



SELF-HELP EXERCISE: RECLAIMING YOUR SPIRITUALITY

INTRODUCTION

Do your spiritual practices (e.g., prayer, meditation, study) feel less meaningful to you than they used to?

If your spiritual practices are no longer meeting your needs, this could be a time to reevaluate or find new meaning in your faith. There are several strategies you can try that may give you a renewed sense of meaning.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Find your place:



First, try researching your spiritual practices using a couple of different sources and see if you can learn something new about them. Then, restart your spiritual practices using a different approach or a slightly different pattern. Don't expect any major changes or dramatic benefits, especially at first; just focus on experiencing your practice in a slightly new way. If you stick with this new habit for a while, you may find that your practice has become meaningful again.

If, after a reasonable period of time has passed, your spiritual practices are still not meeting your needs, consider moving on to other strategies.

Finding your place in the world:

Have you lost your perspective as to where you belong in the grand scheme of things?



If so, consider these and other practices:

- ★ Sometimes the best way to find your place in the world is to help someone else find theirs. Volunteer your time at a senior center, soup kitchen, or homeless shelter. If you are interested in religious guidance, try out a church or community gathering that appeals to you.
- ★ Take a look at the world around you. Spend an evening stargazing on a clear night. Take a walk outside and notice the fragile beauty of blades of grass, flowers, or a bug crawling on a leaf. Notice the small kindnesses around you in everyday interactions – a clerk saying hello at a store, or someone smiling while passing on the street. Beauty and meaning are all around us – take some time and look for them.



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FIND YOUR WAY



Finding your way:

Do you feel trapped by an obligation, fate, or a feeling that your choices just won't make any difference? We often feel as though we have limited options because we, ourselves, have limited them. Of course, we don't do this intentionally. Imagine going on a long drive with your sunglasses on. Since it gets dark gradually, it may not even occur to you to take off your shades until late in the day. Difficult times in our lives have the same effect — things get darker and we don't perceive that a change has occurred. To clear your view of your options, try broadening your search.

Here are some suggestions:

- ★ Check out activities and programs you haven't considered before. Look for training and work opportunities or see a career counselor to learn what options are out there for you.
- ★ One of the easiest ways to regain a sense of control is to focus on the basics. Make a list of all the daily life choices that you have full control over (no matter how simple, silly, or boring the task) and then decide whether you want to check the task off the list. Doing this can remind you that you have control over many things and you are able to accomplish things once you decide to do them. If you start listing more significant things, you will regain your confidence and be able to see your options more clearly.

Things I control:

RECREATE



Recreating:

Do you feel like you're in a rut — always doing the same thing and not finding it rewarding? How do you become creative again?

Try to push yourself to do something new:

Go hiking or fishing, join a sports team, take music lessons, join a group, go to a museum, see a play or a concert, take an art or literature class, build something, fix something, plan something — anything that's new to you.



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GIVE AND RECEIVE LOVE AND KINDNESS

Giving and receiving love and kindness:

Do you have trouble expressing feelings to people you care about? Do you find yourself deflecting expressions of appreciation or care and concern that other people offer to you?

Start by initiating small expressions of care to people you care about:



- ★ Do little favors, not expecting anything in return.
- ★ Write notes of encouragement to people who are important to you.
- ★ Teach yourself to say a simple, sincere “thank you” every time someone says something nice to you – without trying to brush it off or claim you don’t deserve it.

FIND BEAUTY



Finding beauty:

Do you find it difficult to appreciate things you used to find beautiful? Sometimes after combat and operational stress and loss, people feel as though the world has become black and white instead of being in full color. One way to regain your appreciation of beauty is through visualization. Have you ever noticed that commercials in black and white sometimes have one item that is in color (often vivid red)?

This technique draws your eye and focuses your attention:

- ★ Try looking for one color or one small detail instead of the whole busy picture of the world.
- ★ Once you have thoroughly digested that one detail, use the same technique on something bigger. Maybe a painting or photo that appeals to you or something you find while taking a walk. Stop and look at it.
- ★ Think about this one thing. Appreciate what went into making it. Imagine the process that brought it into being. Think about the impact it has on the world and the impact the world has on it. Predict how it will change over time. Reflect on why you chose that thing to think about.
- ★ Try this same technique with music, poetry, and fiction. Finding beauty again may be as simple as looking at things you haven’t seen before or going someplace new. But it will often involve taking time to look at and think about the things around you in a new, more insightful and appreciative way.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Reclaiming your spirituality will take time and patience. Your commitment to trying different strategies to renew the sense of meaning your spiritual practices once had is a positive first step and a sign of how important your faith is to you. You may also want to consider seeking the guidance of a wise and experienced member of the clergy (e.g., pastor, priest, rabbi, bishop) from your tradition.



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