

THE QUEST

**Maximizing Health & Wellness
Through Spiritual Healing**

Raphael Ferraro

THE QUEST: Maximizing Health & Wellness Through Spiritual Healing

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Maximizing Health and Wellness Through Spiritual Healing

by

Raphael Ferraro

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**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**

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 to this all omnipotent power. It has been recorded that where our relationship to this force is weak—resulting in an insufficient energy flow between us and it—sickness or poor health occurs; while where the energy flow is strong, health and wellness abound.

In life, one important task an individual can accomplish is to promote health and wellness for himself and others so that human 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 obtain and utilize the power of God for the benefit of ourselves and others. Nor should our healing be restricted to this method, for spiritual healing—God’s creative and benevolent power working through us to heal—should complement the wondrous results often achieved by medicine, science and therapy. Spiritual healing can heal both the body and mind, and result in wellness: the experience of joy, contentment and elation brought about through the awakening of the core of our being—the spirit.

In this country and abroad various movements in the religious and medical community reflect a growing interest in the role of religion and spirituality on the healing process. As early as 1954, an Academy of Religious and Mental Health was established in the United States to further communication between the religious professions and healing. The National Institutes of Health has in the past established an Office of 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 forty-five hundred hospitals. Besides adhering to a medical code of ethics, these healers were also required to work closely with clergy, hospital personnel, and physicians.

The reported data concerning the effects of prayer on healing is encouraging. Reverend David Wilkerson, author of *The Cross and the Switchblade*, claims seventy-five percent of the addicts he treated through prayer were cured of their addiction. This figure compares well with the five-percent cure of addicts attributed to federal hospitals. In his text, *Healing*, Francis Macnutt 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. Dr. Larry Dossey’s informative book, *Healing Words*, states that the result of examining 130 scientific studies pertaining to prayer was that prayer was effective in bringing about change in organisms ranging from bacteria to humans. And Reverend Theodore E. Dobson’s

handbook, *How to Pray for Spiritual Growth*, relates that the 1200 professionals belonging to ACT (Association of Christian Therapists) found therapy combined with healing prayer was more effective than therapy used by itself, cutting the sessions to about one-quarter or more of the normal time. Also, it is important to mention the admirable work of Dr. Herbert Benson of Harvard Medical School whose book *Beyond the Relaxation Response* introduced the term "Faith Factor," a concept which when practiced can relieve many human ailments. Another of Dr. Benson's texts, *Timeless Healing*, is filled with data and observations on the physical and mental effects of healing resulting from religion and spirituality.

Once a subject of limited interest, spiritual healing has today gained wider acceptance and credibility as a technique for healing. For instance, one-third of the nation's medical schools now offer courses in spirituality. A study of American doctors conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago indicated that 81% of the doctors believed that "better clinical outcomes can result directly from a patient's spirituality." And, more importantly, in recent years informative seminars and workshops have been offered across the nation dealing with the role of spirituality in healing. These workshops have been attended both by medical professionals and lay persons.

Readers are invited to participate in a series of psycho-spiritual exercises, a program aimed at spiritual growth, emphasizing in particular the means through which we can achieve health and wellness. Activities are presented in a logical and sequential order in a manner best suited to purge the superfluous and detrimental elements of human nature and to strengthen and aid the body and mind in developing new ways of thinking and acting. The regimen presented in this text also seeks to release us from those human shortcomings which enchain the human spirit by dissipating our energies, distracting us from seeking and obtaining knowledge and experience of God.

The Quest

Each of us plods through life burdened with duties and responsibilities, desiring and sometimes seeking to develop our spiritual gifts. We wish to realize ourselves—expand our minds, reform our characters, stimulate our psyches—either through our own makeshift methods or by attending one of the more structured courses for self-improvement such as Arica, Psycho-cybernetics, or Bioenergetic Therapy. We are asleep in need of awakening; we are weak in need of strength; we are fragmented in need of wholeness. 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.

This constant drive to improve our lives is but an inkling of a basic need to recognize our nature and fulfill our destinies. Even the readiness to seek improvement is an achievement, if a small one. It does not matter whether this calling is termed “a return to one’s origin,” “a change in consciousness,” “a quest for reconciliation and fulfillment,” or “a transformation of the personality”; for ultimately, however expressed, this yearning to fulfill our potential is the soul’s need to unite itself with the power of the universe, the fount from which all life springs and the source from which all life receives sustenance.

This power or force which we seek pervades 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 juices in 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, or 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, Max Long describes *mana* as a stream of white luminous light capable of performing miraculous deeds, including healing.

Indian 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 in turn 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*. A *chi* imbalance in the system is the cause of illness. Used in a specific and prescribed manner, short and long needles are stuck into the body at particular locations 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. As early as the Greeks, Hippocrates claimed to have discovered an omnipresent force in organisms called *enomron*. In the fifteenth century, the chemist and physician Paracelsus's experiments led him to believe in a universal essence called the *archaeus*. In the next century, Jan Baprista van Halmont, a Flemish physician, wrote about a "universal fluid" uniting all phenomena and bonding all matter. In the seventeenth century, Dr. Robert Fludd described the existence of a "supercelestial force" inherent in all nature. And in the mid 1800s, Karl von Reichenback, a German chemist, 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. These modern experiments include a project conducted at McGill University in Canada to examine the effects of energy projected from human hands. In 1963, Dr. Bernard Grad, a biologist at the university, snipped skin from hundreds of mice. Separating the mice, he placed his hands over designated cages filled with mice for a specific time each day. He found the skin wounds of the selected mice healed more rapidly than the wounds of the other mice unexposed to the energy emitted from his hands. In 1971, Graham and Anita Walkins at the Institute for Parapsychology conducted an interesting experiment—a healer sent energy to anesthetized mice placed in another room. The results found those mice recovered and returned to their regular activity more rapidly than other mice in the same room on whom the healer did not concentrate. Unlike Dr. Grad's earlier project, this experiment avoided harming the mice and eliminated the lengthy waiting period for their wounds to heal. At Rosary Hill College in New York, another biologist, Sister Justa Smith, working with a healer named Colonel Oskar Estebany verified the accelerated growth of trypsin simply by Estebany placing his hands over a test tube containing the cell-repairing enzyme. Smith noted that the energy emitted from Estebany's hands was similar in strength to the force surrounding a strong magnetic field.

Worldwide, the evidence is mounting that energy associated with life and change can be detected and observed. More and more, studies substantiate the existence of an invisible but powerful field of energy about each of us, capable of being utilized and directed for the healing of ourselves and others. We read about the "human aura" documentation of Thelma Moss at UCLA; the variety of techniques for photographing energy fields innovated by Semyon and Valentian Kirliian; the Russian biologist, Dr. V.M. Inyushin, who has demonstrated the relationship between various diseases and the deterioration of "bioplasma;" and the research of biologist Dr. Pavel Gulyaiev, another Russian, who invented a sensitive device called an "electroauragram" for charting the energy field surrounding humans.

