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Sacred Dying: Creating Rituals for Embracing the End of Life

spiritual and cultural traditions teach us about dying? How can professionals not only learn about these beliefs and practices but help turn the end of life experience into something sacred? Join the INTEGRIS James L. Hall Jr. Center for Mind, Body and Spirit in welcoming theologian and author Megory Anderson for an insightful presentation to help us understand death, dying, and the afterlife within our spiritual, religious and cultural traditions.

Anderson's personal encounter with a life-threatening illness led her to work with people who are facing death. Today, she runs the nonprofit Sacred Dying Foundation in San Francisco, and frequently writes on the topic of sacred dying.

Sacred Dying looks closely at the rituals we have created to help us, as well as our dying loved ones, make the transition between life and death. This is not about mourning and how to handle grief; it is not about the mythology of death; it is not about funeral planning. It is about bringing spirituality, through ritual, into the physical act of dying.

For those going through the death of a loved one, or for those who care clinically and pastorally for the dying, the presentation will offer a new understanding of the dying process. The luncheon presentation will be at 11 a.m. at INTEGRIS Baptist Medical Center. For reservations, please call the INTEGRIS HealthLine at (405) 951-2277. Luncheon fee: \$5.

INTEGRIS

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The James L. Hall Jr. Center for Mind, Body and Spirit is a not-for-profit educational organization committed to improving health by increasing awareness of the healing power of the connection between mind, body and spirit. The center, associated with INTEGRIS Health, is intended as a community resource. For more information, please call (405) 943-3921, or write:

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HARMONY

News from the James L. Hall Jr. Center for Mind, Body and Spirit

Public Presentation Richard Tibbits, D.Min.

The Healing Heart • Sept. 9, 2003

Join the James L. Hall Jr. Center for Mind, Body and Spirit in welcoming Dr. Richard Tibbits, vice president of Florida Hospital in Orlando, Fla., ordained minister, chaplain, and speaker on spirituality and healing, to Oklahoma City in conjunction with INTEGRIS' 17th annual Women's Health Forum.

Tibbits has completed original research on forgiveness and heart disease as well as designed an 8-week program of instruction with group support designed to help people diagnosed with high blood pressure, gain control of their anger and disappointments.

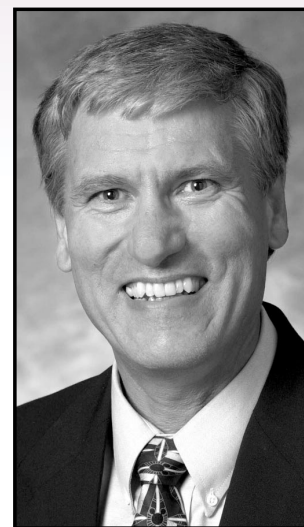
Tibbits will discuss how anger is related to high blood pressure and provide practical advice on how to use forgiveness to reduce anger and improve health. The free presentation will be held at 7 p.m. in the James L. Henry Auditorium at INTEGRIS Baptist Medical Center.

The Heart of Forgiveness Workshop

Tibbits will also offer a morning educational workshop, The Heart of Forgiveness, from 9 a.m. to noon for physicians, medical personnel and mental health professionals, at Epworth Villa, 14901 N. Pennsylvania Ave. CEUs and CMEs available. Cost is \$35.00

Workshop educational objectives:

- Understand biological response to negative and positive emotions and thoughts.
- Learn how grievances are formed and how to reduce them.
- Learn interventions to reduce the negative physical consequences of longstanding hurt and anger.
- Develop an understanding and application of forgiveness.
- Learn how forgiveness training can help some patients reduce high blood pressure.



Richard Tibbits, D.Min.

Mango Garden Wisdom

R. Murali Krishna, M.D.

Thursday, Sept. 25

Stress in modern life is destroying our health and happiness – affecting our sleep, immune systems, relationships, resilience and inner peace. Join R. Murali Krishna, M.D., president of INTEGRIS Mental Health and the James L. Hall Jr. Center for Mind, Body and Spirit, as he shares his scientific insights into the wisdom of the ages and practical methods of discovering the remarkable healing power that exists in each human being.

Learn simple techniques that could help you learn to de-stress and transform your life into a happier and healthier state. Luncheon fee: \$10 for a boxed lunch from Nonna's. Noon, Shartel Church of God, 11600 S. Western. For reservations, call the INTEGRIS HealthLine at (405) 951-2277.



