



# Spiritual Fitness Exercises and Resources for Designing Your Well-Being

*(Updated September 10, 2020)*

Chaplain Bruce Feldstein MD, BCC  
Director, [Jewish Chaplaincy Services serving Stanford Medicine](#)  
a program of Jewish Family & Children's Services, [brucef@jfcs.org](mailto:brucef@jfcs.org)

## Part 1 Spiritual Fitness Exercises

1. [Four Questions a Day](#)
2. [Where Are You? Living Your Questions](#)
3. [Key Relationships](#)
4. [Four Things I Want You To Be Sure To Know](#)

## Part 2 Additional Resources

1. [Prescription for Your Spiritual Fitness and Well-Being](#)
2. [Quotations for Living with Well-Being](#)
3. [Understanding Spirituality, Well-Being, and Designing](#)
4. [Teachings from Jewish Tradition, Poetry, and Literature](#)
5. [Further Exercises and Perspectives](#)
6. [Videos to open your eyes and heart](#)

These Spiritual Fitness Exercises and Resources are designed for living with an increasing sense of well-being. I am pleased to provide this updated version. They are drawn from my personal life, including two decades providing spiritual care at Stanford Medicine, teaching classes on spirituality and meaning in medicine at Stanford School of Medicine, and the recent JFCS workshop series: Designing Our Well-Being: Drawing from Medicine and Jewish Tradition, which I presented in conversation with Mimi Ezray LCSW, MPH.

## Part 1 Spiritual Fitness Exercises

1. [Four Questions a Day](#)
2. [Where Are You? Living Your Questions](#)
3. [Key Relationships](#)
4. [Four Things I Want You To Be Sure To Know](#)

Spiritual Fitness is concerned with building practices that increase our capacity for meaning, purpose and connectedness—essential determinants of well-being. Engaging in these practices fills our living with well-being.

There are many ways to engage with these exercises. What's important is to get started and find a way that works for you. To start, read over them. Peruse them. Ponder your current situation as you read. What questions and concerns do you have that you bring to these exercises? See what jumps out for you.

Begin with [Four Questions a Day](#). Then pick a next exercise that speaks to you:

- If you're in the mindset to "never let a good crisis go to waste", or if you find yourself wondering, "What is this aliveness in me that is yearning to be revealed and lived?" pay attention to [Where Are You? Living Your Questions](#).
- If you may be feeling overwhelmed, or interested in keeping yourself emotionally buoyant for the long term, I encourage you to delve into [Key Relationships](#).
- If you are concerned with healing a relationship and finding peace, particularly if you're facing the prospect of dying or losing someone you love, take a deep look at [Four Things I Want You To Be Sure To Know](#).

Remember that learning happens in the repetition. Practice these exercises until they become part of your daily living. Be patient and gentle with yourself, yet steadfast, too. It is said that it takes 21 days to create a new habit; do it for 90 days and create a new lifestyle. When you forget one day, no worries, simply come back to it again and again. Some people find it most helpful to engage in these with a learning partner. Who might that be for you?

### 1. [Four Questions a Day](#)

**Exercise:** Each day, take time to stop and consider these four questions:

1. **What surprised me today?**
2. **What touched me today?**
3. **What inspired me today?**

#### 4. For what am I grateful?

At the end of each day, stop and take 5 or 10 minutes of quiet time to contemplate each of the four questions, one at a time.

- Ask the first question: What surprised me today? Reflect back on your day until you come to the first thing that surprised you. Stop and make note of it in a little journal or a file on your smart phone. It's important to write it down.
- Then go on to the next question. Again, think back on your day until you come to the first thing that touched you, and jot it down. And so on, for the other questions.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of every time during the day you were surprised, touched, etc. Simply notice one example for each question. Do this every day for three-weeks and see what you discover. (This exercise is drawn from research on gratitude, and from the teachings of Rachel Naomi Remen MD, developer of the Healer's Art course.)

**Comment:** This exercise is a foundational practice for discovery, wisdom and well-being. It is about living with open eyes and an open heart. We increase our capacity for well-being as we develop new ways of recognizing that which is positive and meaningful. In developing this practice, discover for yourself what others have noted:

- *The heart is an organ of vision that allows us to see below the surface of things. Meaning is a function of the heart.* Rachel Naomi Remen, MD
- *It's only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.* The Little Prince, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
- *Your heart will give you greater counsel than all the world's scholars.* The Talmud

**The first stage** of this exercise, as described above, is to be able to stop and reflect on these questions at the ends of the day, and notice positive emotions and meaningful moments. These can be moments in relation with yourself, with others, and with the world around you, including the Transcendent. (See Key Relationships below).