It has been recorded that the energy within us and about us and around us is a manifestation of God's 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 do we become as channels of its beneficent 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. Let us consider the comments of some well-known contemporary healers concerning their understanding of this marvelous power.

Agnes Sanford's classic *The Healing Light* 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 healee who is in need of spiritual refurbishment. Sanford advises that when filled with this healing energy, one must always thank God for it.

The late Olga Worrall practiced the healing ministry for many years. Willing to share her knowledge with others, Olga lectured and demonstrated her gift for healing before various medical and scientific groups. To become a clear channel for God's power, Olga prepared herself through prayer and visualization. Believing herself in the presence of the Divine, she first sensed God's power working within her before visualizing spiritual energy flowing out from her hands and into the afflicted person.

Francis McNutt, the author of various texts on healing, actively shares his gift for healing both in this country and abroad. McNutt characterizes the healing power of God 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 writes, "depends not only on the healer's faith but also on how much energy the healer channels into the healee." Some who receive this energy are overwhelmed, falling to the floor as if asleep, "resting in the spirit" for a few minutes up to six hours.

Reverend Ralph DiOrio is a well-known Catholic priest blessed with the gift of healing. During a healing service, Reverend DiOrio senses a warmth first in his hands and then throughout his body, a sensation which builds to an intense heat. 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 and into the healee. 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 faith, trust, and confidence in God will help us to gain access to an enormous beneficent energy capable of healing and transforming ourselves and others.

In seeking this salutary power, we can profit from the words of those who have pursued this same grand adventure. To this end, ample references to relevant authors and texts 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 God's healing power. On this inward journey, we can also learn much from an experienced mentor. If we desire such direction, we should seek a person knowledgeable of human nature and the ways of the spirit. A mentor can be a bulwark against error and discouragement. Ultimately, however, our individual efforts and the grace of God working in our lives will determine our success in this most challenging and rewarding adventure to heal and transform ourselves and others.

Tools for the Quest

Our quest for healing power can consume much of our time and strength. It can result in mental and physical fatigue. The extreme demands of our search can leave us victims of our fragile natures, handicapped by the detrimental effects of stress. Stress often hampers our ability to act quickly and effectively; it obstructs the flow of energy, preventing our performing with any degree of success. Stress is unavoidable and at times even beneficial in challenging us to bring forth the best within us; but, needless to say, it is worthwhile to have available the means for dealing with excessive stress so that we are not overcome by its adverse effects in our striving to experience God's power.

Attitudes, Thoughts and Ideas

The wrong 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, placing others before themselves, 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 God's salubrious power.

Those on the quest for healing power must discipline themselves to pray, meditate, and focus on the energy of God growing within them each day. They must reach out to the homeless and the poor. They must oppose war and violence, hate and prejudice. They must see the world and its riches as a snare for those who seek to experience the greater kingdom of God. Their guide should be to lessen in any way they can the suffering, pain, or hurt of others. To actualize these spiritual ways of thinking is obviously difficult and may cause individuals to experience an enormous amount of stress and anxiety.

We must examine whether what we think, say, and do is for our good and for the good of others. 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, we must turn to God and through prayer and affirmation 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, overcoming the stress we initially experienced when our lives were more concerned with ourselves than with others.

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-three different life changes, both positive— marriage, obtaining a promotion, taking a vacation—as well as negative. 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, while the more severe the change the greater the demands required of us.

Suggestions for Dealing with Change

First of all, 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 T'ai 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 Relaxation 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.

T'ai 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. T'ai 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 T'ai Chi for twenty to twenty-five minutes twice a day.

Relaxation Exercises

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 the following:

1. Slows the heart beat.
2. Lowers the blood pressure.
3. Eases muscle tension.
4. Decreases 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 to be 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.

Breathing 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, first 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.

Memory, imagination, and reason often hold us captive to the illusory world. Dealing with these obstacles through a proper mental discipline allows us to transcend appearances and to experience 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 mental stimuli 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, abeyance of mental activity will foster a stillness of mind, a quiescence through which God's healing power will be accessible to us.

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 the Divine burns, waiting to be fanned by our love and effort. Meditation will ignite this flame into a blazing torch, incinerating the debris of our lives and filling us to bursting with the power of God.

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. Watch stray thoughts pass like a stream. 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 of God 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. Since an abundance of nutritional information is available, interested readers are advised to learn more about this vital subject through wider reading and research. For others, a general knowledge of nutrition is important, and to that end this section will address itself.

Most people claim their daily food intake is from the basic four food groups, but research indicates the opposite. The average American derives almost 90 percent of his calories from food of little nutritional value—white flour, sugar and fat. Further, between 70 and 90 percent of this total food intake is from processed foods. Each of us also consumes about 130 pounds of sugar each year. Is it any wonder that large numbers of Americans suffer from diseases association with excessive intakes of these substances!

The author has summarized guidelines for improving and increasing our energy levels through nutrition. In following these suggestions, readers with a health problem should seek professional advice before making any changes in their eating habits, especially in respect to fasting and supplementation. Also, those individuals uncertain whether or not to follow a new nutritional plan would do well to be cautious.

First, what we eat, how we eat, and when we eat all influence our energy level. Fresh, living, and unprocessed foods provide more nourishment than processed foods and are to be preferred to hydrated, canned, and overcooked

foods. Foods associated with high energy levels and good health are vegetables and fruits, especially when consumed raw. Lean meat and fish along with beans, nuts, milk, and cheese are excellent sources of protein. Greasy and fried foods are to be avoided, while stimulating drinks containing caffeine such as coffee, tea, and soft drinks disturb the nervous system and should be taken sparingly, if at all. The same restriction applies to alcoholic drinks, though in their case they act as depressants. Fiber and roughage is most important. We must keep our bodies cleansed of impurities and toxins by eating the necessary foods to reduce the amount of time waste materials remain in the colon. As we grow older, we should eat less and lighter foods, for in our later years proper elimination is most important since it takes four or five times longer for bodily waste products to leave the system than when we were younger. Also, since many degenerative diseases are related to intestinal stasis, eating fruits, vegetables, and whole grains will help prevent this unhealthy physical condition.

Eating less is healthier than eating more, while thorough mastication is always helpful in digestion. 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 emotionally disturbed, digestion will be incomplete. Likewise, when we are hurried or breathless. Always, we should be grateful for our food, thanking God for providing us with sustenance and nourishment.

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 can differ from slightly to drastically. 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 aphorisms to the current journals, magazines, and books containing information written by biochemists, doctors, and psychiatrists. For example, there is the Ayurveda Nutritional Plan, the No-Aging Diet recommended by Dr. Benjamin Frank, and the Psycho-Dietetics program recommended by Dr. Cheraskin and Dr. Ringsdorf. Also, 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 one may have 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 contribute to fatigue, hypertension, depression, illness, and disease; other foods increase our stamina, energy, and vitality. Though advice on diet is copious, practicing sound nutritional habits is often difficult. Laziness and self-indulgence are our worst enemies, preventing us from achieving better health. Those on the spiritual quest must work to overcome these vices, realizing that in conjunction with exercise, meditation, and relaxation, nutrition is a powerful tool in strengthening us to become healthy instruments through which the power of

God can more easily assert itself.

