

The Roots of Health & Happiness

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HEALTH INVOLVES MORE THAN THE BODY IT INVOLVES HOW WE THINK AND HOW WE LIVE

Medical research now shows that how we think and how we live influences our physical health as well as, our mental well being. The negative affects of prolonged stress, lack of exercise, improper nutrition and negative thinking are discussed in mainstream magazines on a regular basis. Books written by medical professionals now summarize numerous studies indicating that individuals with an active religious or spiritual life tend to be mentally and physically healthier than those who do not pursue this aspect of life.

Famous research institutions tell us that spiritual practices can improve our health, increase our sense of fulfillment and reduce the stressful impact of living in an uncertain and rapidly changing world. Herbert Benson, M.D., a Harvard professor and researcher claims that "human beings are wired for God" and that belief in God (or an ultimate good) "is good for our health". Harold Koenig, M.D. from Duke University summarizes scientific studies of the relationship between an active spiritual life and health or the rate of healing. Throughout his book "Is Religion Good for Your Health?", he describes the very positive correlation found between spirituality and almost all measures of physical and emotional health.

All religions provide principles to live by and the means for developing a strong and good character. The great wisdom traditions encourage people to seek balance and moderation to make conscious, wise choices on a daily basis. Wise choices require an awareness of the "higher" capacities, as well as, the natural tendencies of human beings. Wise choices require an understanding of the nature of balance and the source of harmony with one's inner self and one's circumstances. They also require an understanding of what can - and what cannot - bring a lasting sense of satisfaction, happiness or inner peace.

Wisdom traditions teach that the first step on the road to inner peace and a more joyful life is to listen to our sense of what is "right", as well as, to our ego "wants". Most people find that achieving their personal goals is less stressful and more satisfying when they make choices that are consistent with their core values and higher ideals. Through out history and across cultures, wise people have claimed that true peace of mind (and therefore less stress) can only come from recognizing the transitory nature of physical life, developing desirable character qualities, and acknowledging the ever present Mystery behind each breath we take and every flower that blooms.

Below is a model of a fully functioning human being which includes the spiritual dimension. It is based on Plato's theory of the levels or kinds of human happiness, presented 2,400 years ago. This model is consistent with the greatest philosophies - both the East and the West - and also with the current findings of the social sciences. It depicts two levels of human functioning beyond the pursuit of ego satisfaction.

These higher capacities are generally ignored by both today's media and traditional Western psychology. As a result, many people genuinely do not know that they have within themselves a great capacity for good and the means for experiencing enduring satisfaction and peace. As a result, they tend to look outside themselves for satisfaction from things that can never ultimately satisfy.

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LEVELS OF HUMAN THINKING/FUNCTIONING	MOTIVATION	WAY OF BEING	AWARENESS
1) AUTOMATIC-REACTIVE LIVING (Survival)	PHYSICAL: Increase pleasure, avoid pain	REACTIVE: Behavior programmed by personal-, cultural, & physical environments	UNCONSCIOUS: "Automatic pilot", non-reflective, just reacts
2) EGO-INTENTIONAL LIVING (Effectiveness)	PSYCHOLOGICAL: Achieve personal & social goals	INTERACTIVE: Emphasis on personal opinions, desires & expectations	SEMI-CONSCIOUS: "Little story" of ego likes, desires, fears, etc.
3) INTEGRATIVE LIVING (Intrinsic Fulfillment)	PHILANTHROPIC: Serving others or a higher good	EXEMPLARARY: Choices reflect virtues, principles & qualities of good character	CONSCIOUS: "Bigger story" of life; good of others, what's "right"
4) TRANSCENDENT LIVING (Union)	UNITIVE: Alignment with ultimate Truth or Reality	SELFLESS: Prayer, reflection, right action & wisdom	SUPRA-CONSCIOUS: Universal truths of the wisdom tradition