**As a next stage**, reflect on the questions while going through your day. Take moments to stop, reflect on the questions and jot down your response.

**As you embody the practice**, notice when you're being surprised, touched, inspired, or grateful as the reaction arises. For example, while walking or in conversation with someone, notice yourself being surprised or touched.

**At the next level** you can progress to respond while in the experience. For example, when you notice that you're surprised, touched, inspired or grateful by something someone says or does, you might respond to them saying something like: "That strikes me as remarkable!" "Wait a minute, let me take that in." "I'm touched by what you say." "I'm inspired." "Thank you, that means a lot to me." "I'm grateful to you for..." "I admire you ..." "I love you."

In filling our day in this way, we begin to see and fashion a world that is increasingly filled with well-being.

This exercise is built on fundamental skills for mindfulness and for designing our well-being. These skills include, among others, the ability to: Stop. Sense. Notice. Allow. Notice with

appreciation. Notice without judging or needing to understand. Wonder. Reflect. Engage. Converse. Ask questions. Find meaning. Focus ones Attention and Intention. Express with authenticity.

## **2. Where Are You? Living Your Question**

**Exercise:** Take moments during the week to stop and note: what do you discover about what matters most for you?

**Background:** In the midst of any disruption—within the confusion, vulnerability, uncertainty, fear, change, loss, excitement—one can experience an opening, an awakening. A disruption can be temporary or ongoing. It may affect a limited area of one’s life or many areas. It may be a disruption that even threatens life itself.

The opening or awakening can be described as a veil being lifted; or an opening of a window that pushes aside our everyday busyness, preoccupations and habitual ways of seeing. An opening can reveal, as Rachel Remen describes, “a deeper river of meaning just below the surface.”

This week, as you reflect on your current life and way of living, consider the following:

- What is your situation?
- Who is involved?
- Who are you in this situation? What is your role?
- What matters most for you?

You may wish to consider different horizons of time: today, the coming months or year, the next chapter of your life. As you wonder, keep an eye out for the following: What is the aliveness in you that is yearning to be revealed and lived?

Ponder these questions during a period of quiet, or on a walk, while journaling, or in conversation with others. Ponder these questions, too, while in the midst of a disruption or an emotional reaction, whether it be positive or negative. Again, note your discoveries. Keep in mind the wisdom of the poet Rilke:

***Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.***

**—Rainer Maria Rilke (from Letters to a Young Poet)**

**Comment:** Living with uncertainty and discovering your questions are fundamental skills for designing well-being.

### **3. Key Relationships**

**Exercise:** Ponder and note the following: Which of the five key relationships listed below do you have in your life that support your self-care and well-being? Which would you like to cultivate?

- Self
- Soul Friend
- Therapist
- Colleague
- Transcendent

Are there other kinds of key relationships that nourish you?

**Background:** Human beings are relational beings. We are in relationship with our self, others and the Transcendent (broadly understood for our purposes as that which is beyond our individual relationships and everyday ways of experiencing the world and our inner life).

#### **With your Self**

By “self,” I’m referring to our physical, psychological, social and spiritual selves. In this view, let us appreciate that everything we experience and do is mediated through our body. Thus, taking care of our body, our physical self, is essential for spiritual fitness and well-being. As I like to keep in mind: We have just one body. Just one life. This is it. Really!

Let us appreciate that we are finite beings. On the one hand, our body limits what we can do. We can only do what our body and being allow us to do. On the other hand, it is also true that we can do more than we can possibly imagine or dream.

Supporting a positive relationship with the self includes practices such as self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-respect, self-forgiveness, and practices for grit, resilience and endurance. Developing a healthy relationship with self includes “the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

#### **With Others**

We live in relation with others: family, friends, people in the community, and people at work. More broadly, we are in relationship with the writers of the words we read, with the composers and performers of music we listen to, with artists and architects. We are in relationship with plants and animals, with the physical and natural world around us. Let us consider relationships with others that are nourishing and keep us buoyant, for example, with a:

- **Soul Friend** – someone you connect with at a level of deep meaning and understanding. Someone with whom you can share freely, be vulnerable, be listened to without judgement. This includes someone you can turn to at two o’clock in the morning, during a crisis. (Research shows that people who have these kinds of people in their lives live longer than those who don’t). A soul friend can be someone you’re meeting for the first time, as well as someone you know.

