

LOOK WITHIN YOURSELF AND FIND
THE POWER YOU HAVE TO HEAL —
YOUR SPIRITUALITY

Do You Believe?

BY CAROLYNN DELANY

At age 34, Chris DeTar discovered what approximately 178,700 women will find this year—a lump in her breast. It was cancer. A year later, DeTar credits her faith as an important resource during her healing process.

"I always believed that no matter what happened, I would be safe," she says.

Increasingly, medical professionals are recognizing the role spirituality plays in the recovery of patients like DeTar. A number of studies presented at the 1997 Harvard Medical School Spirituality and Healing Conference supported the link between spirituality and health.

Statistics show that an estimated 40 percent of hospitalized patients cite their religious belief as the most important factor in helping them cope with their illness.

Pam Raman, a holistic nurse practitioner, says integrating conventional and alternative therapies is often beneficial.

DeTar used visualization tapes to get her through chemotherapy. She would imagine a fountain. The water was the

medicine flowing into her body to heal her.

"All self-healing practices," Raman comments, "help patients access their own resources."

And spirituality may be one of our most valuable health assets. In a recent *Harvard Health Letter*, Herbert Benson, M.D., an associate professor at the Mind/Body Medical Institute at the university, says prayer promotes the "relaxation response," a form of meditation.

Benson found that by entering a state of calm for 10 to 20 minutes each day by focusing on a word, phrase or prayer, people can decrease blood pressure, heart rate and metabolic rates.

"The human spirit is relevant, indeed influential, in the treatment and prevention of illness," writes Benson in his book, *Timeless Healing*. "In 30 years of practicing medicine, I've found no healing force more impressive or more universally accessible than the power of the individual to care for and cure himself."

Spirituality means different things to different people. Some find their spiritual needs met by regular attendance at church. But, if organized religion does not appeal to you or you would like to supplement your Sunday ritual, try these activities to help nourish your spirit:

BEGIN BY REFLECTING

Decide what is important to you in your life right now. "It took having cancer for me to recognize the genuine love and support that exist," says DeTar. "Because

of this crisis I have gained enlightenment at a relatively young age. I don't need to wait 20 or 30 years to find out what is really important in life."

EXPRESS YOURSELF

There will be days when nothing seems to be going your way. Don't be afraid to get angry or upset. Expressing your anger can be an important cleansing tool in the healing process.

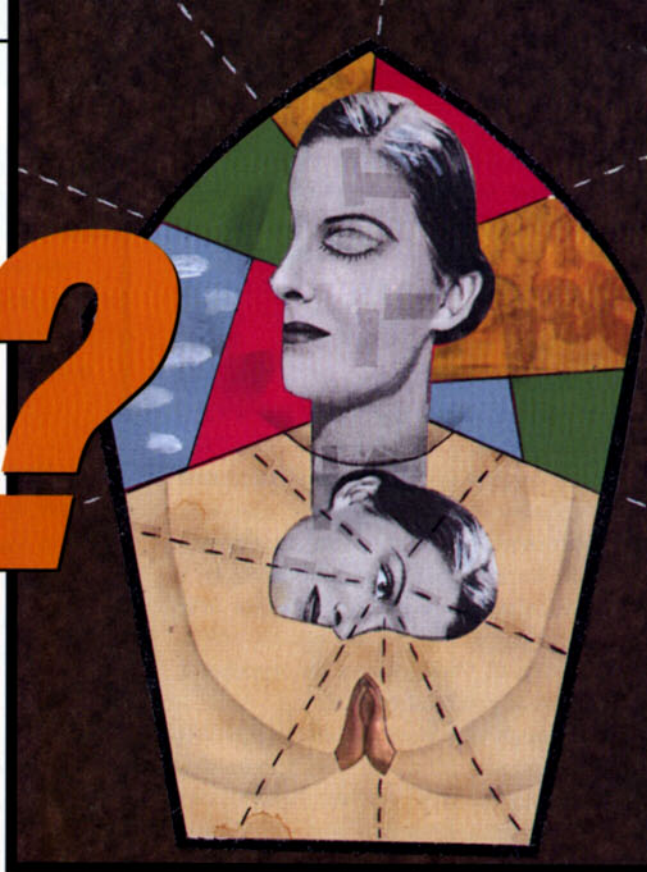
RESPECT YOUR BODY

The body houses your spirit and reflects the nourishment you give it. Adhere to the dietary needs suggested by your doctor. Limit or avoid caffeine, alcohol and nicotine. If possible, look into an exercise, such as yoga, that is designed to engage the body and soul.

GIVE THANKS

Acknowledge the achievements of your day and give thanks. While sitting in waiting rooms, DeTar started the practice of making gratitude lists, noting everything in life she was thankful for, particularly her young son Kyle. It helped remind her that she was still alive.

Like life, spirituality evolves. It is a work in progress. One that—with nourishment—will grow and feed our souls. ☺



HEALTH LINK

Feed Your Soul

You don't have to wait for a crisis to call on your spirituality. Visit the eHealth Online at www.ehealthmag.com to learn more about tapping your inner resources.

