Your Spiritual Health Programme

Boost your emotional wellbeing

Improve your physical and mental health

Connect with the good things in life

Introduction

Inside

2 Introduction
3 Overview
4 Taster
6 Connect
23 Peace of Mind
32 Care and Compassion
37 Summary
38 Science and Evidence

Published by the Spiritual Companions Trust • 2018 • Charity Number 1155777

www.spiritualcompanions.org
PO Box 3662,
Glastonbury BA6 8ZY
01458 555008

Spiritual Companions Trust

Supported by the Romeera Foundation
THE ROMEERA FOUNDATION

There is a wealth of evidence that spirituality can be great for your health, happiness and wellbeing. The *Spiritual Health Programme* shows you exactly how to bring these good things into your life.

It is the result of ten years research and development by a group of educators dedicated to understanding and clarifying the connections between spirituality and good health. We are not affiliated with any particular spiritual or religious tradition. Our approach is *person-centred*. We believe that the secret to good spiritual health is to ask the right questions starting with: How does it work best for you?

Throughout the *Programme* there are guided exercises. The audio for these exercises can be listened to on our website. A digital version of *Your Spiritual Health Programme* is freely available on our website.

We also provide a service of supporting individuals and small groups in going through the programme. We welcome you connecting with us if you are interested.

Wishing you great spiritual health.

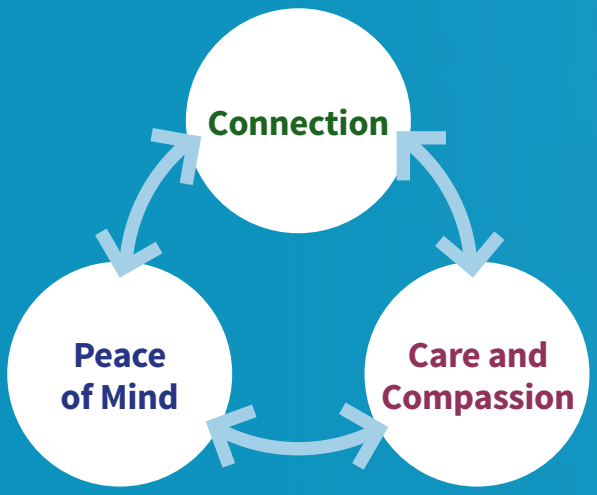
William Bloom
Director – Spiritual Companions Trust
2018

www.yourspiritualhealth.org

Audio of guided exercise is available on our website

Overview

At the heart of the *Spiritual Health Programme* are these three important elements:



© MUSICMAN / COVER IMAGE © NADTYOK

Connection

The foundation of spiritual health is your personal connection with the wonder and energy of life. From a flower, through a child's smile, to the awesome night sky there is a magic and beauty to existence.

It is crucial that day-by-day you have times of connecting with this wonder and energy. This is your spiritual fuel.

In the *Spiritual Health Programme* you will discover your own best ways of making this connection.

Spirituality: Your natural connection with the wonder and energy of life

Peace of Mind

From birth to death you are on a spiritual journey to become a wiser and better person. Every situation, easy or painful, is an opportunity to become more loving, compassionate and conscious.

This is the true foundation of happiness and inner peace.
In this programme you will be guided through how to manage your spiritual growth to find peace of mind.

Spiritual growth: The development of love and consciousness

Care and Compassion

The third foundation of spiritual health is to give care and love to others. You are part of the web of life and your spiritual generosity supports everyone's health.

Caring for others triggers a feedback loop of wellbeing that nourishes your own body and soul. In this programme you will be reminded and shown precisely how to do this.

Compassion: Caring for others while aware of their pain

A Taste of the Spiritual Health Programme

You can type and tick in all the boxes throughout this programme. Remember to Save as you go along.

Here is a quick taste of the programme. It consists of three questions and one exercise.

Three Crucial Questions

Let's start with three simple but crucial questions.

There are no right or wrong answers. In fact you may have no answers at all.

Just write down whatever comes into your heart and mind.

1. Connection
In what circumstances do you most easily connect with the wonder and energy of life?

2. Inner Peace
What do you feel is the spiritual purpose of your life?

3. Care
When and where have you enjoyed caring for someone?

Exercise

Notice the Good Feeling and Let It In

Remember a moment when you were really touched by the beauty of life.
(Suggestions: Some music. A landscape. A child.)

Imagine that in that moment you pause.

You sigh and say to yourself: *Mm. What a beautiful moment this is*.

You then allow yourself fully to feel the good experience.

A couple of soft breaths.

Another sigh.

Like soaking in a warm bath, you allow the good feeling into your body.

You say *Thank you* and have a sense of gratitude and appreciation.

© FOTOS593

1.Connect

Let's get you fully connected to the goodness, wonder and energy of life.

Being connected is a normal and natural experience. People have it all the time but they do not always recognise that it is happening.

It may, for example, happen for you when you are out walking in nature, or hear some music, or see a friend's smile, or smell a flower, or are at worship, or see the sun in a blue sky. It might happen too while you are swimming or running or watching sport. Or being creative. Or reading. Or just sitting with your family.

In these moments something shifts in your mood. It is a good feeling. An inner smile. It may last for a moment or it may last longer.

So here is what might be the most important question in the whole of this programme:

In what circumstances do you most easily connect with the goodness, wonder and energy of life?

Recalling when you have felt connected

Read this to yourself. Record it. Be led by a companion. Listen to it online.

Exercise 1.1

Recalling when and where has it happened for you

Sit or lie somewhere comfortable.

As best you can, let your body drop down into being at ease – like in a deckchair or in a comfortable chair after a good meal.

Pause for a few moments and look back over your life.

There have been times and circumstances when you have felt a sense of life's magic.

This experience may have been very obvious or very subtle.

It may have lasted a while or touched you for only a few seconds.

Notice and be aware of when this has happened for you.

Notes

Recall when and where it has happened for you.

Exercise 1.2

Recalling a particular moment of connection

Take a few moments of quiet.

Sit or lie somewhere comfortable.

As best you can, let your body drop down into being at ease – like in a deckchair or in a comfortable chair after a good meal.

Perhaps you can remember a moment when you were touched by the wonder and beauty of life. When was it?

Remember the circumstances.

Remember too how it felt – your emotions, your thoughts.