- **Therapist** – e.g. psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, life coaches, social workers, chaplains, spiritual directors. Someone who provides a safe place to process your situation, thoughts, feelings, behavior, attitudes, aspirations, and more. As a chaplain, I check in regularly with a therapist with whom I reflect on my current situation and inner life. For me, it's akin to a baseball player who works weekly with a batting coach to monitor his swing and mental attitude at the plate. This relationship allows me to observe and talk through my stories, fears, uncertainties, joys, gratitude or moods and gain perspective and guidance. As a chaplain, I also have the privilege to provide this kind of relationship to a wide range of people from of all backgrounds, including other therapists.
- **Colleague or Peer** – people with whom you have a shared life experience or commitment. For example, I can resonate with another chaplain, physician, or medical student in ways that I cannot with my wife or a soul friend or therapist.

### **With the Transcendent**

As a human being, we are in relationship with that which is greater than our individual self and others. We are in relationship with all life, history, world, existence, and that which goes by many names, such as God, Jesus, Allah, Atman, Great Spirit, the Sacred, Source, the One, the One who can't be named, Mystery. As human biological beings we are wired to experience moments of awe, inspiration, joy, belonging, grace, peace, gratitude, intuition, the sacred, holiness, oneness, being in the flow, and synchronicity (a meaningful unexplained coincidence). These moments can feel outside of time. It can be a singular “top of the mountain” or a once in a lifetime moment. It can be an ordinary moment such as encountering a rainbow, seeing the sun break through a cloud, being enthralled by a taste of chocolate, or touched by an unexpected act of kindness.

Possibilities for transcendent moments abound. They can happen anytime, anywhere: in nature, while making or appreciating art or music, during movement, prayer, ritual, reading, worship, study, crying, laughter, in community, volunteering, in dreams. They can happen in the midst of work, sport, gardening, laughing, listening to a baby laugh, at the bedside of the dying. This kind of moment is experienced as something that comes upon you, happens to you; something you allow for and appreciate, not something you make happen. We are more likely to have a transcendent experience when we get outside our normal routine, stop our busyness, set aside pre-occupations. We are ripe for Transcendent moments during times of major life change or disruption.

## **4. Four Things I Want You To Be Sure To Know**

As human beings, we are finite, relational beings who belong to life. As human beings, expressing that which is essential is, well, essential. Particularly when we realize we may never see someone again. Here are four essential elements to include in a conversation with people in your life, elements that contribute to healing a relationship and finding peace, particularly if you're facing the prospect of dying or losing someone you love. This dialogue can also take place with yourself, with the Transcendent and “in mind and heart” with those who are no longer living.

- 1) **Appreciations, Gratitude:** *What I appreciate about you is... What I admire about you is... I am grateful for... I acknowledge that... You may include moments or stories of joy, happiness, whimsy among others.*

- 2) **Regrets, Forgiveness:** *I regret that... You know that time I did \_\_\_\_\_ and you said \_\_\_\_\_ and I said \_\_\_\_\_, it really doesn't matter... I'm sorry... Please forgive me for... forgive you for...*
- 3) **Love:** *I love you... How do I love thee; let me count the ways (Shakespeare)... You mean more to me than... Without you... Keep in mind the unspoken ways to express love—physically through kissing and touch, or through gifts or other actions.*
- 4) **Meaning and Blessing for the future:** *What I wish for you is... What I hope for you is... What I will always remember is... I promise that... I bless you... I pray that... A piece of you is inscribed upon my heart... What I hope for your [children and grandchildren] is... Please remember... What I want you to know is...*

## Part 2 Additional Resources

As a complement to the Spiritual Fitness Exercises, I'm pleased to share with you these additional exercises, inspirational quotations, teachings, and references:

1. [Prescription for Your Spiritual Fitness and Well-Being](#)
2. [Quotations for Living with Well-Being](#)
3. [Understanding Spirituality, Well-Being and Design](#)
4. [Teachings from Jewish Tradition, Poetry, and Literature](#)
5. [Further Exercises and Perspectives](#)
6. [Videos to open your eyes and heart](#)

Read over this section. As you scan, let your eye be captured by sections that pique your interest. Let curiosity be your guide. As you're inclined, search the internet and explore an author or topic. Then set aside some time with the first exercise.