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 few physical demands are required of us. 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 difficulties and will also strengthen us in anticipation of emergencies such as emotional crises and sudden illnesses. Exercise involving the muscles and joints increases inflexibility and keeps muscles firm, strong, and shapely. Such exercises include sit-ups, push-ups, weight lifting, and stretching. Just as important as strength and flexibility is cardiorespiratory fitness. Aerobic exercises—jumping rope, cycling, walking, and swimming—keep the blood vessels of the heart from atrophying as well as increasing lung capacity.

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 text 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 comfortable on the floor with your arms along your sides. Keeping your knees stiff, raise your legs slowly using your hands against the lower back as 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. Attempt to relax, inhaling and exhaling very slowly. Hold this position for about one minute and then slowly 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 twenty-minutes once a day to thirty-minutes three

to five times a week. The schedule selected should suit one's circumstances with the particular activities appropriate to various personalities and physical conditions. Working out should be enjoyable, the activities performed slowly, without hurry, strain, or excessive exertion, progressing from the easy and simple exercises to the more complex and difficult ones. Stretching and warming up is recommended before exercising; relaxing and cooling down is suggested afterwards. For maximum benefit, exercise at least two hours after or one hour before meals. Very important: immediately cease exercising if there is a marked shortness of breath or any chest pains. If you are over thirty-five or a health problem exists, get a doctor's approval before pursuing an agenda of exercise. Finally, 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 individuals much stress and anguish which in turn will distract them from focusing on their spiritual 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 us to flow more freely, we can also voice our frustrations—not suppress them—confide in a friend 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 foibles will help us cope with the debilitating effects of stress and significantly tame the turmoil in our lives which often prevents us from experiencing God's 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 whose task it is to externalize those images which impress it. 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 the subconscious to actualize.

Visualization is most effective when practiced in a relaxed state of mind called *passive concentration*. Effort inhibits success, often resulting in anxiety and stress. This undesirable response is called “the principle of paradoxical intentions.” We can avoid this unproductive situation by relaxing our bodies and refraining from strenuous effort whenever we practice visualization.

Although our goal is 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 slouched, 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 free 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 recalcitrant images. First, we visualize a meaningful image and hold it firmly and vividly in mind—a person, a scene, an object. Observing the image, we watch it develop a life and freedom of its own, its activity directed by the subconscious. The images evoked through *active imagination* energize mental imagery while the sequence of events or the specific narratives they unfold can be quite instructive about our little understood needs, abilities, and frustrations.

Active imagination establishes a channel for conflicts confined in the dark subconscious to gain access to the light of consciousness through the medium of mental pictures. 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. Dr. Assagioli pioneered the use of the imagination in fostering self-actualization through the visualization of such images as the Legend of the Grail, the Blossoming Rose, and Dante's Pilgrimage through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. This process involves reflecting on the symbolism of the images, introjecting or identifying with them, and finally 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 for practicing these and other useful imaging exercises.

Dr. Carl Happich, a former Darmstadt 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, a stimulation offering much therapeutic benefit to the individual.

Happich's program begins by first relaxing the body and mind through breathing exercises. With this accomplished, various scenes are created, beginning with the *meadow meditation*. In this exercise, we visualize a tall 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. The third visualization is called the *chapel meditation*. In this scene, we pass through a grove and note a small, picturesque chapel. We 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 "archetypal" 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 God's 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, enabling God's healing power to rise within us like a phoenix

from the ashes of our darker selves.

Below are suggested activities to expand our visualization skills. Substitute your own images for those which for one reason or another may be undesirable to you. Practice the various visualizations until the sensations they represent become as vivid as possible.

Visualization Exercises

Sight:

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

Sound:

- raindrops on a slated roof
- melody played on the piano
- a fog horn
- cry of a seagull
- voices of people you love
- ticking of a gold pocket watch
- bouncing tennis ball
- jingle of sleigh bells
- crackling of burning logs
- 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

Smell:

- buttered popcorn
- freshly cut hay
- a bar of soap
- brewing coffee

- favorite perfume or cologne
- roses in bloom
- hot pizza
- roasted chestnuts
- chicken soup
- salty sea breeze

Taste:

- crunch a piece of toast
 - chew a pear, apple or peach
 - drink a cool glass of juice
 - taste an almond or a cashew
 - lick an ice cream cone
-
- bite into a peanut butter and jelly sandwich
 - sip a cold glass of lemonade
 - eat a piece of pizza
 - chew some carrot sticks or celery
 - taste a roasted chestnut

Picture a real or imaginary place you would like to visit. Select a peaceful spot where you will be relaxed and comfortable—a farm, a cabin, a seashore.

For example, utilizing all the senses, picture a farm. Hear the sounds of white and black cows munching long clumps of grass behind a rusty barbed wire fence. Step from the path of clucking hens and quacking ducks scattering dust as they prance about a sandy yard.

Look across the field at waves of yellow grain rippling in the wind. Pick a daffodil from beneath a cluster of tall gleaming white birches. Stand content with the cool country air sweeping across your face as you delight in the sights of nature all about you.

Look carefully at a photograph or a painting for a period of time, and then close your eyes and mentally reproduce every detail of it as vividly as possible. Do this with a variety of pictures until you are proficient at it.

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

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

Look down at the planet Earth from a mountain ridge high on the

moon.

Drift slowly down from the sky in a parachute.

Slide down a long wet silver slide. Jump rope, ski, bowl, race or roll down a hill of fresh green grass.

Swim in a pool of cool water on a hot sticky day.

Climb a mountain, cut a path through a forest, and sail on a blue lake with a cool breeze blowing against your face.

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 of our neural-musculature systems while simultaneously stimulating the brain's right hemisphere, an area of the brain associated with imaging, intuition, and creativity. Exercises such as these also enhance the senses, affect the entire organism, making us more sensitive and responsive to the workings of the spirit through the imagination.

The Cleansing Process

We cannot be open to God's 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. For these reasons, the cleansing of self is necessary.

Negative feelings alienate us from one another, hinder us from achieving our potential as caring persons, cause us to become emotional cripples. 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 like malignant tumors ever ready to wreck havoc on our lives.

The suppression of emotions such as anger 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. Herbert Weiner, for instance, finds a close relationship between repressed anger and ulcers. In group studies, Lawrence LeShan notes unworthiness and low self-esteem as key factors in differentiating cancer patients from others. And Thomas Holmes' research shows that, in the majority of minor illnesses, repressed anger preceded the ailments. Recognized for his innovative treatment of cancer, Dr. Carl Simonton writes that predisposing negative personality traits of cancer patients include holding resentment, finding it difficult to forgive, and feeling rejected. And in the area of heart disease, researchers find hostility can damage the heart as much as smoking, cholesterol, or high blood pressure.