How long did it last?

How powerful was it?

Did it have any impact on your life?

Notes

Recall a particular moment of connection.

Spiritual connection
People say:

"I thought that kind of connection only happens to saints in caves. But it happens for me when I'm playing football with my son. And when I'm cooking. I kind of knew something was happening when I went walking by the sea or in the hills. I felt something special. I couldn't put it in words."

"I just need to get away from everyone and everything. I need a completely quiet space. I just sit and wait. I pray that the children leave me alone! And then slowly I begin to feel like myself again and something shifts and I feel all right and that the world is good. I like gardening, too."

"With my animals. I love them."

"I just really love being with my grandchildren. It's magic. Gardening is good too."

"Mad dance! I have to dance. I love raving. It takes me into a state of being completely ecstatic and connected with spirit."

"It doesn't matter what I'm doing. It comes over me unexpectedly. Suddenly I'm just aware of everything and my breathing is very calm. Is this what they call mindfulness?"

"Reading is very important to me. I also like puzzles. Sitting there, pencil in my mouth, I go into a sort of reverie. The world feels good."

"I am most deeply in my experience of connection when I'm caring for someone who is in pain. When I witness suffering something moves in my heart, and, it's strange, I can feel the beauty of life too."

Spiritual connection is like food.

It can come in **snacks**, **meals** or **banquets**.

Sometimes when you connect it will only last **a few seconds** and be just a hint or a murmur.

Sometimes it will be **deep and long**.

Exercise 1.3

Your List of Connections

List all the things that have touched your heart and connected you with the goodness, wonder and energy of life.

List in these boxes anything that has touched or opened your heart.

Music

Theatre, Musicals, Films & TV Programmes

Books

Places

Hobbies and activities

Animals and pets

People, friends and family

Colours

Exercise 1.3 continued

Your List of Connections

Aromas and tastes

Textures

Worship in a Church, Temple, Mosque or Synagogue

Sounds

Memories
Do you have a memory of a really beautiful moment that always makes you smile and touches your heart? Write down a few words that will remind you of it.

Anything else you would like to add?

Exercise 1.4

The Natural World

For many people nature is where they most easily connect with life's wonder and goodness.

To complete this exercise place a tick in the appropriate box.

5 = *You really like it.*

1 = *You don't like it at all.*

The natural world touches my heart	**YES** 5	4	3	2	**NO** 1
Animals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Flowers, plants and trees	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Rocks, stones, crystals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Water, ocean, river	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hills and mountains	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fire	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sky and clouds	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Wind and air	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sun	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Moon	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Night sky and stars	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The whole wonder and mystery of cosmos	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Any others? Please write them here:

Biophylia

Built into our biology is a positive response to the natural world.

The natural world is good for our health.

This is sometimes called 'biophylia' – the love of nature.

This is the heart of many nature-based spiritual traditions.

Exercise 1.5

Circumstances and Activities

Here is another way of auditing when and where you most easily connect with the goodness of life. Tick any boxes that apply to you.

- ☐ Animals and pets
- ☐ Art
- ☐ Building
- ☐ Caring for others
- ☐ Carpentry
- ☐ Celebrating
- ☐ Ceremony
- ☐ Chanting
- ☐ Cleaning
- ☐ Climbing
- ☐ Cloud watching
- ☐ Completing a task
- ☐ Concerts
- ☐ Cooking
- ☐ Crafts
- ☐ Dance
- ☐ Driving
- ☐ Drumming
- ☐ Eating
- ☐ Entertaining
- ☐ Exercise
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Fire
- ☐ Flowers
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Gardening
- ☐ Geometry
- ☐ Giving healing
- ☐ Grandchildren
- ☐ Helping others
- ☐ Hills & Mountains
- ☐ Hobbies
- ☐ Humour
- ☐ Hymn singing
- ☐ In a church/temple
- ☐ In a special place
- ☐ In nature
- ☐ Kittens
- ☐ Listening to music
- ☐ Looking at sky
- ☐ Lovemaking
- ☐ Making music
- ☐ Martial arts
- ☐ Meditation
- ☐ Ocean & sea
- ☐ Parenting
- ☐ People watching
- ☐ Perfumes
- ☐ Puppies
- ☐ Pilgrimage
- ☐ Poetry
- ☐ Prayer
- ☐ Quiet
- ☐ Reading
- ☐ Riding
- ☐ Risk taking
- ☐ Ritual
- ☐ River/stream/lake
- ☐ Running
- ☐ Sensing angels/ spirits
- ☐ Sharing
- ☐ Singing
- ☐ Skiing
- ☐ Song
- ☐ Sounds
- ☐ Sport
- ☐ Studying
- ☐ Surfing
- ☐ Swimming
- ☐ Taste
- ☐ Teaching
- ☐ Theatre
- ☐ Time with family
- ☐ Time with friends
- ☐ Touch
- ☐ Trees
- ☐ Walking
- ☐ Water
- ☐ Wind
- ☐ With a loved one
- ☐ Working on meaningful project
- ☐ Working on your hobby
- ☐ Worship
- ☐ Yoga

Would you like to add anything?

Exercise 1.6

Personality Types

People also have very different personality types and styles when it comes to making their spiritual connection. The differences can be quite extreme. For example, some people connect very easily in communal situations like singing in a choir; while others enjoy solitude. Some people connect when being very active, like swimming or dancing; others prefer to be studious and quiet.

Tick any style that might apply to you.

- ☐ Academic
- ☐ Adventurous
- ☐ Calm
- ☐ Careful
- ☐ Chaotic
- ☐ Communal
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Devotional
- ☐ Disciplined
- ☐ Earnest
- ☐ Ecstatic
- ☐ Emotional
- ☐ Experimental
- ☐ Extrovert
- ☐ Intellectual
- ☐ Introvert
- ☐ Intuitive
- ☐ Joyful
- ☐ Loner
- ☐ Meditative
- ☐ Methodical
- ☐ Philosophical
- ☐ Poetic
- ☐ Practical
- ☐ Psychic
- ☐ Purist
- ☐ Radical
- ☐ Reclusive
- ☐ Safe
- ☐ Scientific
- ☐ Sensuous
- ☐ Simple
- ☐ Solitary
- ☐ Sociable
- ☐ Stoic
- ☐ Studious
- ☐ Thoughtful
- ☐ Wild

Would you like to add anything?

