thanks to God.
- Now remember anything that you are **less grateful for**. Experiences that caused you to feel drained of energy, frustrated, irritated, angry, sad, alone, isolated, unaccepted, fragmented...less than your best self.
  - Bring these memories before God; ask God to bring you the healing you need.

### Step 4 Choose one feature of the day and pray from it

- Asked the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may involve a feeling - positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person, or moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may seem something that's rather insignificant. Look at it.
- Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart. Whether it be intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude

### Step 5 Look Forward to Tomorrow with Hope

- Look forward to tomorrow. Ask God to give you grace for tomorrow's challenges.
- Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what is coming up. Are you doubtful, cheerful, apprehensive, full of delightful anticipation?
- What do you think you particularly need for tomorrow, strength, energy, patience, courage? Asked for that gift.

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## MIND-BODY AWARENESS & COGNITIVE REAPPRAISAL

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As previously listed, the Examen is a time for reflection and awareness that includes cognitive reappraisal where we look to evaluate our actions, thoughts, intentions and feelings.

We can also reflect back on the day in noticing those signals of stress and what adaptive coping responses we automatically or deliberately chose.

1. Become aware of your common stress warning signals.
2. Become more aware of your immediate response to stressors that maybe reflected in negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.
  - Reframe your responses towards positive adaptive thoughts, beliefs, feelings and behaviors; and consider the way of wisdom if it is a problem solving or acceptance situation.

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.*

## COGNITIVE REAPPRAISAL EXERCISE

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Stress is a signal that change is needed, and our body lets us know it before we are fully aware.

Jot down a stressful event and then list some of your Stress Responses: Physical Signs (Sensations), Behaviors, Emotions/Feelings, and Automatic Thoughts you had as a result.

Under the Automatic Thoughts/ Conditioned Beliefs section notice if your thoughts focused on what you don't want or did not serve you well, (thoughts are maladaptive if they do not serve you well).

### TWO APPROACHES

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- **Problem-solving** is used with stressors you can positively influence to mitigate or eliminate.
  - For example, if you are not getting enough sleep, you alter the situation with strategies that can help you improve your sleep habits.
  - If your diet is unhealthy, you can take steps to improve it.
- **Acceptance** is used with stressors with which you have little or no influence.
  - For example, being extra tall in stature. Nothing you do will change. First is to accept and then find a positive meaning in it.
  - “Milking the situation for meaning,” leads to acceptance. To do this, you would ask yourself:
    - *How has this experience changed me in a positive way?*
    - *What have I learned? (THE EXAMEN)*
    - *Are there others who have been able to make positive meaning from this?*

Sometimes, painful situations that are out of our control leave us feeling like we “could have done something” or “should have said something.” It is important to understand that acceptance is not about “giving up” or “giving in.” Rather, it is about finding a better adaptive response to a situation.

AWARENESS & COGNITIVE REAPPRAISAL LOG

Stressor/Stressful Event: \_\_\_\_\_

Physical Signs (Sensations)	Behaviors	Emotions/Feelings (with their Underlying Beliefs are reflected in Thoughts)	Automatic Thoughts (Notice these thoughts typically focus on what you don't want, the thoughts are maladaptive if they do not serve you well)	Cognitive Distortions (are a product of core beliefs that are negative)	Adaptive Desirable Positive Emotions & Feelings	Adaptive Desired Positive Thoughts – Beliefs (Intentionally focus on what you deeply want, what you desire when in RR)

Stress Responses:  
 The first 5 columns correspond to Stress Warning Signals and Stress Activating Responses.  
 Notice how Negative Emotions and Feelings are linked to Cognitive Distortions that have deep unique Conditioned Maladaptive Beliefs.

Coping Key:  
 Negative, Irrational Thoughts (thought that don't served you) = Thought Distortions in need of Cognitive Reappraisal and Restructuring  
 Negative, Rational Thoughts that represent what's under your influence = Approach is Problem-Solving  
 Negative, Rational Thoughts that represent what you cannot influence = Approach is Acceptance, then look to find or create positive meaning

## THE 8 POWERS OF THE SOUL – SELF CARE

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IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND THOMISTIC VIEW ON THE POWERS OF THE SOUL & EVIDENCE-BASED MIND-BODY MEDICINE METHODS FOR STRESS REDUCTION AND INCREASED RESILIENCY

We human beings were created with a body and soul. St. Thomas Aquinas used the term - Ensouled bodies or Embodied souls.

