

A Doctor's Prescription:
Nurture the Spirit—Heal the Body

Eve A. Wood, MD



As a doctor, I have spent over 28,000 hours caring for patients from all walks of life. I have learned, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that spirituality is the cornerstone of mental and physical health. What do I mean when I say *spirituality*? Spirituality is a sense of meaning and purpose, and an ability to see what is possible in the world. It is an awareness of and a respect for one's inner wisdom. It is a receptiveness and an openness to the love, potential, and healing power in the universe. That said, spirituality does not have to involve organized religion. Many people are extremely religious, but they may not be spiritual; others are extraordinarily spiritual, but have no affiliation to a church, temple, or congregation.

It is one of the most significant aspects of human nature, that we embody some sense of purpose and seek to express this meaning in our lives. Whether you are a devout religious follower or not, the search for universal meaning offers you hope. A connection to the world-at-large can lift you out of yourself, shed new light upon the struggles you face, and offer you a momentary reprieve from those challenges. In a world as chaotic and complex as ours, it is certainly easy to lose our way; a sense of faith and purpose can be our guiding thread through this labyrinth.

We simply cannot underestimate the power of spirituality and faith when it comes to our physical, mental, and emotional well being. I have personally seen the miraculous emerge from a tiny sliver of hope, and devastation take over when all hope was snuffed out. I have seen the power of connection and love to transform lives, and the power of isolation and alienation to destroy them. I have seen children excel when told they are smart, and fail when told they are not. I have seen patients with hope survive illnesses that were thought to be fatal, and patients in despair die of curable disease. I have experienced the healing power of love, hope, and acceptance in my own life. I have been lucky enough to learn how to offer these gifts to my patients. I have found that my faith in the value, purpose, and potential of each of my patients helps them to heal; and I have discovered that by teaching them to see themselves in kind, they blossom.

In order to help you take your spiritual pulse, I have included a series of questions. As you answer them, consider the meaning and purpose of existence. What is your notion of a higher power or God? What are your gifts that you are meant to share? What matters to you? Why are you here? If you had a religious upbringing, what did you learn from it? What was constructive and what was not? There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

What do I value most in life?
What are my most precious memories? ...belongings?
Whom do I respect the most? Why?
Where, when and with whom do I feel most calm or at peace?
What words heal me?...harm me?
Do I have a spiritual home? Where or why not?
Do I see myself as a child of the universe? Do I treat myself like one or not?
Do I treat myself with as much love as I treat my children? Pets? Partners?
Friends? Relatives? Neighbors? If not, why not?
Do I offer to help others?
Do I ask for help when I need it?
Do I treat my body like the physical temple that houses my soul? If not, why not?
Do I give and receive love with a full heart?
Do I act from a place of self-love and love of others?
Do I allow judgment and criticism to rule my life?
Do I approach pain with humility and a desire to learn from it?
Do I give thanks for the many blessings in my life? Do I even know what they are?
Do I take time to watch the sun rise or set? To smell a flower? Or to say a prayer?
Do I strive for peace and harmony or would I rather be right?
Do I say I'm sorry often enough? Too much?
Do I believe in magic? Miracles? Wonder?
Do I allow myself to experience pure joy?
Do I give myself permission to be silly? Playful? Creative?
Do I laugh and cry enough?
Do I hear my spirit when it sings? Do I allow myself to dance to its music?
At the end of my days, what do I hope to be remembered for? Am I living a life that supports that vision? If not, why?
Do I surround myself with people who nurture my spirit? If not, why don't I?
Do I spend the bulk of my time pursuing what most matters to me? If not, what gets in the way?
Am I generous with my time, money, self, gifts? If not, why not? Am I afraid they will be exhausted?

You can feel moved and uplifted when you are singing in a choir, climbing a mountain, donating your time to a charity organization, or sitting in a quiet chapel. Your spiritual connection to the universe can take many wonderful forms. Use the following spiritual development exercise to grow yourself at your own pace.

List three action-steps that you are willing to take with in the next two months that will serve to nurture or grow your spiritual self. These steps could be anything from beginning a work-out or weight-loss program to attending a religious service. Be sure they relate to the answers you gave to the above questions.

Once you have written the steps, commit to taking them. Keep growing your list of steps and pursuing them over time.

This spiritual development path is this doctor's prescription for health, fulfillment and peace.

EVE A. WOOD, MD is Clinical Associate Professor of Medicine at the University of Arizona Program in Integrative Medicine. A practicing psychiatrist, author, speaker and consultant, Dr. Wood is a pioneer in the field of integrative psychiatry. Having spent nearly two decades and over 28,000 hours in the care of troubled individuals from all walks of life, Dr. Wood has developed a treatment approach that involves traditional psychiatric medicine, psychology and universal spiritual principles. Her method has attracted attention and acclaim from the nation's leading authorities in the fields of medicine, health and spiritual well-being.

Dr. Wood has served on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, the Executive Committee of the Institute of Pennsylvania Hospital, written articles for medical and professional publications, lectured widely to professional and lay audiences, taught workshops and seminars around the country, appeared on over 85 radio programs and been the guest on many television programs in major cities. Dr. Wood has her own call-in radio show, *Healing Your Body, Mind and Spirit*, which airs every Tuesday at 3pm PST on www.HayHouseRadio.com and Sirius satellite radio channel 114 LIME. She is also the back page feature columnist for *Massage Therapy Journal*.

In her book, *Medicine, Mind and Meaning: A psychiatrist's guide to treating the body, mind and spirit*, Dr. Wood shares her patients' captivating clinical tales to demystify the therapeutic process and illustrate her treatment approach. This widely acclaimed book has earned Dr. Wood the prestigious Benjamin Franklin Award for Best New Voice in Non-fiction. *Medicine, Mind and Meaning* has been a *ForeWord Magazine Book of the Year* winner in three categories (Psychology, Mind-Body-Spirit and Health), as well as a finalist in the *Self-Help* category. The book was a finalist in two categories in the *Nautilus 2005* competition (Psychology/Self-Help and Small Press--an honorary category) and a finalist for the 2005 IPPY Book Award in Psychology/Mental Health. *Medicine, Mind and Meaning* received an Honorable Mention in *Writers Digest International's 2005* competition in the category "Inspirational."

Medicine, Mind and Meaning will be released in paperback with a new title, ***There's Always Help; There's Always Hope – An award-winning psychiatrist shows you how to heal your body, mind and spirit***, in May 2006 under the Hay House imprint.

Dr. Wood is committed to building bridges between the disciplines, empowering colleagues and helping as many people as possible to heal.

Dr. Wood lives in Tucson with her physician husband and four children, ages 8 to 18. She maintains a small clinical and consulting practice and teaches at the University of Arizona Medical School, in addition to her many other activities.

For more information about Dr. Wood, feel free to visit www.DrEveWood.com.