Exercise 1.7

Exercise and Movement

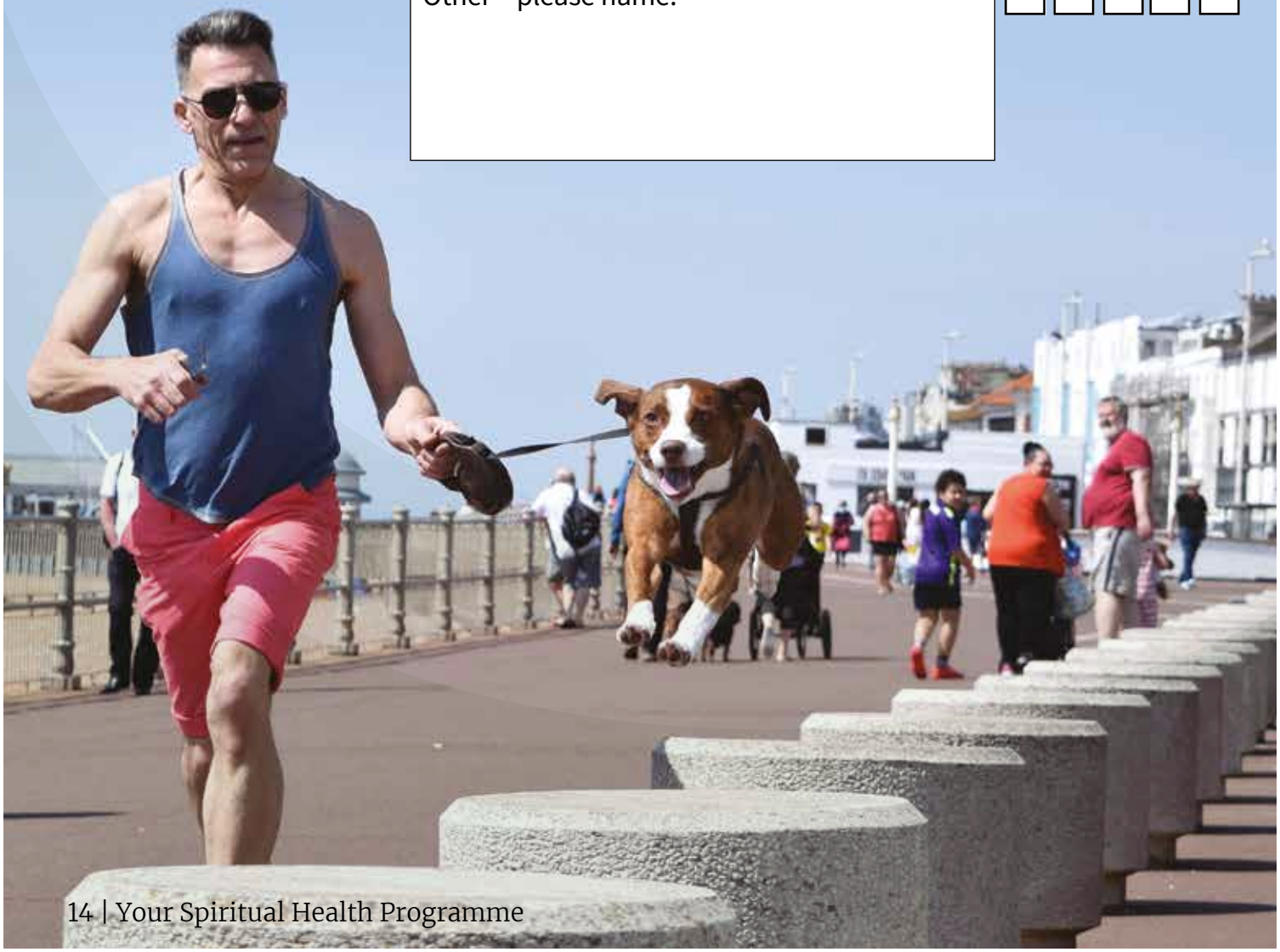
It is good to recognise that many people connect most easily through movement and exercise

To complete this exercise place a tick in the appropriate box.

5 = *You really like it.*

1 = *You don't like it at all.*

I enjoy	**YES**				**NO**
	5	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
Walking					
Dance					
Gym					
Sport					
Swimming					
Yoga, Tai Chi, Pilates, etc					
Running					
Martial Arts					
Other – please name:					



Exercise 1.8

Summary of How You Connect

a. Write below all the words that you marked or highlighted in the lists above.

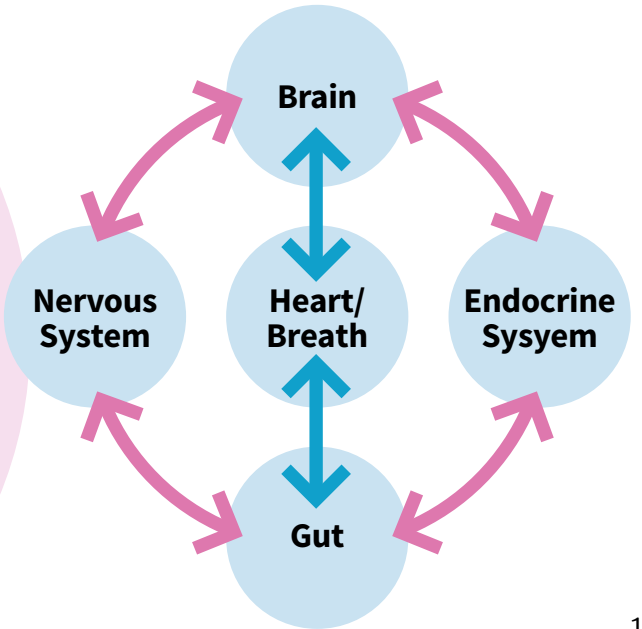
b. Complete these two sentences

I most easily connect with the goodness, magic and wonder of life when I:

Even when I am in a bad or sad mood, doing this helps me connect and feel better:

Your experience of Connection
can be **brief and subtle**
or **long and deep**

A sense of connection ripples through your nervous and endocrine systems putting your body at ease, calming your brain and improving your emotional wellbeing.



Connect as often as you can

Connecting with the wonder and energy of life is the foundation of your spiritual health. It brings you energy, fuel, reassurance and a sense of all the good things.