Forgiveness is crucial in the cleansing process. Defined as excusing an offense and ceasing to feel resentment, forgiveness allows us to change for the better, 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. Jesus often speaks of the need to forgive others as well as our need for God to forgive us. Recognizing the importance of forgiveness, let us keep in mind certain facts about it. First, each of us is unique, some of us able to forgive more easily than others. For this reason, time is a necessary consideration. We each need our special time to recuperate our resources, to come to terms with our emotions, 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 then pray for God's love to help us deal with our anger, to strengthen our hearts to do His will by forgiving those who have offended us. All too often, we are petty, in need of God's grace to 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 during which we master specific types of behavior called developmental tasks. Various theories of human

development depicted in religious and psychological literature serve as guides to what individuals are expected to accomplish in these stages and predict the consequences of unsuccessfully completed tasks. None of us finishes all that we attempt nor do we do everything well, for each of us has shortcomings and inadequacies. 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 suspect or believe suppressed anger exists from incomplete or unpleasant tasks or situations in our past, we must work extra hard to release the distressing emotion association with those circumstances in order to allow the free flow of God's 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, 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 Inter-personal Relations. Sullivan's theory emphasizes specific qualities which shape interpersonal relationships developed in the six stages from Infancy through late Adolescence.

Of the contemporary theories dealing with the successful resolution of specific tasks at various ages, the psychoanalyst Erik Erikson's Stages of Development Theory has attracted the most attention. He lists eight crises the individual must pass through, each stage requiring its own solution. For example, he writes that from birth to eleven the child develops 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* 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* relates the major time periods of a person's life to healing (Prenatal, Birth, Infancy, Childhood, Adolescence, and Adulthood), explaining the possible psycho-logical 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 purging ourselves of suppressed emotions associated with past experiences through a technique used in my workshops which I call *full sensorial visualization*. It is visualizing the various stages of human development. Knowing we become what we habitually think about, we impress on our minds as vividly as possible those conditions we wish to exist, continue to hold the desired visualizations until we have realized them. By transforming images of past failure into images of success, *full sensorial visualization* offers us the means to impede the enervating influence of negative images. While we practice this process, negative images will continue to surface from time to time until our imagination vanquishes the resilient, dark images associated with earlier stages of development which

through years of repetition have adversely influenced our thinking and behavior. At such times, we must be careful not to allow detrimental images from the past to usurp the imagination and reverse any beneficial results we have achieved.

The ages indicating the Five Stages of Development listed below vary from individual to individual. One person may mature physically at thirteen, another accept the responsibilities of adulthood at sixteen, and yet another retire at fifty or at seventy-five. The various stages and ages are guides, flexible and adaptable to the individual's unique rate of development. Some psychologists list more than five stages of development, including the Prenatal and Birth periods which also have a significant influence on our behavior. We will not, however, investigate all of these stages of human development nor will we explore any one stage in great detail. Our aim is simply to facilitate a cleansing process in certain areas of our lives by practicing a method of visualization which among other benefits will allow us to achieve greater insight into ourselves and others.

1)	Infancy	0-2 years
2)	Childhood	2-12 years
3)	Adolescence	12-18 years
4)	Adulthood	18-65 years
5)	Old Age	65—

Full sensorial visualization offers us the means by which we can get in touch with feelings such as anxiety and frustration experienced in the past. We do this by recalling and examining our relationship with our family and others, our life values and goals, our coping mechanisms in dealing with problems and people, and especially our relationship with God.

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 any cathartic reactions which may result from an examination of our past. *Full sensorial visualization* is enhanced by our verbalizing what we feel, for speaking helps to release repressed emotions associated with painful memories. As we visualize the selected scenes and verbalize the specific emotions we felt at various times such as resentment or hostility, we note our bodily and mental reactions to those emotions. 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. As we visualize those images associated with fear, anxiety, and frustration, we attempt to identify any erroneous ideas and beliefs which may have been responsible for our distress, realizing how irrational thoughts and beliefs can limit our freedom. Once we have identified these negative and irrational beliefs, we replace them with truthful rational statements. In *A Guide to Rational Living*, Albert Ellis and Robert Harper include the following as samples of irrational ideas or beliefs: having 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 obviously a hindrance to realizing health and wellness.

And, 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, for an emotional upsurge from the unconscious may be overwhelming. Also, we apply *full sensorial visualization* to recalled pleasant memories as well as negative ones, enjoying the uplifting feelings which arise, realizing that we need not conclude these experiences with positive visualizations.

Reviewing the exercises at the end of Chapter Three is recommended for those readers wishing to improve their imaging skills before attempting *full sensorial visualization*.

Directions for Visualizing the Five Stages of Development

Find a comfortable chair in a room where you will not be disturbed. Relax the body and the mind before visualizing a large television screen with a video set up and ready to run. Turn off an imaginary lamp on the table next to you. Turn on the VCR.

On the wide TV screen, visualize the events in your age bracket. For example, if you are in the Adulthood Stage (18-65), the video 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, image the events of the years from 18-33. At the next session view the reel entitled *Adolescence* (12-18). After *Adolescence*, view *Childhood* (2-12) and then *Infancy* (0-2).

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 Old Age (65-) 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 one sitting.

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.

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 Old Age 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 what is

called The Review, Retrospection, or The 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 recapitulation of the general aspects of the day. Since as in all visualization a relaxed state affects our response to the scene, it is well to cultivate a state of equilibrium before we begin. 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 work havoc on us during the night. Discharging 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 three 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 consciousness with positive attributes of behavior relevant to spiritual growth and behavior.

Viewing, experiencing, and reconstructing negative images of the past will defuse those images of their detrimental effects and predispose our present and future behavior toward constructive spiritual thoughts and actions. This activity will help free us of unconscious conflicts and internalized images which may have caused us much difficulty and heartache and continue to influence us adversely in the present. Through discrimination, critical analysis, and catharsis, we *disidentify* ourselves from those character traits which have hampered the ability of our personalities to function more adequately. Focusing the will, memory, and imagination on spiritual values and behavior will improve our lives. We will become more devoted servants of God and more efficient instruments of his healing power. Also, with the release of inner energy once clogged by emotions such as resentment and anger, we will experience a greater openness to people, a willingness to forgive, and a strong sense of God's emerging love acting to direct our lives toward the greater good.

Prayer

We seek to experience God's healing energy both for ourselves and for the good of others. Relying on His grace, we work diligently and patiently, believing His power will manifest itself openly or in our deeper selves, performing its magic in its own time and in its own way. We know that for this spiritual growth to occur a new perspective, developed and nurtured through training and discipline is often needed. The program we have followed in this text aims to reduce turmoil, anxiety, and distractions, to calm the mind, rendering it more receptive and open to God's power. Whenever possible, we have directed the will and supplied the intellect with the knowledge and understanding necessary to cleanse and strengthen us. Finally, to the extent possible, we have loosened the binding energy of unpleasant memories so that the emotional dregs attached to such memories do not hinder or distract us from our quest. To accomplish these goals, we have looked at and have practiced a variety of exercises. Now, we turn to prayer, our most formidable ally.