Sacred Dying: Creating Rituals for Embracing the End of Life

Megory Anderson

Friday, Oct. 10

Religious and cultural beliefs and practices play an extremely significant role in how an individual or family faces the end of life. In our medical communities, however, death is often seen as failure. What can our



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Mind Matters: This is Your Brain on Meditation

By R. Murali Krishna, M.D.

Their heads were shaved. They wore crimson robes. They stooped over a large table, holding thin metal scoops filled with colored sand in one hand and metal sticks in the other. They scraped the sticks (called “thurma”) across the hatched length of the “chakpuhr” scoops, causing vibrations to trickle sand grain by grain out of the straw-like end of the scoop. The process allowed the monks to “paint” with the colored sand in spaces of less than a square inch – creating a massive sand mandala that was later swept away.

A mystical ritual in some remote mountain monastery?

Not at all. Instead, it was a public tour by Tibetan Buddhist monks at the Omniplex museum in Oklahoma City. The sand-painting ritual is also considered a form of meditation within the Buddhist faith. And while painting sand mandalas may remain esoteric to Oklahomans, the message of awareness behind such practices is finding an increasingly receptive audience in the Sooner State and elsewhere.

Meditation and other forms of “mindfulness” relaxation can offer a daily antidote to stress. Such practices can bring balance in a nation where stress-related illnesses are one of the primary causes for visits to the doctor’s office. Western science is beginning to make some startling discoveries that reveal ancient contemplative practices are powerful medicine for the mind.

We’ve known for some time about meditation’s ability to decrease blood pressure, heart rate and respiration. And we’ve also seen how meditation and other relaxation techniques can “synchronize” brain waves. But this is really child’s play compared to the newest scientific research findings.

A clearer picture is beginning to emerge: objective scientific studies are starting to suggest relaxation techniques can have a profound impact on the body’s immune system, aging process and emotional well-being. Long-term practice may also significantly lower stress hormones – and could help the body combat so-called “free radicals” that can cause cancer and heart disease.

Once considered outside the

mainstream, now even health insurers are paying for meditation instruction – as a form of medication and for preventive purposes in hospitals and clinics across the nation. The mass media has picked up on the burgeoning popularity of meditation. One hears constantly in the press that meditation could be good for you.

But what are the fundamental effects of meditation? What is going on when someone meditates?

- Meditation and other deep relaxation techniques have been shown to induce a unique physical state in which metabolism settles and oxygen consumption lowers even more than during sleep.

- In some studies, calming hormones like melatonin and serotonin are increased by meditation, and stress hormones like cortisol are decreased.

- It is likely that the activity of the sympathetic branch of the nervous system decreases, while the parasympathetic branch dominates. This is an important shift for healing and an immune system boost.

- A study released in the American Heart Association’s journal *Stroke* showed that among those who meditated twice a day for 20 minutes, arterial wall thickness reduced. A thickening of arterial walls is a predictor for heart attack and stroke. The thicker the wall, the narrower the artery. The reductions found in the study were similar to those achieved with cholesterol-lowering medications.

- Less tangible benefits can also take place. After a period of time, many practitioners report increased energy levels, optimism and a general feeling of well-being. A study at the University of Pennsylvania found that those with an optimistic “style” of thinking about life’s events were much less likely to develop depression.

- New research at the University of Wisconsin’s E.M. Keck Laboratory for Functional Brain Imaging and Behavior has used a PET scanner, an MRI and a “geodesic sensor net” to measure brain activity in advanced meditators, such as a Tibetan Buddhist lama. The sensor net looks like a bad wig, but it has revealed some surprising information. In the case of the lama, the research showed distinct

brain configurations as he practiced different forms of meditation. For example, while meditating on compassion, the lama’s brain showed a dramatic increase in electrical activity in a zone of the brain pinpointed as a possible source of positive emotions. This research is ongoing, but it promises to show that meditators’ brains can be physically and permanently altered in beneficial ways.

- Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania used a SPECT scanner to observe the brains of experienced meditators and religious practitioners (such as Catholic nuns). Their research revealed that when nuns or monks reported “oneness with the universe” or communion with God, the parietal lobe of the brain showed decreased activity. The parietal lobe helps humans determine spatial orientation as well as providing a “boundary” between the self and the outside world. This area of the brain was essentially suspended in those in deep meditation or prayer, meaning they perceived no boundary between themselves and the rest of the universe. This has been dubbed the “Why God Won’t Go Away” phenomenon in a recent best-selling book.