The crucial advice here is that you should connect as often as possible. This is obvious, isn't it? If it works for you … If it makes you feel good . . . Then do it!

Repetition creates a groove of behaviour. It becomes a benevolent habit. It embeds and anchors in your life style.

Exercise 1.9

What circumstances most attract you?

In the previous section you listed and named all the circumstances and things that connect you. What would you like to do on a regular basis?

Take a few quiet minutes.

Contemplate the situations and circumstances in which you most easily experience a spiritual connection.

Which of them would be most easy for you to repeat regularly and often?

Which of them attracts you most?

Begin to formulate a plan for actually putting yourself again into those situations and circumstances that support your spirituality.

When and where would it be most easy for you to do them?

Notes

© MATUPOOM CRAIBLUT

Exercise 1.10

Daily Connection

Daily
What do you want to do on a daily basis to connect?

When?

Where?

For how long?

Exercise 1.11

Top-ups

As well as daily connection there are also things you can do, places you can visit and people you can visit occasionally. These are special circumstances in which you feel really connected. They need planning and scheduling.

Top-Ups
What do you want to do occasionally to connect?

When?

Where?

For how long?

‘Soak’ in the experience

The Secret of Soaking

To achieve the full physical and psychological benefits of being connected, you have to let it anchor in your body. You have to *feel* it.

This is exactly the same as when you let yourself relax in a warm bath. You can get in and out of a bath quickly – or you can choose to stay in longer. If you stay in longer you can feel your muscles giving way to the enjoyable sensations of the warm water. You yield. You surrender. You luxuriate in the warm water. You soak in it.

This is exactly the same as what you need to do with your spiritual connection. Let it in. Soak. *Don’t just notice the flowers. Stop and smell them*. In traditional spiritual practices this is called ‘surrendering’ or ‘emptying’.

So when you are experiencing a sense of connection:

Be aware that you are experiencing connection.

Pause.

Notice the good feeling.

Relax. Take a few soft long breaths. Sink down into yourself.

Yield to the feeling (like a warm bath).

Let it settle down into your whole body.

Soak in it

You can do this whenever and wherever you like. Don’t just have a small experience. Enjoy it. Luxuriate. Relish it.

This is similar to how you feel after a good meal, or when flopping in your favourite chair or sofa. Or relaxing after a long walk or exercise. It is a deckchair or sun lounger moment.

You just let go and allow your body to drop down into being at ease and enjoying the moment.

Physiologically this sends wonderful health supporting messages through your whole body. The hormones of anxiety and tension, adrenalin and cortisol, are reduced. A cocktail of beneficial hormones – endorphins, serotonin, oxytocin – roll through the body.

Exercise 1.12

Soaking Lite

You have above already identified the circumstances in which you most easily connect. Now just imagine that the next time you experience connection you pause and spend some time really enjoying it. Here is the sequence again:

Pause.

Notice you feel connected.

Allow your body, especially your stomach and abdomen, to sink and drop down.

Take three soft calm quiet breaths.

Allow the good feeling to be absorbed by your body – just like relaxing in a warm bath.

Enjoy it fully.

Exercise 1.13

Soaking Deep

Put aside ten minutes to be quiet. You can do this in bed or sitting in your favourite chair.

Remember that your body already knows how to be at ease and relaxed. It has, for example, been doing it when you sleep or relax for decades.

Your body already knows what its like to be at ease. Perhaps after a good Sunday lunch. Perhaps on holiday. Sitting in your favourite café. Looking out across a beautiful view. On a park bench. After lovemaking. After exercise and movement.

In those situations you are just physically comfortable and content. Sinking into yourself and calm.

Right now allow yourself to sink into those same sensations.

Let your stomach sink and relax.

Lower your chin slightly.

Lower your eyes slightly as if looking down to the ground.

Notice the sensations on the soles of your feet.

Notice the sensations of your clothes on your thighs and your bottom.

Take three very slow, very quiet, very soft and calm breaths down into your abdomen.

Allow yourself to drop and sink fully down into yourself. Just like sitting at your favourite café, or in your favourite chair or sofa, or beach.

Bring into your mind one of those circumstances where you feel connected.

You can feel exactly the same now.

Stay relaxed. Stay at ease. Allow yourself to feel connected. Let it fully in. Absorb it. Soak in it.

Talking about 'Spiritual' Connection

Why 'Spiritual'?

Is it right to call these moments of connection 'spiritual'? Spiritual is probably the right word because these experiences of connection inspire people to feel and see the good in life. They open our hearts. They show us that there is more to life than material success, status, money and power. They connect us to the wonder and energy of life.

Many people have this experience during religious worship. Many others have the same experience out in nature or in the very different circumstances we have explored above. Atheists, agnostic, secularists and humanists also have precisely the same experiences. They are however suspicious of religious language and beliefs.

Exercise 1.14

Naming the experience

All across the world in many different cultures there are many different names for the wonder and energy of life.

What words might you use to describe the wonder and mystery of life?

Spiritual Community

It is well known that community is good for our health. It is good to have friends, companions and a sense of belonging. It reduces loneliness and anxiety. It supports wellbeing. For some people a sense of community and companionship comes not only from people but also from animals and from nature. For others there is a subtler and very meaningful *spiritual* community.

© LIGHTFIELD STUDIOS

Exercise 1.15

Spiritual Community

To complete this exercise place a tick in the appropriate box.

5 = *You really like it.*

1 = *You don't like it at all.*

Where do you find comfort, community and companionship?

	YES 5	4	3	2	NO 1
People	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Animals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Nature	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
God's invisible presence	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Angels and spirits	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Jesus	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Buddha	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Krishna	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mary	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Other - please name any other meaningful spiritual beings for you:

When I commune I like to:

	YES 5	4	3	2	NO 1
Be completely quiet	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Pray	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Converse	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Receive a blessing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Other - please name any other meaningful spiritual activities for you:

If you pray what is your favourite prayer?

2.Peace of Mind

One of the most inspiring and reassuring ideas in spirituality is that our lives are meaningful journeys. From birth to death we change and grow. Every situation is an opportunity to develop. And because everything is connected, our personal development of love and compassion ripples out to support the wider community.

Life does have meaning and purpose. It is not just a materialistic competition for status, power and success. True happiness and peace of mind come from our ability to manage the highs and lows, good and ill health, opportunities and crises.