Prayer lifts our heart and minds to God. It unlocks the doors to our deeper selves, opens these doors wider, and allows the light of the Spirit to shine into our lives. Besides activating the power of God within us, prayer also provides us with the necessary energy and determination to assist us in life's more difficult times.

Let us examine various aspects of prayer. First of all, true prayer is always answered. 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 God, realizing His wisdom is total, His understanding perfect. Reverend Franklin Loehr, who has done extensive research on prayer, cautions that if we do not obtain what we seek when praying, we must understand that God's plans for us have precedence over our own. Loving us and caring for us more than we can ever comprehend, God always acts for the final good of each and every one of us. 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." With unanswered prayer, God has something other in mind for us than what we prayed for, difficult as this reconciliation may be.

Gordon Turner's *An Outline of Spiritual Healing* relates an interesting story that well illustrates the enigma of answered and unanswered prayer. It is about a blind ten-year-old boy on his fifth pilgrimage to Lourdes and a partial paralytic anti-Catholic named Louis Olivari. Louis had gone to Lourdes to please his wife, who no doubt had prayed for him and expected a healing.

Louis and the boy waded in the water at Lourdes which is renowned for its curative properties. Sensing someone nearby, the blind boy called out to Louis, who moved by the sight of the disabled youngster, prayed for the boy's cure. Weak, Louis then fainted. When later revived, he noticed movement in his legs—his paralysis was completely gone! The boy, however, remained blind in spite of the many fervent prayers he had offered to God and the strong faith he must have possessed to have journeyed to Lourdes for five straight years and then returned home still unable to see. On the other hand, Louis prayed for the boy, not for himself. His prayers for the blind youngster went unanswered

whereas his wife's prayers for him were answered.

Accepting 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 we must believe God will send His power to work within us and through us to fulfill our petitions when they are for the final good of ourselves and others. Aside from assurance in God and belief in the power of prayer, affinity for the person for whom we pray also influences the outcome of healing prayer. In this respect, healers relate that having negative feelings toward a healee usually indicates that the person will not obtain a healing. Insufficient sympathy and love for the afflicted dampens the Spirit's positive response to our requests.

The expectations of those desiring a healing also influence the outcome of healing prayer. Lack of a positive attitude creates a barrier about the negative individual, an obstacle which blocks the healing energy projected from the healer, causing it to veer off into another direction. "Running into a rubber wall" is how some healers describe this non-healing experience. Many reasons exist why healees do not possess the necessary faith and trust required for a healing. Often, persons coping with debilitating illnesses find it difficult, if not impossible, to summon the strength to be affirmative or positive. Family and friends shower time and attention on those who are sick; consequently, their minds are divided on the benefits of a healing. Others consider their illness a punishment for their sins. When faith is lacking on the part of the healee, a healing can still occur, but generally, when this condition exists, the energy generated by the healer's prayers is insufficient to penetrate the negative aura of the healee.

Consciously or unconsciously, for one reason or another, when affirmative emotions and positive attitudes of the healer or the healee are of insufficient strength, a barrier is constructed between the two of them, deterring the power of prayer from performing its beneficent work.

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*, 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.

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 or a physical healing, for the patient's illness, or for the doctor to find a cure for it. Called "direction in prayer", discernment is revealed in a moment of intuition, either through a

spontaneous image, idea, or feeling. We especially should seek discernment when for unknown reasons a healing does not occur, and we feel certain something other than our prayers is preventing it. An excellent example of discernment is given by Francis MacNutt in *Healing*, where he writes about a man whose tobacco addiction was incurable until the healer discerned that the man's poor relationship with his father needed improvement first. Another example related in the text is how the healing of a missionary occurred only after the healer praying for her learned through discernment that an unpleasant and painful incident involving her parents and a favorite pet dog needed to be resolved before the healer could help the woman with her emotional problems.

Discernment reveals the specific blockage to be removed or the particular direction to be taken so that healing prayer can successfully perform its benign task. Guidance from the Spirit will identify the source of the problem. Before seeking discernment, however, we ask God to fill us with His power. This is accomplished either through a visualization, a Psalm, a mantra, or an inspiring prayer of our choosing such as the *Lord's Prayer* or the *Hail Mary*, remembering that the words we speak in prayer influence our state of mind as well as the movement of the Spirit.

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

Most mantras contain specific consonants which along with other letters resonate through the head, especially the areas behind the forehead and between the eyes. Practiced in the various religious traditions, repetitive prayer such as the *Prayer of Jesus* and other expressions as the single word *Om* or *Om Tat Sat* are powerful mantras utilized for centuries to focus attention and to awaken spiritual energy within us. Other powerful mantras are *shalom*, *insha'allah*, and *kyre eleison*.

Intercessory Prayer

A healer need not be present at a healing, nor is it essential that the healee be informed that someone is praying for him. Whether the healee is present or aware of a healing treatment, the results will be the same, for God's power can overcome any limitation of time and space. Intercessory prayer is more successful at times because some individuals become tense or anxious in the emotional atmosphere of a healer and thus create an impenetrable barrier for healing power. When intercessory prayer is applied to the healing on someone not present, it is often referred to as "absent healing."

Even saints have benefited from the prayers of others. Most readers know how St. Paul fell to the ground on the road to Damascus, overcome by a blinding light. Few, however, recall that 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.

At times, prayers not only of another person, but one with a special calling for helping those with certain illnesses or difficulties can be advantageous. Having suffered from a particular health problem, such empathic healers often generate the necessary energy and spiritual power to cure others with similar ailments.

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 healee as well, not ill, trusting that God's power is working to correct the situation by curing the individual's particular ailment or illness. Once our deeper mind believes a healing is occurring in the present, the power within will make every effort to answer our prayers.

Guidelines to Effective Prayer

First, though human effort is not without merit, God alone can teach you to pray. And 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. Next, ask the Spirit within to fill you with His energy, choosing from the various visualization exercises those you find most suitable. If you feel an unknown obstacle is preventing your prayers from being answered, ask God what must be done to correct it. If your prayers have not the sufficient spiritual strength to accomplish their purposes, request from the Spirit the knowledge whom 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 God has answered your prayers, give thanks for this blessing.

With *absent healing*, it is best to pray in the morning or in the evening when the healee has most likely retired. At these quiescent periods of the day, the healee's subconscious is most apt to receive and respond to the power and the image projected by the healer. When no change is seen in the healee, the healer should repeat the healing treatment at the same time each day until there is a noticeable improvement in the healee.

Concerning whether or not the healer should tell the healee that he is praying for him, the healer's discretion must be relied on in this

matter. At the end of each healing session, give thanks to God for working through you for the good of another.

Only after much discipline can we learn how to pray effectively. Even to say we practice prayer, however, 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.