So what is meditation? And how can you learn it? Surprisingly, you have a built-in toolbox for practicing meditation right away:

- Sit comfortably, with your eyes closed and your spine erect but relaxed. You can sit just about anywhere, as long as you are comfortable – in a chair or on the floor on some cushions.

- Let your attention center on your breathing. You can focus on the feeling of air moving through your nostrils or feel your belly rising and falling.

- When thoughts, emotions, physical sensations or external distractions arise, don’t push them away. But try not to get wrapped up in these things, either.

- Simply come back to the breathing.
- Continue in this way for 10 to 15 minutes.

This is the core of meditation. There are many other techniques. You can also try progressive relaxation, guided imagery, Yoga, Christian contemplative prayer, Eastern meditation practices and so on.

From The DIRECTOR



By Charlotte Lankard, LMFT,
director, James L. Hall Jr. Center
for Mind, Body and Spirit

Forgiveness matters, not only for your soul, but for your physical health as well. Two area hospitals are placing an emphasis on the topic this fall. INTEGRIS James L. Hall Jr. Center for Mind, Body and Spirit is bringing Dr. Richard Tibbits to Oklahoma City in September. Information about his presentations is on the front page of this newsletter.

And Nov. 8, Mercy Health Center will present Dr. Fred Luskin, author of *Forgive for Good* and co-founder and director of the Stanford University Forgiveness project. Dr. Luskin will be here as part of Mercy's Retreat Day for Health Care Providers.

Dr. Luskin will lead the day-long retreat into self-reflection – teaching the nine step forgiveness method “that makes it possible to move beyond being a victim to a life of improved health and contentment.”

These two men have worked together. Dick Tibbits drew in part from the work of Dr. Luskin and

Dr. Luskin was a part of the Tibbits study.

You will not want to miss either of these presentations.

A thought from author Joan Borysenko's book, *Handbook For The Soul*.

I don't believe I've ever met a person who hasn't been challenged or wounded by something. Difficulties present choices. We can either waste away from our wounds or use them to grow our souls.

The process of making sense of our wounds is a very personal one. But a common theme in wound healing is the universal need to forgive. If we don't forgive ourselves for our mistakes, and others for the wounds they have inflicted upon us, we end up crippled with guilt. And the soul cannot grow under a blanket of guilt, because guilt is isolating, while growth is a gradual process of reconnection to ourselves, to other people, and to a larger whole.

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Mind Matters: This is Your Brain on Meditation

Each has something different to offer. You can learn more about such techniques through resources like the INTEGRIS James L. Hall Jr. Center for Mind, Body and Spirit. While practices vary, all induce the “relaxation response” in the body – a term first coined by Harvard researcher Herbert Benson, M.D., in the 1970s – an effect that feels good in the short term, and can have beneficial health effects in the long term.

All of this is great cause for hope. Nevertheless, if you're interested in learning more about what meditation and relaxation can do for you, you should keep in mind that such techniques are not a panacea.

Lately, it seems, modern medicine has been assailed from many corners. Too expensive. Too many surgical and medication errors. Doctors with a bad bedside manner.

Meditation and other relaxation techniques can have profound benefits. But that doesn't mean one should abandon Western medicine. Deep breathing won't help a car crash victim. Yoga won't cure cancer. Learning how to calm the mind won't kill a stout bacterial infection.

And take it from me, if you meditate you can still catch the common cold.

But our reliance on the miracles of 21st century medicine has also made us complacent. Too many people think they can take a pill to fix anything. We should be willing to take some responsibility for our own health. Meditation can be a great first step. Meditation can be a powerful medicine. If you're willing to give it a try.

Making Choices Is Your Greatest Power

You can decide to alter the course of your life at any time. No one can ever take that away from you. You can do what you want to do and be who you want to be.

Nature is constantly at work around you. Character and destiny are her handiwork. She gives you love and hate, jealousy and reverence.

You have the power to choose which impulse you follow.

While your character is formed by your circumstances, your desires can shape those circumstances.

The one thing over which you have absolute control is your own thoughts. It is this that puts you in a position to control your own destiny.

Your greatest power is the power to choose.