How best can you manage life's surprising journey? A spiritually healthy perspective suggests:

The purpose of your life is to become more loving, conscious and connected.

Every situation, good and bad, is an opportunity to grow and develop.

Life is best guided by high ideals and ethical standards.

Your real work is to take responsibility for yourself, become more conscious and guide your spiritual development.

The Bigger Picture

Mindful and Compassionate Self-Management

But life is not easy. There are competing demands on our time and attention. So another crucial part of the spiritual health programme is taking responsibility for yourself and committing to self-management.

This needs you to step back and take a good look at yourself.

Your life is a journey towards greater love, wisdom and connection.

Every situation – good or bad – is an opportunity to learn, grow and serve.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness = the psychological ability to detach, witness yourself and self-manage with care, wisdom and compassion

Exercise 2 .1

Witnessing Yourself

Stepping back, detaching and witnessing yourself is a normal human activity. It happens to all of us sometimes. It is just like watching television or sitting in a café watching the world go by. Except here you are watching and thinking about yourself.

When have you stepped back and found yourself thinking about yourself or looking at yourself in a detached way?

- ☐ At a social event
- ☐ Bored
- ☐ Drunk, stoned, on meds
- ☐ During a monotonous activity
- ☐ Exhausted
- ☐ Having achieved a success
- ☐ Ill or in pain
- ☐ In crisis
- ☐ Lying in bed
- ☐ Meditating
- ☐ Needing a change of career
- ☐ Needing a change of relationship
- ☐ On holiday
- ☐ Out of work
- ☐ Relaxing
- ☐ Working too hard

Some other time – please name:

Exercise 2.2

Conscious Self-Management

Have you ever thought: I need to change my behaviour and attitude.

☐ Yes ☐ No

If Yes, describe the circumstances:

Self-Manage Kindly

It is important to look at yourself with an attitude of kindness. If you think about yourself with a judgmental or critical attitude it is like having an angry critical person punishing you inside your head. This internal punisher triggers electro-chemical changes in your brain and nervous system, and produces hormones of anxiety and stress.

But if you witness yourself with an attitude of kindness and care, it triggers a cocktail of wellbeing hormones.

Your Kind Witness

Is willing to learn more about who you really are and the nature of your character and psychology

Compassionately looks at everything you are, seeking to understand and heal all parts of yourself

Is mature and takes responsibility

Guides you in your next steps and development

Exercise 2.3a

The Inner Smile

In this exercise you use the caring attitude you might have towards a vulnerable child or small animal. You direct this kind and caring attitude down into your own body. It has a wonderful effect of reducing tension and improving your mood.

Find somewhere comfortable and quiet.

Be patient.

Allow your body to drop down into being at ease.

Let your stomach and abdomen drop and sink.

Take three soft quiet breaths.

As best you can . . .

Open your heart and feel some gentle love.

Soften your eyes.

Now turn your focus down into your own body.

In the same way that you might lean down and care for an injured child, or cradle an injured bird in your cupped hands, you direct this same quality of kind care down into your own body.

Have a kind and loving attitude to your own body.

Notice any feelings of distress, tension or pain.

Be accepting, tolerant and kind towards it. Hold and cradle it.

Exercise 2.3b

Inner Smile and Cauldron

Do the Inner Smile as above. Then add:

Envisage your body as being like a large pot, or cauldron, or chalice.

Your Inner Smile fills the container with benevolence.

Exercise 2.3c

Inner Smile and the Tree of Life

Do the Inner Smile as above. Then add:

Envisage your body as being like a tree with a strong trunk and deep roots.

Your Inner Smile is like the sun feeding the tree with light and warmth.

Exercise 2.4

Self-Healing

Take a few minutes to calm.

Guide your attitude into that of the Inner Smile, focusing with kindness and care on your own body and feelings.

Notice anything that might be causing you distress.

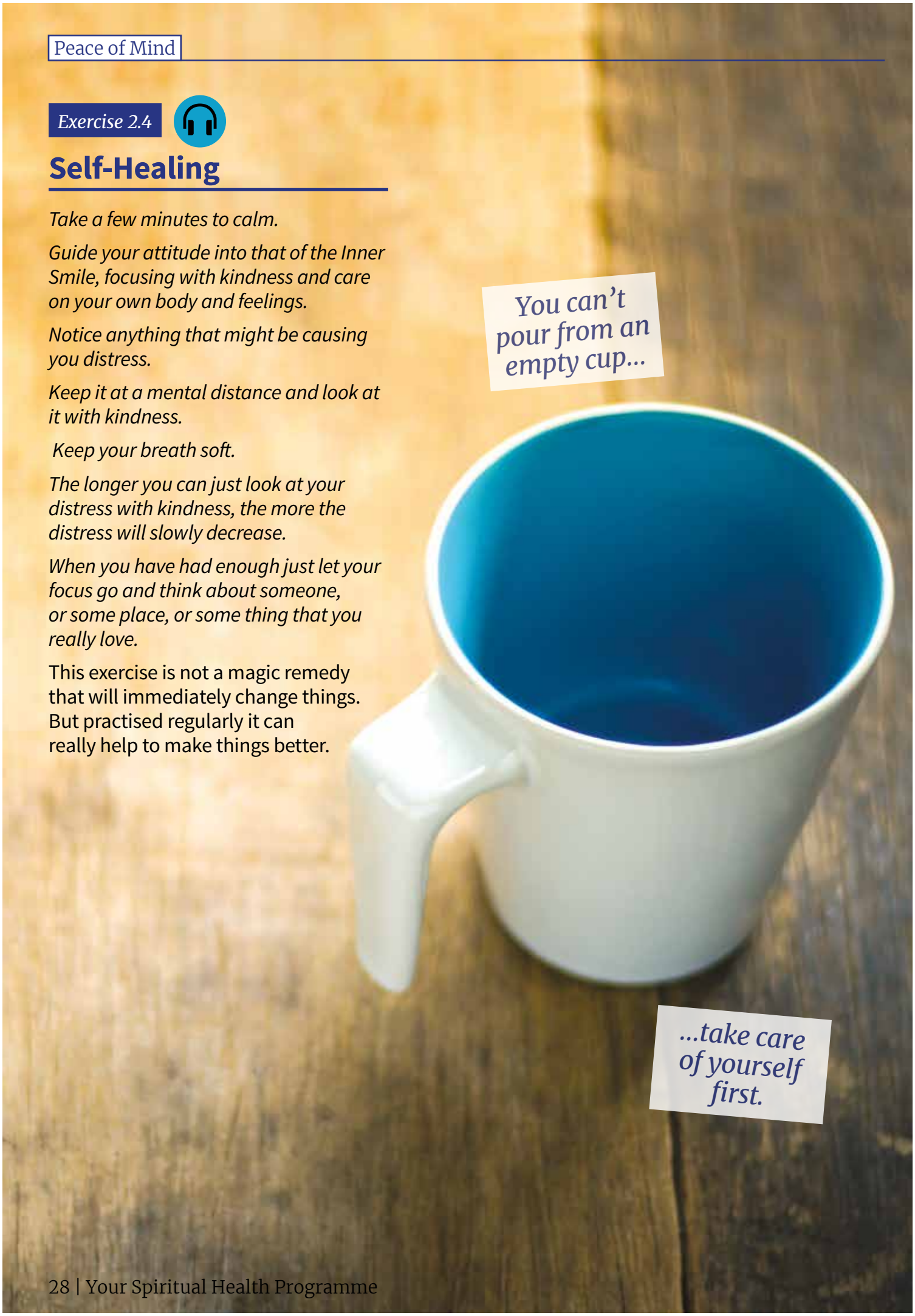
Keep it at a mental distance and look at it with kindness.