Spiritual Healing

Visualization and Healing

Those who practice the healing arts have from earliest times utilized visualization. Relatively new healing methods also utilize 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 uses mental pictures as part of his program for helping cancer patients. His technique centers on positive thinking and health-inducing imagery practiced three times daily over a period of time. Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP), a 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 involved in spiritual healing. When the healer is relaxed and in touch with the Spirit, he creates the necessary conditions for the healing power to flow. The healee, through prayer and anticipation, places himself into a receptive mood, his feelings opening the deeper levels of his mind. During this process, healing energy passes from the healer into the healee. Along with this energy the healer's mental image is also projected into the healee. If the healer projects a positive image, the healing most likely will be permanent. If the healer's image is negative, then the healee's recovery will likely be temporary or not at all.

The crucial role of visualization in healing is widely acknowledged. The healer Olga Worrall, for example, writes that before coming into contact with patients she allows herself time to become a clear channel for God's healing power through the practice of prayer and visualization. An interesting experiment by Reverend Franklin Loehr recorded in *The Power of Prayer on Plants* relates how clear images affect the power of prayer. In the experiment, individuals prayed for the growth of seedlings with little effect. Later, the same persons prayed, visualizing the improved growth of corn seed. The final outcome confirmed that clarity of mental imagery brings about positive results through prayer, a fact verified by other experiments as well. Francis MacNutt writes that when we act as instruments for God's healing power, we must visualize the person to be healed as healthy and vibrant, not as he appears in his 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 speaks highly of visualization's role in healing. For a time, she was unsuccessful in praying for the sick at a distance, a technique called "absent healing." Advised to use visualization in her prayers, Sanford did

so and found her patients experienced positive results. Sanford writes 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, not as he appears in his present state of illness. Believing the sick person is getting better, as reflected in the image she projects, she gratefully exclaims, "Amen."

The visualization of Jesus, the Blessed Mother, the saints, or other religious figures plays a prominent part in 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 or as in self-healing the healee places himself in the biblical scene. In her excellent 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 healee, 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 to shiatsu and reiki 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 well-known text, *Touching*, 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, the hands should be warm. If they are cold, we are to rub them briskly before applying them to the healee. Hawaiian and African healers rub their hands to increase the flow of energy before a healing. Yoga Ramacharaka's *Science of Psychic Healing* states that the most effective way to transfer power from one person to another is through the hands. He advises healers to rub their hands together until they feel brisk with energy whenever they are about to begin a healing.

Healing energy flows in the direction the fingers are pointed, its projection strongest through the thumb and weakest through the middle finger. Bunching the fingertips concentrates energy on a small area. When both hands are used, the right hand transmits energy and is placed over the area causing pain while the left hand is placed opposite the right hand on the part of body to be healed.

In these positions, energy passes from the right hand through the afflicted area of the body and then into the left hand, completing an energy circuit. When touching another's body, healers are to observe imbalanced energy indicated by emanations of hot, cold, or tingling sensations from the healee's body. These areas of the body may require more attention than other areas.

Healers warn against placing the hands on certain parts of the healee's body. Instructors of therapeutic touch say that placing the hands near the head and eyes of the healee can send excessive energy into those areas upsetting the delicate electromagnetic balance of those organs. Experiencing excessive energy in the head area can also result in the patient feeling sluggish or irritable. In *The Healing Light*, Sanford cautions healers against laying hands over a blood clot because blood will rush to that part of the body increasing heat and energy in that area. With headaches as well, increased blood will flow to the head if a healer places his hands there. Further, the power transmitted from the healer sometimes causes discomfort or temporary pain in the afflicted part of the healee's body. When this happens, the healer should explain to the healee how the body reacts to an increased level of energy during or after a healing. When the above symptoms are excessive, it is advised that the healer remove his hands from those sensitive areas of the healee's body which have caused the discomfort. At times, it is best for the healed person to rest for a few moments after a healing so that he may regain his equilibrium.

The Healing Process

Realizing the significant role of visualization in spiritual healing, let us review step-by-step the healing process and the suggested activities to enhance it.

First, breathe deeply and relax the body before praying to be filled with God's power. Before beginning visualization for a self-healing or for the healing of others, sense God's spirit alive within you. Ask God in your own words or in the words of a favorite prayer to fill you with spiritual power. Use a mantra if you find that more effective.

In addition to prayer, a verbal, or a silent request, select from a variety of visualizations to accomplish what is referred to as "calling upon the power", exercises to activate God's healing energy. For example, imagine streams of spiritual energy flowing into the body and filling it with vitality, or visualize a glowing sphere of God's 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.

Another effective practice is called the Star Exercise because the body assumes the position of a geometrical figure, a star. First, visualize rays of radiant light above you. With the feet slightly spread, stand with the arms outstretched at shoulder level, the right hand turned downward, and the palm and the fingers of the left hand turned upward to receive God's energy which you picture as

flowing into the left hand and spreading into every part of the body, strengthening and vitalizing it. During this exercise, 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 God to reveal any information necessary for the successful outcome of the healing. If no answer comes through a word, an image, or an intuition, then continue. Visualize the person to be healed, picturing him/ her in a healthy state; in the case of a self-healing, see a healing occurring to you as you have visualized it. When you have formed a clear picture of a healthy person in your mind, place your hands on or near the healee and verbally affirm, "I call on God's healing power to act through me to set you free from any mental or physical illness. May God's Spirit fill the dark and unhealthy places of your life, making you sound and whole." If you wish, choose an affirmation of your own.

God's healing energy and the image in your mind will spontaneously enter the healee where together they will perform their benevolent alchemy. Feeling God's energy pass from you into the healee, offer a prayer of thanksgiving.

To be an instrument through which God's healing power can be realized is a wondrous gift, but lest we be too credulous of the outcome of spiritual healing, or faith healing as it's sometimes called, we must remember that there are charlatans who resort to trickery and others who though sincere cause irreparable harm by their indiscriminate approach to healing. For instance, such healers can suggest physically restricted individuals to walk or to move before they are strong enough, resulting in irreversible damage to their nerves or bones. At other times, through the power of suggestion, healers may temporarily remove symptoms of life-threatening diseases, causing the person to avoid seeking proper medical advice when necessary. Persons might also be told that they are sinners and only through prayer will they be cured of their illnesses or handicaps. And while they pray for days, weeks, or months, their illness can become worse, causing them to lose valuable time during which they could have received life-saving medical treatment.

The reliable healer takes every step to insure that when needed the healee 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. Also, the reliable healer has no reservations about submitting information about any alleged healing he may have participated in to a medical investigation of the facts in the case. Actually, a genuine healer never claims to heal, acknowledging that he/she is only an instrument of God's power working through him. Further, a healer does not know with certainty who will be healed and if and when God's power will flow through the afflicted person to bring about a particular cure. However, a healer

believes and trusts that anyone is capable of experiencing a healing even if it is not physical, a healing through which the afflicted will find courage, patience, and/or strength to bear and triumph over their inner anguish and their physical pain with the help of God's healing power.

Daily, throughout the world, authentic healings do occur. Bogus healings often take place in an emotionally charged atmosphere promoted by charismatic healers who use blaring speakers, shouting, and admonitions to condition the response of their trusting and indiscriminating audience which usually consists of many who are old, ill, and desperate for a cure. Temporary healings—often resulting from the sudden stimulation of endorphins in the afflicted are quite unlike true faith healings, where spiritual energy, the power and energy of God, passes from one human being and into another to effect a lasting and permanent cure in the individual.