### 1. [Prescription for Your Spiritual Fitness and Well-Being](#)

**Exercise:** I invite you to write a prescription for yourself. Set aside 15-30 minutes in a place where you'll be undisturbed.

Scan the table on the next page. Take a few minutes before writing to consider the following questions: *Who am I? What matters most for me? What sustains me? What nourishes me? With Whom? Where? When?*

Begin to fill in the table on the next page. Be as specific as you can.

For example, under "Practices" you might list: take a daily walk, savor chocolate, cook with friends, call a soul friend, reach out to a friend in need, stop and help a stranger, seek out inspiring stories, sing a favorite song or chant in the shower or a resonant stairwell, break into a dance in the kitchen, keep a file of jokes, keep a file of inspirational quotes and videos, meet weekly with a learning partner, stand sentinel on rock next to the ocean, walk in the forest, exercise with a trainer.

When you are ready, sign and date your prescription. Put it in a place where you can see it. Add to it freely.

# Rx

## Prescription for Well-Being

**Who am I? What Matter Most? What is my Purpose?** List: Relationships, roles, questions you live (see Rilke quote), what you care about, essential motivations, pursuits, goals.

### Practices

List verbs: What actions sustain you?

### Inspirations

List nouns: Who/What inspires you? people, stories, ideas, quotes, images, poems, films, books, art, music food, clothes, objects, rituals, places, etc.

Rx \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Refills unlimited  
(your signature)



## 2. Quotations for Living with Well-Being

**Living the Question** from *Letters to a Young Poet* by Rainer Maria Rilke

*Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.*

**On Meaning** by Rachel Naomi Remen

*Meaning is the antecedent of commitment, and the original meaning of our work is service. Service is not a relationship between an expert and a problem; it is a human relationship, a work of the heart and the soul.*

I highly recommend two books by Rachel Naomi Remen: *Kitchen Table Wisdom* and *My Grandfather's Blessings*.

**What is Essential** from *The Little Prince* by Antoine Saint-Exupéry

*And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.*

**Where is your heart?** from “Bridging with the Sacred: Reflections of an MD Chaplain” by Chaplain Bruce Feldstein MD, *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, 42(1):155-161, 2011.

*Life has a curious way of growing us beyond what we can imagine ... [Love is a kind of medicine] not found in an I.V. or prescription bottle or at the end of a scalpel ... Within each of us, there is a human longing for meaningful connection ... the depth of that connection is made possible by our willingness to be authentic and by focusing on the quality of presence, and the attention and intention that we bring to each other. We become authentic, in part by asking ourselves: What is the uniqueness in me that asks to be lived? Where is my heart?*

**Taking Time Out: an Antidote to Busyness (Heart-Killing)**

Rest is essential for cultivating well-being, particularly for those of us who are prone to busyness. Here are excerpts from *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in our Busy Lives*, by Wayne Muller.

*In the relentless busyness of modern life we have lost the rhythm between work and rest...Even when our intentions are noble and our efforts sincere—even when we dedicate our lives to the service of others—the corrosive pressure of frantic overactivity can nonetheless cause suffering in ourselves and others...As Brother David Steindl-Rast reminds us, the Chinese pictograph for “busy” is composed of two characters: heart and killing...Rest is an essential enzyme of life, as necessary as air. Without rest, we cannot sustain the energy needed to have life. We refuse to rest at our peril—and yet in a world where overwork is seen as a professional virtue, many of us feel we can legitimately be stopped only by physical illness or collapse.*

## **Further Thoughts for Moving Forward**

*What is this aliveness in me—this unfolding aliveness—that is yearning to be revealed and lived?* Chaplain Bruce Feldstein MD, BCC

*The real journey of discovery lies not in seeking new vistas, but in having new eyes.*  
Marcel Proust

*People do not decide their futures, they decide their habits and their habits decide their futures.* F. Matthias Alexander

*There is a strength that comes from knowing you will die and still refusing to love with anything less than your whole self.* Brian Andreas

*If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions.* Albert Einstein

## **3. Understanding Spirituality, Well-Being, and Designing Spirituality**

Spirituality is the way you find meaning, hope, comfort and inner peace in your life. Many people find spirituality through religion. Some find it through music, art or a connection with nature. Others find it in their values and principles.