Keep your breath soft.

The longer you can just look at your distress with kindness, the more the distress will slowly decrease.

When you have had enough just let your focus go and think about someone, or some place, or some thing that you really love.

This exercise is not a magic remedy that will immediately change things. But practised regularly it can really help to make things better.



Exercise 2.5

Audit Your Previous Twenty-Four Hours

Here you are developing your ability to step back and observe yourself as a 'kind witness'.

Sit quietly.

You are going to look back at the previous twenty-four hours.

Hour by hour recall what you did and with whom.

Ask yourself these kinds of questions:

- *Were you kind?*
- *Were you aware of what others needed?*
- *What mood were you in? How did you feel?*
- *What might you have done better?*
- *What was going on for you?*
- *What needs improving?*
- *What did you do well?*
- *What do you need to improve – more rest, self-discipline, time alone, exercise, better diet, etc?*
- *If you were in distress or ill or challenged, what did you learn from those circumstances?*

Day by day review yourself and your life.

This is what I learned about myself from the self-audit:

Your Kind Witness is you at your most intelligent, wise and compassionate.

It develops new connections in your brain.

It sends health giving messages through your neuro-endocrinal system.

Your Kind Witness can be your best friend.

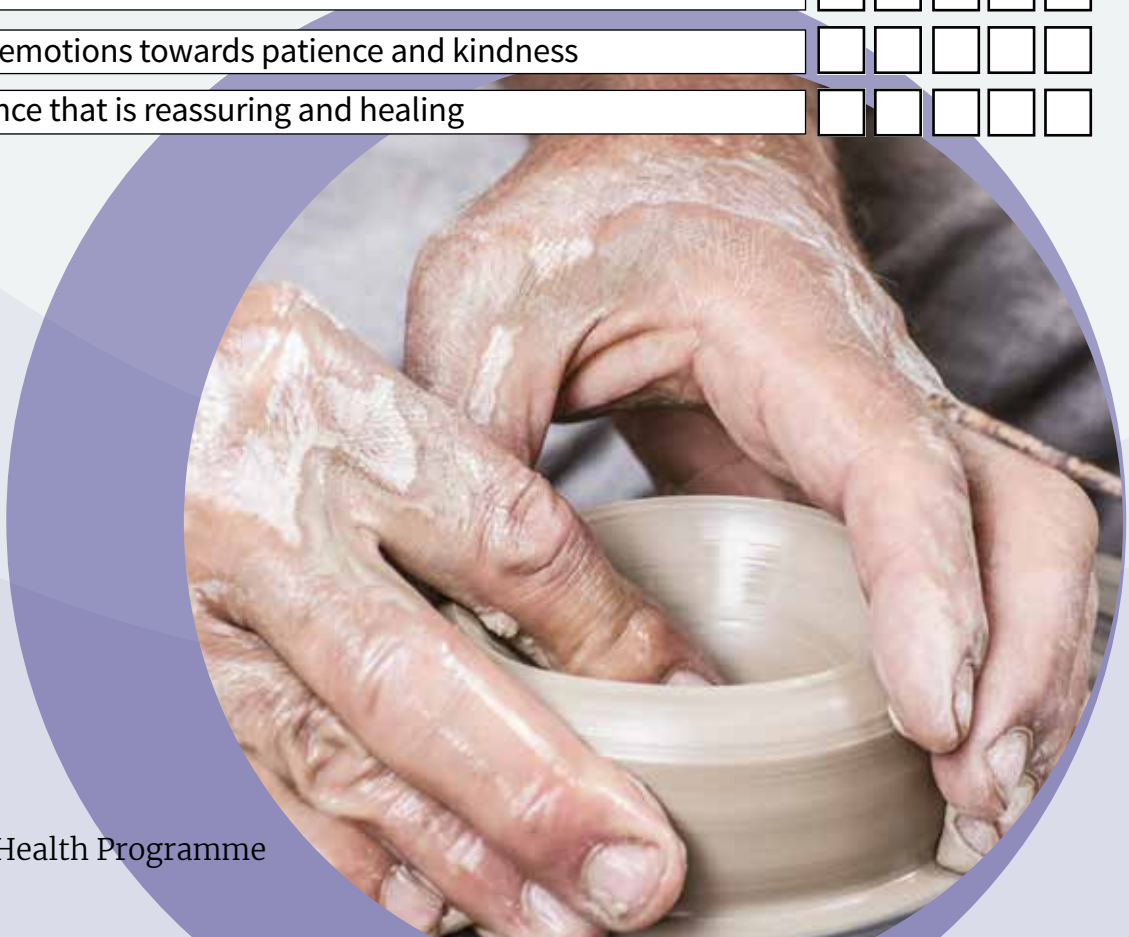
Exercise 2.6

Mindfulness Self-Audit

To complete this exercise place a tick in the appropriate box.