Thus far, in this text, we have examined those techniques identified as effective for achieving health, wellness, and healing. We have disciplined our wills, thoughts, and feelings to focus on spiritual matters, attempting to go beyond the ego to release our entanglement with self and worldly obstacles. We have also struggled to improve our mental and emotional states by an examination of conscience and a refashioning of memory in order to cleanse ourselves of those impediments such as tension, anxiety, and fear which clog the spirit and hinder it from expressing itself. 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.

Inspired by Jesus' dedication to healing, we find our commitment to spiritual healing worthy of our best efforts. Biblical scholars record that Jesus performed between thirty-six and forty-one mental and physical healings in his short ministry as well as commanding his disciples to heal the sick and the lame. As with any discipline, spiritual healing will take time, practice, and patience to become proficient at; however, in the process, we will discover that our compassion for the suffering and pain of our brothers and sisters 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.

Wellness and Other Spiritual Gifts

It must be remembered that when we speak about becoming spiritual healers, we are not referring to an end goal, but a continuous process, an uplifting of consciousness, which brings with it the unfolding of the gifts of the Spirit and the felt presence of God. Transformed by the power of God, we will be more attuned to the people and the world about us. We will utilize more of our intellect and intuition. We will be in harmony with ourselves and others, knowing more, feeling more, and understanding more about life and its mysteries than we did before. We will also experience wellness.

In our quest, our concern has been not only to experience wellness but to maximize it to the extent that is humanly possible through the exercises in this text advocating a holistic approach to the subject. Through the various activities, we have attempted to keep ourselves healthy as well as to dramatically improve our behavior by bringing about a change in personality. The desired outcome of therapy parallels our goal. Individuation, functional autonomy, self-actualization, and creative selfhood are some of the psychological terms used to define the person who has come to realize his potential and wellness. Abraham H. Maslow, clinical psychologist, defines a self-actualizing individual as one who “is uncovering, expressing, and developing his inner nature.”

In psychosynthesis, Dr. Roberto Assagioli writes that the self-realized individual is in “a state of consciousness characterized by joy, serenity, and inner security.” And the religious scholar D.T. Suzuki tells us that the transformed individual is one who has “awakened” and experiences peace and joy.

To some extent, we will reap the benefits of therapy by our constructive evaluation of our past and present behavior and our determination to fashion our future in accordance to our quest. However, if we are to experience wellness to its fullest, harmony and balance between us and God’s power is essential. Once we have achieved this goal, “a peace which passes all understanding” will be ours. We will experience a tranquility which will affect our countenance and demeanor, surrounding us with an air of calmness. This exalted wellness, this peace and bliss, this gladness and joy, we identify with the spirit of God alive within us. At such a time, our eyes will be opened and our minds will awaken as we know wellness for the first time. From that day on, our lives will never be the same.

Encountering God

Whether we are graced with wellness or the ability to heal or with any other gifts of the Spirit, we must realize that when attempting to share with others the workings of God's marvelous power, we can do so only in vague and enigmatic words, for language is incapable of adequately communicating what happens when the human and the divine meet. This is especially true of those who have reported encountering God. Some who have had this experience have left no account of it, believing meetings of such a nature can never be adequately explained nor understood. Others have written openly about their vision of God, referring to Him as the "dazzling darkness," "the Cloud of Unknowing," "the All," and "the clear light of the Void." These and other diverse and paradoxical references to God make clear the inadequacy of language in describing what occurs when the Spirit, God's courier, emerges from the deep recesses within to allow us to glimpse a higher level of reality hitherto hidden from our limited human perception. Since most readers are familiar with the gifts of the Spirit mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles such as prophecy, exorcism, and glossolalia, these phenomena will not be discussed in this chapter. The writer will emphasize those less-known gifts of the Spirit as well as attempt to provide readers with a better understanding of the various ways and the circumstances under which God's power manifests itself in our lives when we are transformed by the Spirit.

Light

The phenomenon of light is the first and most impressive sight reported by many who have experienced God's power. Since time immemorial, light has been associated with God. Artists depict holy figures with light. God is "the Supreme Radiance" with his emissaries aglow with nimbuses, auras, or aureolas. God is a radiant light whose magnificence surpasses the splendor of the sun. In the Ancient Mystery Schools, the initiated addressed the presence of God with "Hail, new Light!" Indeed, this dazzling light is unlike the known light of Earth and the starry heavens, for this unique sight is the power and energy of God. Walt Whitman, the poet who touched the Heart of the Universe, calls God's brilliance "Light rare, untellable!" The German scholar Eckhart calls the Creator an "uncreated Light," "a power," "a divine spark;" and St. Augustine refers to God as the "Light Unchangeable," a light unlike any recognizable light discernable to sight. Further, he writes only those who see the Light know the meaning of truth and eternity.

Perhaps the best known story of those who have spontaneously experienced God's power is St. Paul's illumination on the road to Damascus. A light filled the heavens, a luminosity so overwhelming that St. Paul remained blind for three days. In a similar encounter, Mahomet fainted after casting his eyes on an enormous blaze of light whose brilliance overcame him while in the

presence of God. When Moses descended Mt. Sinai, his body radiated a light of great magnitude. In the Garden of Gethesmane, a brilliant light surrounded Jesus. And when Gautama Buddha walked down Mt. Miennuo, the rocks and stones of the mountain glittered like diamonds while his luminous appearance blinded all who set eyes on him.

Agnes Sanford calls the power or energy of God “The Healing Light,” the title of her best selling book on healing. References to the phenomena of light seen about or around those who experience God’s power abound. Of ineffable splendor, this light is a godly light, a source of power and energy, and often the harbinger of a healing or a transformation of personality. This ethereal light of God’s kingdom shines on the individual and the world when the doorway to the spirit within us has been opened.

Knowledge

God sometimes reveals to individuals knowledge about the purpose of life and the meaning of the universe. In seconds, the veil is rent from the face of nature and more is momentarily revealed than is contained in all the books and schools of the world. This sudden illumination of intellect is realized because in finding God we also gain access to the source and font of all knowledge. Called “supernatural insight,” this intellectual illumination is the means of perceiving reality directly. Superior to reason, this insight allows us to comprehend a “knowledge of things as they are.” St. John of the Cross writes that this revelation transcends all science. Sri Aurobondo, author of *Founding the Life Divine*, calls this knowledge “self-luminous,” and William James alludes to the learning attained in this state of spiritual awakening as *noetic*.

Insight and learning of momentous proportions are made available to us by the very reality which governs our lives and the universe—God. Though this knowledge exists deep within us and is unobtainable through the ordinary means of intellectual discipline, God sometimes gratuitously reveals this knowledge to those touched by his power.