*Am Fam Physician.* 2001 Jan 1;63(1):89. <http://www.aafp.org/afp/2001/0101/p89.html>

Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred.

Puchalski, et. al. Improving the Quality of Spiritual Care as a Dimension of Palliative Care: The Report of the Consensus Conference. *Journal of Palliative Medicine* 12(10): 885-904, 2009.

## **Well-Being**

### **What is Well-Being? (Gallup.com)**

*Well-being isn't just about being happy or physically fit. It's about everything that is important to each of us and how we experience our lives. "A life well-lived" means something different to every person. By studying the world's population, Gallup uncovered the common elements of wellbeing—physical, career, social, financial and community—that need to be fulfilled for people to thrive.* From [What Wellbeing Means in the Coronavirus Era](#) by Brian J. Brim Ed.D. and Jennifer Robinson May 15, 2020, Gallup.com.

### **On Positive Psychology and Well-Being (Seligman)**

As Seligman notes: Well-being, not happiness, is the topic of positive psychology. The goal of positive psychology in well-being theory is to increase the amount of flourishing in your own life and on the planet. Well-being has five measurable elements (PERMA). No one element defines well-being, but each contributes to it.

These elements are:

- **Positive emotions** (of which happiness, joy and life satisfaction are aspects)
- **Engagement**
- **Relationships**
- **Meaning and purpose**
- **Accomplishment**

Read more about **PERMA**:

<https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/>

**Visit Stanford WellMD** to explore well-being and professional fulfillment, and to access anonymous online self-test sites:

<https://wellmd.stanford.edu/center1.html>

<https://wellmd.stanford.edu/test-yourself.html>

## **Designing**

Designing, for me, is concerned with practical living, caring for our human concerns and values, what matters most. Designing involves attention and intention, a keen awareness of underlying concerns and the larger purpose. Designing keeps in mind the governing context: ethical, moral, historical, communal and ecological. Successful designing includes new ways of seeing, listening, and thinking.

### **Ontological Design, a Framework for Designing Ourselves (Flores)**

Ontological Design is a philosophical approach developed by Fernando Flores and others beginning in the 1980s. It provides a framework for observing and thinking that enables us to design ourselves. Two key precepts are:

- (1) Human beings are biological beings, historical beings and linguistic beings.  
Terry Winograd and Fernando Flores, *Understanding Computers and Cognition: A New Foundation for Design*, 1986.
- (2) According to Flores, there is a structure of concerns that is constitutive of every human being's life. 'Constitutive' means the structure of concerns that make up the substance of human actions, possibilities, and assessments. Thirteen of these domains of concern include: body, family, education, career, work, aesthetics, sociability, money or prudence, world, dignity, situation (mood), spirituality, and membership (belonging). I would include the domain of "play".  
<http://conversationsforaction.com/chapters/chapter-11-recurrent-domains-human-concerns>

## 4. Teachings from Jewish Tradition, Poetry and Literature

### From Jewish Tradition

#### Noah and the Ark (Genesis Chapters 6 – 9)

Noah prepared to survive the flood by building an ark, placing within it all that he would need to continue living during the time of the flood and after. In this time of the pandemic (including economic and social disruption), consider the following, as Remen suggests, If your body and being are an “ark”, what do you wish to take with you, for now, and for after the pandemic is over?

#### Insist on your blessing. Jacob wrestling with the angel (Genesis 32: 22 – 31)

One night, Jacob finds himself wrestling throughout the night with an unknown being, as we later learn, an angel of God. Neither prevails against the other. Morning dawns and the angel says to Jacob, you must let me go. Jacob insists, “I won’t let you go unless you bless me.” The angel blesses Jacob with a new name, *Yisra-el*—Israel—one who wrestles with God. The angel departs. After a night of wrestling, wounded and blessed, Jacob limped off into the rising sun. A lesson for the journey: After a “night of wrestling,” be sure to insist on your blessing.

#### Finding Guidance When You’re Off Your Map (Exodus 13: 21 – 22).

On their journey to freedom from Egypt—from the narrow place of constraint and bondage—the Israelites crossed the Red Sea. The waters opened before them, then closed behind them. There was no going back. How did they navigate through the wilderness when they were off their map? They followed the presence of God, who led the way in a Pillar of Cloud by day and a Pillar of Fire by night. They followed the pillars. When they remained overhead, the Israelites stayed put. When the pillar moved, the Israelites picked up and moved on. When you are off your map, what guides you? What is your Pillar of Cloud and what is your Pillar of Fire? What are the skills you can develop to recognize and follow your pillars?