5 = *You really agree.* **1 =** *You don't agree at all.*

I experience mindful compassion in these ways	**YES** 5	4	3	2	**NO** 1
I use my breath to calm myself	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I compassionately witness what is happening around me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I detach and compassionately witness my moods, thoughts and behaviour	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I mindfully manage my feelings and emotions with compassion	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I regularly reflect on my behaviour and attitude	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I ground myself and stay calm in crises	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am aware of how my mood and presence can influence other people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I respect and am sensitive to other people's personal space and boundaries	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know how to calm myself when someone else is in distress	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know when to stay quiet and just listen	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I consciously manage my body language, facial expression and eye contact	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I guide my fraught emotions towards patience and kindness	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I aim to be a presence that is reassuring and healing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



Meditation

Maybe you are a meditator . . . but don't know it

Meditation is a natural human behaviour. It was not invented by a particular religion and it is not complicated. Its essence is very simple:

Body at ease

Mind watchful

Calm and quiet

You stay in that state for a while

Maybe you do all of the above but have never recognised that it is meditation.

We all have an instinct to be quiet and alone; and to ponder on our lives. This is a very natural and normal behaviour. And there is substantial evidence that meditation is good for our physical and mental health. It is obviously good for all of us to have times of quiet and wise watchfulness.

All the way through the Spiritual Health Programme you have been taking moments of quiet and being at ease. For some readers this may have been easy. For others it may have required more focus and self-management.

Exercise 2.7

	YES				NO
	5	4	3	2	1
Do you think meditation might be a good practice for you?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

When could you take ten to twenty minutes just to sit quietly and be at ease?

Where might you do it?

When you are quiet, calm and watchful you can choose to use one of these meditation practices:

- Inner Smile
- Self-healing
- Mindful and compassionate self-audit
- Soaking
- Prayer
- Thinking good thoughts about others
- Patience
- Breathe softly when you feel irritated or want to get up

3.Care & Compassion

From childhood many people have a quiet knowing that being a good person and caring for others makes the world a better place.

There is also a hidden benefit for all of us. Caring for others and being kind are good too for our own health. It is programmed into our mammalian DNA. When we care for others our body chemistry adapts and softens in a way that is physiologically beneficial. It is nature's way of rewarding us for being kind. Caring for others also brings the emotional and psychological benefits of integrity, meaning and self-respect. And it builds community.

The world's religious, spiritual and philosophical traditions also ask us to be caring.

Exercise 3.1

Audit Your Ethics

It is always helpful to name your highest values.
Tick each value or ethic that you feel is important.

- ☐ Apology
- ☐ Balance
- ☐ Benevolence
- ☐ Care
- ☐ Charity
- ☐ Chivalry
- ☐ Community
- ☐ Compassion
- ☐ Continence (sexual moderation)
- ☐ Courage
- ☐ Creativity
- ☐ Democracy
- ☐ Dignity
- ☐ Discipline
- ☐ Diversity
- ☐ Equality
- ☐ Equanimity
- ☐ Faith
- ☐ Fidelity
- ☐ Forgiveness
- ☐ Freedom
- ☐ Generosity
- ☐ Goodwill
- ☐ Grace
- ☐ Green
- ☐ Harmlessness
- ☐ Honesty
- ☐ Honour
- ☐ Hope
- ☐ Inclusivity
- ☐ Industriousness
- ☐ Joy
- ☐ Justice
- ☐ Kindness
- ☐ Love
- ☐ Mercy
- ☐ Moderation
- ☐ Modesty
- ☐ Nature
- ☐ Neighbourliness
- ☐ Non-violence
- ☐ Oneness
- ☐ Order
- ☐ Peace
- ☐ Reliability
- ☐ Respect
- ☐ Safety
- ☐ Self-reliance
- ☐ Self-sacrifice
- ☐ Sustainability
- ☐ The Golden Rule
- ☐ Tolerance
- ☐ Truth
- ☐ Vegetarianism
- ☐ Virtue
- ☐ Wisdom

Add any others you feel are relevant:

Using the words that you have ticked and written above, complete this sentence.
My highest values are . . .

I believe in them and they guide my life.

Exercise 3.2

Traditional Ethics

There may be a traditional ethical creed that communicates the purpose of your life. Tick any one of them that is relevant to you.

- ☐ The Ten Commandments
- ☐ Sermon on the Mount
- ☐ Noble Eightfold Path
- ☐ Dharma Teaching
- ☐ Submission to God
- ☐ The Golden Rule
- ☐ Humanist Secular
- ☐ Natural World

Other – please name

The Body Language of Care

People who care are the heart of a humane and compassionate world. In fact it is a basic instinct to care for the vulnerable. You can see this instinct at work in parents with their children; or when children look after small animals. It is a basic biological drive that ensures our survival.

We all present the same caring body language to somebody who is vulnerable.

- We turn our whole body towards the person we're caring for.
- We lean in towards them, shoulders down.
- Our body language is harmless and reassuring.
- Our breath calms.
- Our eyes soften and we look directly at them.
- Our faces are calm – but also alert and attentive.
- If appropriate, we may give a reassuring touch.
- We are careful about what we say. Silence is golden.

This is the universal body language of care and compassion. It includes key behaviours that support your own physical health: body at ease, calm breath, relaxed facial expression, soft eyes.

To be cared for is good for everyone.

Exercise 3.3

Compassion for Others

My heart has opened and I have felt kindness and compassion when caring for someone in distress

To complete this exercise place a tick in the appropriate box.

5 = *You really agree.*

1 = *You don't agree at all.*

	YES 5	4	3	2	NO 1
A child	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
An animal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A friend	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A family member	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A stranger	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A patient/client/service-user	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other – please name:					

Deeper Compassion

	YES 5	4	3	2	NO 1
I can see the good in someone even when they are acting badly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can see the distressed inner child in someone even when they are angry and aggressive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can forgive even when I still feel aggrieved	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can be patient and kind even when my timetable is stressed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have been inspired by other people's compassion and generosity of spirit	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other – please name:					

Kind Thoughts for Others

Finally kind thoughts, meditations and prayers for others are also good for your own health.

There is a body of research that shows that negative thinking is damaging for your physical and mental health. Thinking kindly about others however soothes your own nervous system.

