

Module 73 – Pillar Seven: Mind Over Matter

Walking Meditation & Prayer



White and pink Plumeria flowers I cut during my morning meditation walk.

I can't sit still. I always have to be doing something. So sitting meditation never worked for me! Walking meditation fits the bill. And, to me, prayer and meditation are interchangeable. But I'll separate them here to help define them.

The Benefits of Prayer

Jonathan Edwards, in the 1700s, reminded us that "Prayer is one of the greatest and most excellent means of nourishing the new nature, and of causing the soul to flourish and prosper." Edwards is "widely acknowledged to be America's most important and original philosophical theologian." He grounded his life's work on conceptions of beauty, harmony, and ethics.

If our image of God is a deity who loves us unconditionally and is forgiving, patient, and kind, it can't help but evoke similar feelings in us. Contemplating or meditating on the story of Jesus can be the inspiration we need to live our lives. What are the tangible benefits?

1. Prayer evokes healing. I once studied a technique where you could pray for another by allowing yourself to feel unconditional love for them. There were countless stories of healings that took place using this practice.
2. Studies show that people who pray regularly are physically and emotionally healthier than those who do not.
3. Depression, anxiety and many physical illnesses heal faster with prayer.
4. Prayer strengthens relationships. A prayerful posture puts you in another person's shoes. You see their side of the story and understand them in new ways.
5. Prayer opens you up to see the miracles in life: a smile, someone opening a door for you, the beauty in the face of a cloud or a sunset.
6. Prayer helps us to be thankful for what we have.

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Defining Prayer

Prayer is the act of communicating with a deity – especially as a petition or in adoration or contrition or thanksgiving.

A deity or God is defined as a supernatural being conceived as the perfect and omnipotent and omniscient originator and ruler of the universe. The deity or God becomes the object of worship in monotheistic religions.

To me, prayer can be directed toward God, to the angels or to the God in me. And I feel it's mostly about giving thanks. I am thankful for all that I have and ready for more!

Too often prayers are much like natural medicine where people go as the last resort. Whereas, both can be used daily to stay on your true path.

The Science of Prayer

Scientists don't often study prayer. Science claims that an action or activity has to be reproducible to be valid. It's only in the past few decades that some scientists have accepted that there are unknowables that can't be studied with our current methods and yet they still exist.

Prayer Is Good Medicine is one of the many books by Dr. Larry Dossey that helps us understand prayer.

Dossey clearly states that "I used to believe that we must choose between science and reason on one hand, and spirituality on the other, in how we lead our lives. Now I consider this a false choice. We can recover the sense of sacredness, not just in science, but in perhaps every area of life."

Meditation and Prayer

You'll hear comments from both ends of the spectrum that meditation and prayer are the same or that they are completely different. In the final analysis, I think it's up to you. If you're an atheist and you meditate, you're going to just clear your mind of thoughts, allowing it to take a break.

If you believe in a higher power then your focus is probably on that higher power when you meditate or pray. If you believe that you're the center of your universe and you create your reality, your prayers and meditation will evoke what you want your universe to be.

As I said earlier, for me meditation and prayer are interchangeable.

Meditation and Trance

A trance is any state of consciousness associated with single-minded absorption in a specific activity; without internal mental chatter about what's happening or what's in the environment. Most everyone has the ability to go into a trance state. Something as simple as daydreaming can put us into a trance state. So can running, swimming, pain, fatigue, sensory overload, drumming, or psychoactive chemicals.

Chemically, what happens to the body is a release of beta-endorphin, an opiate several hundred times more potent than heroin. Just reminiscing about a time when you were in a relaxed state of pleasure can be enough to get you back there.

Meditation and Medication

I've often wondered why meditation and medication sound so similar. Is meditation just another form of medication? The definition of meditation for some is to "empty your mind." Are we being asked to suppress our natural mind activity?

Some say that meditation is a discipline that trains one's mind to "realize some benefit." It's another nebulous definition of something that can't be "done" to you but is a very personal and "internal" experience.

Practitioners of meditation may cultivate a feeling of compassion or love or focus on an external object or a word or phrase. In some religions, a phrase of a prayer or a mantra is repeated.

It seems there are hundreds of different types of meditation that are part of most religions around the world. But when all is said and done, and even after a thousand studies of meditation in the English-language alone, nobody really knows how meditation works.

The Meditation Society of America says meditation is a three-step process that leads to a state of consciousness that brings serenity, clarity, and bliss. Now we're talking! But the more I read on their website, the less clear I became about meditation.

For me, meditation is putting aside the labyrinth of the mind and contemplating the beauty of nature and I do it while walking. It's the "intent" to meditate. It's saying to yourself, "I'm going to walk outside, gliding along like I don't have a care in the world and just walk."

Walking Meditation

I'm not going to make a list of the benefits of meditation because they are much the same as prayer – giving you a greater sense of awareness and possibility in your life.

When I think of walking meditation I imagine doing it outdoors. But some people walk indoors for any number of reasons: terrain, inclement weather or privacy.

As I mentioned I can't sit still long enough to do sitting meditation so I practice walking meditation. It's probably the best way for beginners to start meditating. It occupies your fidgety body and gives your eyes new scenes to observe but not necessarily engage.

Here are some suggested components of a walking meditation. There are no "rules." It's the last place you want to worry that you're not doing it "right." There is no right or wrong, there is only you with your intent to meditate and the rest will take care of itself.