#### Unlocking New Habits: Burning Bush and Holy Ground (Exodus 3:1 – 6).

Moses encountered God at the burning bush. From this we learn the value of stopping in the midst of our everyday busyness, and shifting from our habitual way of looking and seeing, to discover a dimension of life that is otherwise unseen.

Moses was tending his flock in the wilderness when he came upon a fire blazing out of a bush. He stopped and gazed. He noticed the bush was not consumed and marveled. God, from within the bush, observed Moses stopping to notice and called out his name. “Moses! Moses!” Moses answered. “Hineini. Here I am.” And God said, “Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from off your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.”

**Commentary** on “Remove the sandals from off your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground”: In a Hasidic understanding, the Hebrew word for *sandal* shares the root letters for the Hebrew word for *lock*. And the Hebrew word for *foot* shares the root letters for *routine* or *habit*. Thus, the verse can be understood as follows: Unlock yourself from your daily habits (routines) and see that the ground on which you stand is holy ground. (From *Darchei Ha’emunah* by R. Yosef David Mei’as, in *Pineini HaHasidut*, translation by Rabbi Sheldon Lewis).

## **Story of Reb Zusha**

Reb Zusha, a great Hasidic master, is on his deathbed. His students are seeing him crying and ask him, "Why are you crying?" "I'm afraid," said Zusha, "Because when I get to heaven, I know God's not going to ask me 'Why weren't you more like Moses?' or 'Why weren't you more like King David?' After all, God already has a Moses and a King David. I am afraid that God will ask, 'Zusha, why weren't you more like Zusha?' and then what will I say?"

## **From Poetry and Literature**

In Jewish tradition, Reb Zusha teaches us the value of realizing and living our uniqueness and possibility. In ancient Greece, Socrates taught "Know Thyself." These ideas are reflected in this poem and story.

### **Poem by Stephen Levine, Breaking the Drought: Visions of Grace**

I may not know my original face  
but I know how to smile.  
I may not know the recipe for the diameter of a circle  
but I know how to cut a slice for a friend.  
I may not be Mary or the Buddha  
but I can be kind.  
I may not be a diamond cutter  
but I still long for rays of light that reach the heart.  
I may not be standing on the hill of skulls  
but I know love when I see it.

### **Story of the Big Jump (by Benjamin Elkin, Illustrations by Katherine Evans)**

In the old days, no one but a King could have a dog for a pet. One day when the boys and girls came to see the King, a dog ran to one of the children. The King smiled. The child asked the King, "What would I have to do to have this dog?" The King said, "If you could do the Big Jump you *could* have the dog. The King demonstrated. With one magnificent leap, he jumped from the ground to the top of a very tall tower. The child went home to practice. At first frustrated, but later inspired by the dog, the child returned to the King. The child went to the tower at the foot of the stairwell, and jumped, one-step at a time, all the way to the top of the tower. And that his how a child came to have a dog in the old days when no one but a King could have a dog for a pet.

## **5. Further Exercises and Perspectives**

### **Prepare Your Attention and Intention**

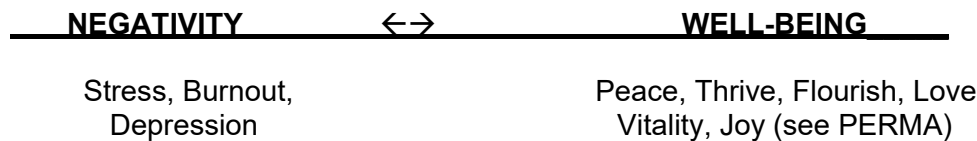
Being able to stop and focus your attention and intention before beginning an activity or engaging with another person is an essential skill for living with meaning and purpose, and experiencing joy. As an example, here is a practice I developed in my work as a chaplain before going into a room to see a patient. It can be applied to any activity.

First, before I enter the room, I prepare my Attention by focusing on my breathing and cleansing my hands. I STOP and bring my full attention to my body standing on the ground, and then to my breathing. I breathe in that which is lifegiving. I let go of what is

old and used up and no longer supports life. As I wash or gel my hands, I lift up my hands to wash away or evaporate my pre-occupations.