Understanding God

The knowledge sometimes granted to those who experience God’s power is that He is One, eternally revealing his many masks to the world, but who beneath the many disguises is One essence, uniting all seeming diversion and division. Duality and individuality cease to exist. The separation between humans and the Deity is obliterated. We and God become One, a united and coherent entity, existing in time, space, and eternity.

When God is revealed to us, we sense a loving and caring presence as well as experiencing an overwhelming feeling of affection. At this time, a paradox also becomes evident. God is One with many faces, a universal power and

energy and yet much more. God is immanent and transcendent, working in nature, through nature, and beyond nature. These are aspects of God's being as well as mysteries of his nature.

Saints and mystics often write of the realm of the spirit beckoning us to return within ourselves to claim our birthright. They say when we achieve this homecoming, we will discover that our true Self is integrally related to God, and this God within us is united not only to all other Selves but to all nature and all creatures as well. They further state that, in recognizing this truth, we no longer remain isolated individuals seeking selfish ends and goals. Instead, we find ourselves dedicated to the service of others, since we have come to realize that all people everywhere are united in the spirit of God. Injustice, hatred, and tyranny no longer bear lightly on our hearts and conscience; for with the realization that the suffering of others is our suffering and that their joy is our joy comes an intense love for our fellow humans which fulfills itself in acts of charity, goodwill, and sacrifice.

Time

Past, present, and future are concepts of our limited perception of events in the material world which constantly change in the ever passing stream of life. When we are filled with God, we perceive nature and events as timeless, possessing no past or future, but an endless present of eternal duration. Opposed to the distorted and limited view of time created by our conscious minds, those who experience God's power awaken to the real and eternal universe.

Those who experience this enriched vision of time often perceive a new reality, one quite different from the common, everyday view of the world. Nature is infused with a sublime light, pulsating with splendid color. The whole universe is transfigured. The English mystic, William Blake writes that this enchanting display of light, form, and color occurs when we "put off the rotten rags of sense and memory and put on imagination uncorrupt." This magic time when we see the world anew is referred to as "the timeless moment," an entirely unique dimension of time known to science, one filled with a sense of transcendent beauty and wonder.

Transiency and Passivity

The magic moment of encountering God is of short duration because the extreme exaltation of this experience cannot be sustained by the human body for any extended period of time. For instance, in his *Confessions*, St. Augustine writes that his mind met the Absolute Being "in a flash," for a meeting of this magnitude is enjoyed only "briefly and hastily." St. Bernard writes that blessed and holy are those who experience such an event in their lifetime, even if it lasts for "hardly a moment." The author Warner Allen tells us that his union with God occurred in even less than a moment in what he calls an "infinitesimal fraction of a second."

Those who experience God also feel themselves in abeyance to a power far greater than their own to which they willingly submit themselves in order to become its instruments. William James in his classic study, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, refers to *passivity* as one of the characteristics of a religious state through which we become more receptive to the spiritual world.

Psycho-Physical Phenomena

When God's power awakes within us, we often acquire various psychic gifts as clairvoyance, ecstasy, visions, and voices—gifts referred to as psycho-physical phenomena. In Eastern literature these talents are called *siddhis*; the modern term for them is *increased perceptions*. These phenomena both fascinate and detract those on the spiritual path, arrest their development, and at times even lead to their destruction. Wary of such manifestations, the German author Rudolf Steiner writes that for every step we take in acquiring spiritual power, we must take three in the direction of improving our moral character. The Buddha advised his disciples to disregard psychic phenomena as both enticing and illusory. Others urge the same precaution. For example, St. John of the Cross warns us not to seek visions, and Albertus Magnus classified sensuous visions as always dangerous. God-sent visions take place without our seeking them and have about them a sense of certitude, peace, and joy. Masters of the spiritual life repeatedly advise aspirants not to seek psycho-physical phenomena. Further, when they do occur, they admonish us not to encourage them but instead to observe the phenomena as the normal unfolding of one's spirituality.

General Improvement

Besides an enhancement of one's sense of wellness, those who experience God's power are also strengthened and renewed by an increase in stamina and energy. Isaiah says, "He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. . .they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not be faint." Lest we think these are idle words, let us remember what Paul says in 1 Cor. 4:20, "For the Kingdom of God does not consist in talk, but in power." Having tapped into the fountainhead of power and energy, great accomplishments are well within the grasp of those who encounter God. In this respect, St. Bonaventure aptly refers to God as the "Energizing Fire." We need only look at the activities of St. Paul and St. Joan of Arc, who after experiencing God's power performed prodigious deeds beyond the ability of most individuals. Less known are the stories of St. Teresa of Avila, who left her convent at a late age to reform a great religious order and to advance Catholicism throughout Spain; St. Catherine of Siena, the Italian Dominican nun, who though uneducated and unable to write, dominated the politics of fourteenth-century Italy with her vitality, intelligence, and spirituality; the English shoemaker George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends or Quakers, arrested sixty times, spending a good part of his life in damp, dark prisons so filthy that lice

almost ate prisoners alive. The bounteous vitality of these individuals who have accomplished their superhuman missions of good will comes from God, a vitality freely given to those who experience the inexhaustible energy of the spirit.

Conclusion

The intensity and the duration of the various phenomena associated with experiencing the power and energy of God varies from person to person. The brilliant light associated with the presence of God is visible about an individual or it may fill the immediate environment with its luminosity. “Supernatural insight” happens in a flash or it may last seconds or minutes. Further, poets, artists, musicians, and writers have an innate talent for perceiving the spirit realm, the world beyond and yet within our own. Nor is this experience restricted to creative persons. More developed in some than in others, all people possess an innate ability for viewing transcendental reality, an extraordinary event which occurs during life’s “magic moments,” cherished times when individuals find their hearts and minds uplifted by an incentive beyond themselves as God’s light shines upon them.

Some significant findings have been recorded by those who have experienced God’s power. First, the spiritual realm reveals itself to those who feel an abiding affection for God. *The Cloud of Unknowing* emphasizes that by love may God be “gotten and holden,” never by “thought or understanding.” St. Ignatius suggests prayer and unceasing service to others will lead us closer to God. Strictly speaking, however, we do not find God—God finds us. We cultivate the soil for his gifts to grow and blossom, nurture it with our attention and effort. Patiently, we watch and wait. Such activities will help us in our quest, but alone they will not suffice. God must prod us to become more open and receptive to the Spirit working within us.

* * *

We have sought through the power of prayer and the influence of imagination to transcend ourselves in order to encounter God. Whether our quest is short or long toward the realization of this worthwhile objective, 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 God, we must look inward, a task requiring time, effort, and discipline. Additionally, our lives must be committed, our purpose adamant, and our faith strong. Finally as we tread the arduous path toward God, we will also learn the necessity of keeping our hearts and minds open and sensitive to the stirrings of the spirit.

Our efforts and God’s grace will guide us toward our destination. And at that fortuitous moment when we have drunk from the bountiful fount within

and find our hearts and minds filled with the Spirit, we will experience God's power and energy, a wondrous gift which will both enrich our lives and provide us with new vistas of promise and hope for the enrichment of the human condition.

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