1. Try to give yourself a minimum of 15 minutes to allow yourself to receive the benefit of slowing down your mind.
2. You can set your pace at a fast, normal or slow walking speed. Some people find that a slow pace is more contemplative.
3. Walk with your body loose. Check in with your muscles and try not to hold any tension as you swing your arms gently and stride along smoothly. Every once and a while do a mini slump to relax your whole body.
4. Be mindful of each step.
5. You may or may not want to focus on your breath. For some it can be a way to still the mind by focusing on the circular flow of your breath.
 - a. Or you may count your breathes in and out. One-two-three-four breathing in and one-two-three-four breathing out.

- b. You can count your steps with each breath for another way of introducing a “mindless” activity.
 - c. Although you aren’t necessarily focused on exercising during your walking meditation, don’t be surprised if your lung capacity improves and you are able to take deeper and longer breaths.
- 6. Your body is loose and your eyes should also be relaxed and not trying to judge everything you see. Don’t let your mind comment on what you are looking at beyond appreciating what you see.
- 7. Cultivate an Inner Smile and an Outer Smile. I first heard the term inner smile from Mantak Chia a famous Qi Gong teacher. He talks about circulating the energy in your body and evoking an inner smile. I say you can begin with an outer smile at the marvel of your body and allow that smile to touch your inner organs.
- 8. Most meditation books talk about walking in silence, no vocalization and no inner voice chattering.
 - a. That’s where I break ranks with the meditators because I like to sing to the angels as I walk.
 - b. So, maybe I’m in the prayer section after all!
- 9. If you choose to do your walking meditation indoors, adopt a relaxed strolling posture. I gently hold my hands behind my back and scuff/walk very slowly with my eyes on the floor. I immediately feel calm and just concentrate on my breathing and counting steps.

Putting Meditation

Some mothers have told me that they do their chores while practicing a form of walking meditation. The cleaning, folding washing, tidying all gets done but in a relaxed, almost trance-like state. It’s usually a quiet time too. You’re either alone or everyone avoids you so they won’t have to pitch in!

Focusing on the job at hand keeps your mind from wandering yet the tasks are usually not so complex that you have to use much of your mind at all. A great added benefit is that you can look forward to this time rather than seeing the household chores as mundane, boring or yet another groundhog day.

Walking a Labyrinth

I’ve only walked a few labyrinths, but the mere mention of one makes my eyes go slightly unfocused and I drop into a relaxed state. Maybe it’s another trance state. As I shuffle around a labyrinth the twists and turns automatically slow me down and I’m suddenly contemplating each footfall.

You can create your own labyrinth in your backyard. Get a number of stones to mark the paths and make a giant circle. Then within the circle make more and more circles. For more precise directions, you can go to www.labyrinthociety.org.

You can even make a labyrinth out of masking tape in a room in your house so there is absolutely no heavy lifting.

If you find a real labyrinth to walk, the power of all the people who have walked before can almost be felt.

Multitasking My Meditation

Every morning – except Saturday when I go to the Farmer’s Market – I wake around 5am just before the sky begins to lighten and the clouds turn pink. I strap on my MBT sandals and glide off on my sunrise walk. My walk is along a huge golf course path that gives me incredible views of the Maui mountains Haleakala and Halemahina and the Islands Lanai, Kahoolawe and Molokini.

The area where I walk used to be on the southern border of the Maui Ranchlands. I read about this area in a wonderful book called *Born in Paradise* by Armine Von Temski. (If you ever want to know some of the true nature of Maui, you will love this book.)

The Ranchlands are still above me on the very gradual slope of Mount Haleakela. But instead of tough and exotic cowboys I see modern day cowboys dragging hoses instead of ropes behind electric carts instead of horses. They wrangle sprinklers the size of geysers instead of cattle and sheep. Still, they tend the land with the same love and patience. I always get a nod and a wave when I pass by.

In one hand I carry a foot-long seed pod from a monkeypod tree. I use the seed pod – which I showed you in Module 68 –to gently tap and relax the muscles between my neck and shoulders (the sternocleidomastoids). More on my seed pod massage in next week’s *Easy Self-Massage* Module.

The tapping also allows me to count out a rhythm to aid my meditation. I can stay with the rhythm alone or count the taps 1-2-3-4; 1-2-3-4 as I walk. That along with the monotonous (but not painful) thumping distracts my mind from other thoughts.

Even so, the inevitable thoughts do spill into my monkey brain... Wow, I didn’t realize until now that I use a monkeypod seed pod to distract my monkey brain! How cool is that!

I also sing to the angels! Let me define what I mean by singing...I’m not a singer. I was one of those unfortunate kids who were told to just move their lips in choir because I apparently couldn’t hold a note. The trauma still remains to this day! However, alone in the early morning hours I can chant and sing away. So rather than just talking to the angels in angel language, I sing and soar.

As you can see, my morning meditation walk has all the features of a perfect prayer or meditation. And I wish you the same with yours.

Make It Happen

This couldn’t be more simple. Whether you’re praying or meditating makes no difference. As you build your “practice” it will become more defined for you and not be defined by someone else’s experience.

1. First decide if you want to slow down your mind and do it while you’re walking.
2. Find a quiet, peaceful area to walk in and count steps and/or breaths as you appreciate your breath and your steps.
3. Or stroll around your home to achieve much of the same benefits.
4. Imagine you are walking a labyrinth.

Until Next Week

Remember, if you don't think you can do EVERYTHING that I outline in the Future Health Now! modules, don't worry. I don't expect you to! Even if you just do 20% you'll probably see 80% of the results you are looking for.

Thanks for participating in Future Health Now! I hope you have been able to implement some of the strategies that I send each week. It will make all the difference in your future health if you do.

Coming Up In Module 74

Let's explore *Easy Self-Massage*. We actually do it all the time. When you grab a muscle and rub or squeeze or pull, that's self-massage. Just try doing it for about 5 minutes at a time and you've got a regular practice going!

If you have any questions about this module email me at help@drcarolyndean.com



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