Next, I STOP and prepare my Intention. With focused breathing, I remind myself: *May I meet you, my patient, in your world as it is for you and accompany you from there. May I bring a quality of presence that allows you to connect with your source of strength, comfort and meaning, whatever that is for you. What matters most for you in this moment is what matters for me. May I identify and respond to that. May I bring all of my life experience as well as my training to serve you. May I be well used.*

### **Pivoting Toward Well-Being**



When you notice yourself “pointed” in a negative direction, physically stand up, stop, then intentionally **pivot** 180 degrees to face in the direction of well-being. Prepare your Attention, state your Intention, then proceed. Your intention may be something like – “May I proceed in the direction of well-being.” Or, “May I be blessed with love. May I be blessed with Peace. May I be blessed with safety. May I be blessed with well-being (by Rabbi Yael Levy).”

### **Four Practices for an Age of Loneliness**

Anita Friedman, Executive Director of JFCS, from a conversation with Vivek Murthy MD (19<sup>th</sup> Surgeon General of the U.S.), relates the following four pieces of advice to create meaningful connection in this age of loneliness:

- 1) **Spend time every day with someone you love.**
- 2) **Make the time meaningful.** Be engaged, focused, don't multi-task.
- 3) **Encourage solitude.** Solitude is not loneliness.
- 4) **Help and be helped.** Serve others. Accepting help is not a sign of weakness.

Often, my patients or their family members are uncomfortable receiving help, particularly those who are givers. Many have found it useful to view receiving help from others as an act of giving – giving someone else an opportunity to serve you.

### **Emotional Reactions to Not Knowing**

During times of uncertainty, not knowing what's going to happen often produces reactions of fear and confusion. Instead of confusion, consider are other emotional reactions to “not knowing.” With practice, one can learn to react with perplexity or wonder.

- Confusion (negative) “Ugh. I don't know what's going on and I don't like it.”
- Perplexity (neutral) “Hmm. I don't know what's going on here.”
- Wonder (positive) “Wow. I don't know what's going, and I'm curious, I like it.”

## Levels of Living—Resiliency

We move up and down through different Levels of Living (below) at different times in our day and life. To “know thyself” is a timeless skill that includes being able to recognize what level we’re in and how we move from one to another. What moves you in the directions of Survival? What is the resilience in you that moves you toward Peaking? (This “Levels of Living” framework was presented at the George Washington University Summer Institute on Spirituality and Healing, 2010).

### Peaking

- At one with self, others, God, and nature.
- Gratefulness as a way of life. Sees life as a gift.
- Balanced, Integrated, Energized, Peaceful.

### Inspiring

- Working with others for a common good.
- Inspired action as a way of life sees life as a challenge.
- Collaborative, teamwork, deep meaning, high physical and emotional energy, productive inner drive.

### Creating

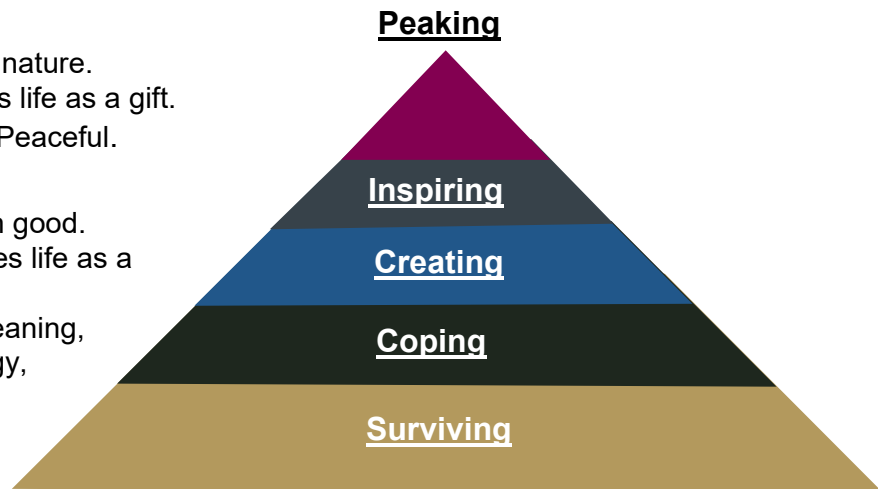
- Making new connections as a way of life.
- Sees life as a challenge. Constant challenge of self and mastery of new behavior and skills.
- Intimacy: focused on ideas and people. Competent and caring.
- Strong sense of self-determination.

