

Prayer

A survey of Americans on prayer reported that around 90 percent of Americans pray, including a large number who pray at least once a day.

Engaging in ritual activities, such as prayer or meditation, promotes relaxation, which is characterized by lowered blood pressure, heart rate, breathing rate and metabolic rate. This may have a protective effect, particularly against high blood pressure.

Developing your spirituality

Spirituality is an evolving process. It's shaped by your upbringing, personality and experiences, and it matures as you age.

Going through life transitions can affect your awareness of spiritual matters and highlight your spiritual needs. At a basic level, spirituality is linked to self-discovery and the development of your inner self.

Attending religious services, joining a charitable organization and volunteering in your community are a few ways to express and expand the spiritual side of your life. Many people find that these activities bring an added sense of

purpose to their lives as they see their time and talents put to positive use.

Many people use prayer or meditation to reflect on their inner lives. Sometimes, just shutting off the television and sitting quietly can help you get in touch with inner thoughts and feelings. Writing down your thoughts can help you sort them out and allow you to examine them later.

Still other people find inner spirituality — what they often term *inner peace* — through music, dance, art or exploration of nature.

To help you gain a better understanding of yourself and become more acquainted with your spiritual side, ask yourself the following questions:

- What gives my life meaning and purpose?
- What gives me hope?
- How do I get through tough times? In what circumstances do I generally find comfort?
- How do I connect to my place of worship? (If you belong to a religious community.)
- What are my three most memorable experiences in my life so far?
- How have I survived previous losses and transitions in my life?

- What helps get me through the daily grind?
- When — a particular time or instance — did I feel that all was right with the world? What caused me to feel that way?
- When — a particular time or instance — did I feel my life was particularly meaningful? What caused me to feel that way?
- Was there a time when I was filled with a sense of awe?

A final example

Imagine a person admitted to the hospital with advanced cancer. Aggressive chemotherapy and radiation are ordered to give this person a fighting chance — but what are the odds? How will this person tolerate the treatments and how will he or she handle this ordeal?

Clinical experience and overwhelming evidence show that attitude, social support and spiritual factors will all have some bearing on how this person will fare.

That's not to say that simply thinking happy thoughts or meditating will make the cancer go away — biology is a fact of life. However, when faced with

this problem, the individual who will do well, whether that's being cured or having a peaceful end-of-life transition, typically has a number of characteristics:

- A partner or advocate that connects with the person and can speak on his or her behalf.
- A sense of community — whether it's faith based, socially based, or simply a camaraderie of friends — for support and encouragement.
- An acknowledgment that life isn't always fair and that the good guys don't always win. But with an equal acknowledgment that we each have gifts to share.
- Some element of spirituality — a belief in a power or an energy above him- or herself that can be a source of comfort and strength.

It may not be a quick recipe for survival, but it certainly helps.