The outline I use here is as a model for an integrative self-care is taken from a program offered by the Thomistic Institute titled Aquinas 101. I apologize in advance that I can not even begin to do justice to provide an introduction. Nevertheless I use the listing of the powers as a demonstration model.

Our human soul is a Rational Soul with certain powers for certain operations. These first two are only in the human soul which are the prime actors in the lower operations of the human soul, are spiritual powers

- Intellect – our ability to know
- Will - our ability to love

These five operations below are shared with Animals who have a Sense Soul

- Sense Cognition
- Sense Appetite
- Locomotion

These three operations are shared with the Vegetative or Plant Soul

- Reproduction – ensuring the next generation
- Growth – development from child to adult
- Self-Nutrition

What you will find in the { } sections are my notes as it relates to self-care and wellness considerations. There is a right order or hierarchy of caring for the body to allow it to function as optimally as possible within its limitations, , in particular under stress. Our bodies are constantly communicating within itself and redirecting resources to maintain ‘allostasis’ – the body’s balancing mechanism. Since we do have limits, we are called to be intentional and reflective in how we proceed.

These first two are only in the **Human Soul (Rational Soul)**, they exercise and perfect the lower operations ( powers).

- **Intellect (Intellectual Cognition)** how we can grasp the nature of things – the essence to extract the abstract – our ability to know - associated with seeking truth and the highest Truth (God).
  - *Ignatian - Find out what you are good at and love to do, discern, there you will find joy, there you will find God*
- **Will** – (Rational Appetite) - the power that includes us to what is apprehended as good or fitting. It is our ability to love – and associated with seeking the good and the highest Good (God)

God is the highest Truth and Good

The Intellect and the Will are associated with Knowing and Loving

Pope Benedict: “Love is the desire for the good of the other, and doing with we can without our means.” Knowing is the wisdom of what to do and if you can.

St. Ignatius – Love is in action.

These five operations below are shared with animals who have an **Animal Soul (Sense Soul)**  
Sensory powers are common to animals and humans.

- Locomotion
  - a. Self-care
    - i. Deep abdominal breathing
    - ii. Walk for cardiorespiratory fitness allows for a warm up to stretch and then strengthen muscles.
      1. Research – Negative effects of a sedentary lifestyle (increases cellular aging) on the preservation of telomeres, which function as the protective regions of our DNA, which are found at the ends of our chromosomes, they help maintain genetic stability (University of California San Diego School of Medicine). People who sit 10 hours a day have shorter telomers.
- Sense Cognition – has 5 external senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell
  - a. Mind-body techniques
    - i. Mindfulness - be aware of our surroundings.
    - ii. Progressive Muscle Relaxation
  - b. The Examen – What did I experience, how did I feel, react
  - c. Time for quiet- savor the physical experiences of the gifts of sight etc
  - d. Music Therapy –
    - i. Experiences are spiritual when they are God directed
- Sense Appetite – has 4 internal senses – {TBD - Ignatian way related to desires – satisfied the good, not the inordinate or disordered - be aware of our thoughts and feelings that lead to action. Ask what was the underlying intention of our actions?}
  - Common Sense (coordinates sense experience
    - a. Reflect - what has really been going on
  - Imagination (generates sense images)
    - a. Ignatian Contemplation

- b. Guided Imagery
- Memory (storage sense images)
  - a. Savoring the good, true and beautiful
- Estimate powers (animal reason)
  - a. TBD

These three below humans and animals are shared these operations with **Plant Soul (Vegetative Soul)**

- Self-nutrition – preserve one's own existence.
  - {2 L water – 3 meals portions – eat colors}
- Growth – helps to come to full term from infant to adult
  - Life-long learning
  - Laugh 3x a day
- Reproduction – hand on the fullness of bodily life to ensure the species endure beyond the next generation.
  - Pass it on -mentoring, share your gifts for the greater glory of God

**We also need restorative sleep and social support to reduce stress and increase our coping ability.**