### Coping

- Trying hard as a way of life. Sees life as a struggle
- Minimal interaction and group support
- Often compensates through various thrills
- Workaholics, works by external demand
- Some involvement and feeling good about skills and being needed

### Surviving

- Fear filled, panicked, bored, out of control. Depressed, overwhelmed, and avoids risk. Scattered, addicted. No time to prepare. Avoidance behavior, denial. Few if any support systems. Unwilling to ask for help. Dependent on too many people. Feeling unloved, incapable of loving. Untouched, unheard, invisible. Feels like a victim. Loss of hope. Feeling low skill level whether or not actual. Fighting off depression as a way of life. Sees life as a no-win situation.



## **Just One Body, Just One Life. This is It. Really! (Feldstein)**

It's easy to overlook the basic fact that we have just one body, one life. Everything we do in life is mediated through our one body. Taking care of our body and our self is our first responsibility. Pay attention to how you:

- **Care for your Body:** Breathe, Eat, Drink, Move, Exercise, Rest, Sleep.
- **Care for your Self with a focus on:**
  - Antidotes to Busyness, mindfulness, rest, designing for what's important.
  - Key Relationships
  - Detoxifying Death to celebrate To Life, *L'Chaim*.
  - Honoring Loss and Grief. Loss and grief are inescapable. Skills for grief are essential.

## **What Shall We Wish For Each Other?**

It is said that one should make 100 blessings a day (Talmud). This includes performing acts of kindness, or being grateful for our food. To wish someone well is a blessing. One of my very favorite practices is to ask someone. ***Before I go, what can I wish for you?*** The person says what they wish for, and I respond. I will usually include the words that they said. *What I wish for you is...* I may also include that which is unspoken. *What I admire about you is...* *What I hope for you is...* *I wish for you all the things you and others wish for you, that you can't even put into words.* The most important thing is to listen for what matters and speak from the heart.

More recently I'm saying the following, with friends, family members, and when it's appropriate, with patients and students. ***I have a question for us before we go. What shall we wish for each other?***

## **Other practices to focus and reduce stress**

- **STOP:** **S**top. **T**ake a Deep Breath. **O**bserve. **P**roceed.
- **Breathe in a count of 5, out a count of 10.** Three times.
- **5-4-3-2-1** When feeling chaotic, scattered, or anxious, or simply wishing to prepare your attention, this mindfulness exercises anchors you in the present.
  - Name 5 things you can **see**. Use what's around you.
  - Name 4 things you can **hear** (you can clap if you don't hear anything).
  - Name 3 things you can **touch or feel** including your hand on hand.
  - Name 2 things you can **taste or smell**.
  - Name 1 **good thing** about this moment.
- **Scribble Drawing.** Draw a scribble line on a paper then color it in. 10 minutes daily.
- **Tapping** below collarbones, and say "I totally and completely accept myself even though\_\_\_\_\_."



- **Sing your Song.** Serious songs. Silly songs. Chants. While alone in the shower. While walking with others. What songs do you sing?

## 6. Videos to open your eyes and heart

Here are some short videos that inspire me. What are yours? Please email me.

- **“A Good Day” with Brother Steindl-Rast.** A powerful contemplation on gratitude. <https://youtu.be/3ZI9puhwiyw>
- **The Power of Words.** A woman stops to rewrite a sign for a blind man that makes a powerful impact on him. <https://youtu.be/Hzqzim5m7oU>
- **Lockdown Productivity:** Spaceship You. Pandemic season. Your mission: Return Better than Ever. Keep your physical/mental core going (exercise, sleep, recreation, creation; everything you have power to effect). <https://youtu.be/snAhsXyO3Ck>
- **Happiness is Helping Others.** Typewriter Artist. About a remarkable man who does typewriter art. I’m particularly struck when he asks, “So, what can you do?” <https://youtu.be/zcrulov45bl>

*Thank you and be well*

*Bruce*

*If you are in need of emotional, mental, physical, or spiritual support, Jewish Family and Children’s Services is here to help. Visit [www.jfcs.org](http://www.jfcs.org) or call 415-449-3700.*

*To make a donation, visit [donate.jfcs.org](http://donate.jfcs.org)*