More than that, all spiritual traditions teach that kind thoughts and kind prayers have a benevolent effect on others. Many people take time every day to meditate and pray for family, friends, colleagues and anyone in the world who needs help.

Exercise 3.4

Be at ease.

Connect with the goodness of life.

Allow yourself to fully feel it.

Spend a while thinking kind thoughts about others.

Wish them well.

Wish them health and happiness.

Your Summary

On this page describe how you now self-manage your spiritual health.

Connection
What do you do on a daily basis to connect?

Peace of Mind
When do you pause and give mindful care to yourself?

Care and Compassion
How do you give care and compassion to others?

Science and Evidence

Your Spiritual Health Programme can improve and boost your physical, emotional and psychological health. It can reduce stress and anxiety, and bring your body back into a state of healthy balance.

It achieves this because your mind, your emotions and mood, and your physical body are all closely connected.

Physical Benefits of Your Spiritual Health Programme

Brain	*Calms the brain*
Nervous system	*Reduces tension, enables relaxation*
Endocrine system	*Triggers a cocktail of wellbeing hormones*
Heart	*Enables heart rate integration (HRV) and calm breath*
Gut	*Lowers acidity, harmonises gut eco-system*
Immune System	*General health supported and boosted*

All this lowers the risk of illness and supports healing and recovery.

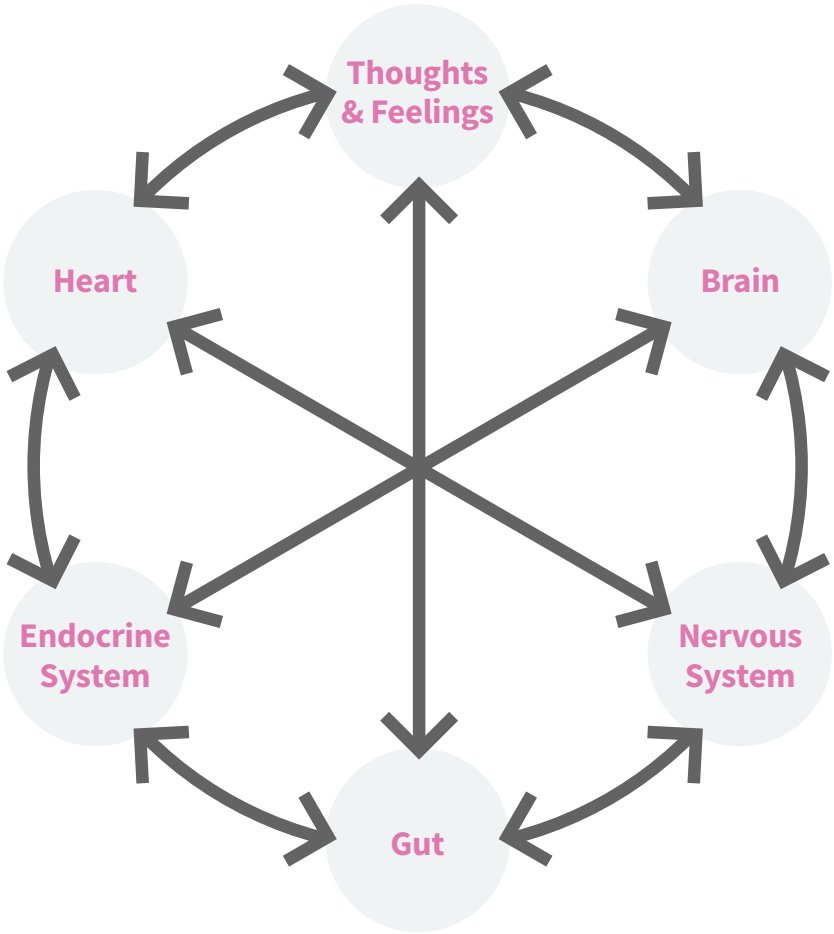
Psychological Benefits of Your Spiritual Health Programme

Confidence	*You feel more in control and self-managing*
Meaning	*Life has more meaning and purpose*
Happiness	*Increases hope and positive emotions*
Strength	*Calmer, more centred*
People	*Improved communication skills, better relationships*
Connection	*Greater sense of community, less isolation*

Evidence Base for the Benefits

People often ask whether there is evidence for all these claims. There certainly is. There is a large and rigorous evidence base of over 3000 peer-reviewed scholarly research papers from all over the world on the benefits of spirituality for physical and mental health. Many of these can be found under the research umbrella of the Duke University Centre for Spirituality, Theology and Health. Recently too there has been a growing body of evidence on the health benefits of being kind, and also the health benefits of mindfulness and meditation.

The Mind-Body Connection



Research and Evidence

For an ongoing summary of global research in this field see the Duke University Centre for Spiritualty, Theology and Health, especially their monthly journal *Crossroads.*

Handbook of Religion and Health, Harold Koenig, Dana King & Verna B. Carson, Oxford University Press, 2012.

Oxford Textbook of Spirituality in Healthcare, Mark Cobb & Christina Puchalski (Editors), Oxford University Press, 2014.

Why Religion and Spirituality Matter for Public Health: Evidence, Implications and Resources, Doug Oman (Editor), Springer, 2018.

Further Reading

The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living, Dalai Lama, Riverhead Books, 2009.

Born to Be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life, Dachner Keltner, Norton, 2010.

The Power of Modern Spirituality, William Bloom, Piatkus, 2015.

A Religion of One's Own: A Guide to Creating a Personal Spirituality in a Secular World, Thomas Moore Gotham Books, 2015.

Train to Deliver Your Spiritual Health Programme

Would you like to deliver Your Spiritual Health Programme and support others in developing their spiritual health? If your answer is 'Yes' come and train with us.

- Gain a nationally recognised qualification – the Diploma in Practical Spirituality and Wellness (Ofqual Register Crossfields Institute Level 3)
- Deepen your own understanding and experience of practical spirituality and health
- Join the professional network of Spiritual Companions

For more information about where and when the qualification is available visit our website.

Support

If you are interested in support either for yourself or your organisation please contact us.

Free Copies

Download for free or read Your Spiritual Health Programme on our website. And/or buy copies of the paper version.

Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.
You are free to share, copy and adapt the material.
We ask you to give appropriate credit and link to yourspiritualhealth.org

www.yourspiritualhealth.org