

# TRANSCENDENTAL TREK

## *Spirituality*



*This essay was written by Dr. Janet Lozar several months prior to her death on October 23, 2005. She gave her essay the title "Transcendental Trek" as part of her commitment to and inspirational guidance for young adults. Dr. Lozar's professional activities included her leadership with creating the university's Athletic Training Education Program; for her vision, inspiration, detailed curriculum development, and perseverance, the university's faculty, staff and students have heart-felt gratitude. A memorial tree planted in her honor near her academic home provides a living memory of her connectedness to and love for the positive development of young adults. This essay on "Spirituality and Your Health" is maintained with COMPASS as part of her lasting legacy.*

**Does this sound like you?** "Tomorrow morning my family back home will be going to church to get their weekly religious lesson. Not me! After the party tonight I plan to go to bed and stay there until I roll out of bed sometime around noon."

**How about this?** "I hear that there's a group meeting on campus for Bible study and some other religious groups that meet on a regular basis. I wonder what they're like. Could I fit in with any of these groups?"

**Or this?** "I had a great weekend! I met new friends on Friday night, went to the city on Saturday afternoon, and the basketball game on Sunday was really exciting! But my Monday classes are always challenging and I hope that I can be prepared for this evening's class and an exam on Tuesday. Having headaches from being so busy lately is such a drag. Maybe I should consider taking a yoga course or learning how to meditate like they were talking about in class last Thursday."



**“Have you ever thought of this?”** “What a relaxing day I had yesterday. My friend and I took a nice drive into the country and saw some beautiful farms and magnificent steeds. I really feel refreshed!”

Whether you’ve been conscientiously driven to religion or not, you are most likely aware of how spirituality affects you from day to day. You may decide to either move away from your current faith (if you have one) or adopt a new religion altogether. Regardless of whether you choose religion or not, your spirituality and the character it produces have a direct effect on your physical and mental health. Now you may be wondering, what exactly is spirituality and how can it possibly affect my health?

### **WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?**

When you think of your values, beliefs, and your sense of the meaning and purpose of your life, you are describing your spirituality. It is a special way of thinking or nature that encompasses your own intimacy. It is unique to you and may or may not be a part of a traditional religious practice. Your spirituality can be very broad, incorporating various avenues of practice such as structured religious services, social activities, family, nature, listening to music, yoga, and other forms of meditation.

### **IS SPIRITUALITY SCIENTIFICALLY PROVEN?**

Over time, scientific research has suggested that maintaining one’s spirituality is beneficial to his or her health.

**Although quite controversial, this growing body of evidence (incorporating Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism among others) has linked spirituality to:**

- Well-being, hope and optimism
- Coping and mental health
- Depression and related physical ailments
- Reduced factors in coronary artery disease
- Reduction in dangerous alcohol intake
- Decreased levels of pain
- Less cigarette smoking in women



It's quite possible that once the semester begins the hustle and bustle of daily life could interfere with your routines and habits, allowing your spiritual side to suffer. If you become ill, you should question whether being more in tune with your spirituality could have prevented it. Research has also shown that individuals who stop their spiritual activities tend to feel more stressed out, leading to physical ailments.

## **SPIRITUALITY THROUGH RELIGION**

More and more scientific research provides evidence that shows a positive link between spirituality and health, some of which centers on religion. According to a New York Times article (May 3, 2005), Americans who attend religious services at least once a week tend to have better-than-average health and lower rates of illness. This also includes depression, an illness that manifests in physical symptoms. There's also a reduction over a period of time in mortality risk for those who attend weekly religious services.

Students may stop their religious practices for a variety of reasons. Whatever the reason for religious nonparticipation, the move away from home can provide an opportunity for a reawakening or a rebirth in your faith, especially when you're able to make independent decisions away from home. If you are interested in joining a religious group, you may find it beneficial to your physical health. Because spirituality is nurtured by a healthy mentality and firm social support structures, the spiritual connection found within the fellowship of various congregations may lead some to better physical health.

## **YOUR SPIRIT IS WAITING**

Are you comfortable with your spirituality as it is or will you be searching for it while you're in college? You will find that the university has a variety of organizations (both religious and secular) in which you can become involved in order to feed your spirituality. Will you look into these organizations? Why not get involved?

### **What can you do?**

- Join one of the organizations on campus
- Enroll in a yoga course as an elective
- Engage in exercise that produces relaxation
- Schedule time each week to devote to your spirituality



- Listen to relaxing music (without simultaneously doing other activities)
- Read spiritual material
- Attend a religious service and meet members of that group

Instead of sitting back and allowing a new acquaintance to influence your beliefs, exercise your new freedom to structure your own spiritual development. Hopefully you will see how your spirituality is both personal and valuable, and that it shouldn't be tossed aside. Adopt a leadership role. Find out how important your spirituality is to you.

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