MEDERI
Foundation

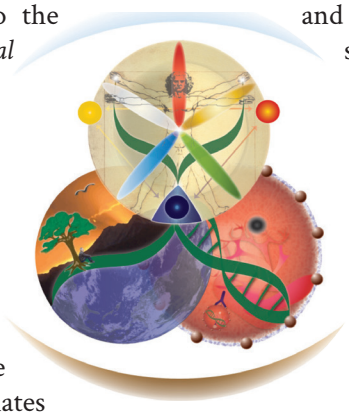
Spirituality and Healing:
The ETMS Approach and the Importance of the Vital Spirit

For many, the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness brings life into crystalline focus, making clear what is most important. A chronic illness, such as cancer, is an invitation to attend to our true nature and to bring our focus into the present moment. This is the essence of the great spiritual teachings of the world, which encourage us to live not in the past or the future, but in the now.

ETMS And Vital Spirit

When assessing the constitutional energetics and physiology of the individual—including physical and psychic dimensions—the Eclectic Triphasic Medical System (ETMS) addresses three interrelated vital energetic influences, the *Vital Force, Vital Essence*, and most importantly, *Vital Spirit.*

These three vital energetic influences represent different states on a continuum from the physical to the subtle and non-material. Specifically, the *Vital Force* relates to metabolism, cellular energy transfer, mitochondrial efficiency, and the use of proteins, fats, sugars, and oxygen. It involves the digestive system and lungs, immune system, blood, and bone marrow and emanates primarily through the Digestive-Spleen Organ Network.



The *Vital Essence* relates to the neuroendocrine (or psychoneuroendocrine) system and emanates through the Kidney Organ Network. It involves the hypothalamic-pituitary endocrine systems and related hormones that contribute to adaptation, growth, reproduction, circadian rhythm, and development, while underlying many aspects of mind and emotion.

The *Vital Spirit* relates to the spiritual everlasting energy. It emanates primarily through the Heart Organ Network. The Heart Organ Network represents the convergence of heaven and earth energy, linking our consciousness with our unconscious. By being connected to the Divine, the heart creates joy and internal vitality. *Vital Essence* and *Vital Force* thus both contribute to *Vital Spirit,* but in clinical practice, each component of this intimately connected triad must always be assessed in terms of its relative contribution to the state of the individual.

The *Vital Spirit* is reflected in our being as joy, connectedness, optimism, forgiveness, calmness (inner peace), compassion, and love. It also is responsible for cooling the body, including heat in the form of temperature as well as emotion.

The Vital Spirit corresponds to the way we conduct ourselves in our relationships, and in the world—both how we live, and how we die. The *Vital Spirit* represents one's spiritual energy, and it is beyond sense, emotion, or thought. In Chinese traditional medicine (TCM) the *Vital Spirit* is referred to as "Shen"—an immediate way of assessing Shen is to look into the eyes; a "sparkle" is usually an indication of a healthy *Vital Spirit.*

Living with a chronic illness can be an invitation to attend to our true nature, and to focus on thriving rather than merely surviving.

The Relationship Of Vital Spirit And Cancer

There is now a substantial amount of research demonstrating that perhaps the most effective and overlooked aspect in cancer treatment is the down-regulation of the sympathetic nervous system through a meditation practice known as "mindfulness."

This new and exciting data from the scientific community suggests that there is a profound interaction between tumors and the psychosocial environment mediated by activation of the adrenaline/ β2-adrenergic receptor (ADRB2).

It turns out that nourishing the Vital Spirit may be the single most important thing you can do to inhibit cancer growth, reoccurrence and metastasis.

Regaining Balance For Wellness

We live in a progressively fragmented world, and this fragmentation negatively affects every aspect of our lives. Even natural medicine is not immune to the tendency to view cancer and other serious illnesses with a narrow focus, addressing only one type of treatment or concentrating on only one aspect of health (for example, diet, exercise, or chemical exposure).

But the body as a whole is interconnected and each cell contains the whole, in the same way that each grain of sand contains the universe. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and that is why we need to take a balanced approach to healing the spirit, mind, and body.

It's important to remember that health cannot be defined merely as the absence of disease. We must expand our view of health to include the entire web of life. We are interconnected with one another, with all living beings, and with all of nature.

Optimal health and wellness includes intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical vitality and embraces engaging in attitudes and behaviors that enhance the quality of life. A true state of being "well" is not merely a condition of the individual. Our wellness is interrelated with the wellness of family, community, and environment. Diseases can manifest cellularly, energetically, physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually, and often involve a combination of these causes. Ultimately, to be healthy in the truest sense of the word, you must give love, receive love, and feel a true sense of community. You must live in "harmony"—harmony within, harmony with others, and harmony with nature, the external environment. Harmony and balance apply to all aspects of living.

A Harmonious Approach To Health

To the Western way of thinking, theology and medicine have little in common. Although some progress has been made in the past several decades in recognizing the interrelationship of the mind, body, and spirit, there is still the tendency to define a human being merely in terms of concrete, physiological attributes. In Eastern Christian ideology, however, just as in Eastern traditional healing systems of medicine, a human being is viewed as a spiritual, psychic, rational, and physical whole.

On the most basic level, we must consider three distinct areas of nourishment that enable us to live and thrive:

Celestial
Derived from the air that surrounds us, and which we obtain through breathing, which in turn oxygenates all the cells of the body.

Earthly
The food and water we consume each day, which provides the raw materials to build our physical body (through anabolic processes) and our energy (through catabolic processes).

Heavenly
Our relationship with God.

On a deeper level, our heavenly nourishment involves three distinct but interrelated relationships:

Cosmic
Our personal faith in our creator, or our religion. The cosmic relationship is inherently a mystery, and is a relationship of personal faith.

Nature
The planet and the plant world. In traditional healing modalities, the emphasis is upon Nature (God), and closely follows the principles of Nature as a model for the ideal life.

Human
Our exchange of love with each other (and animals), giving love, receiving love, and having a sense of belonging. To be whole and healthy, one must be connected to God, nature, self, and others.

The Spiritual Journey

Many people naively view the spiritual journey as a magic carpet ride to bliss. However, this is not a realistic expectation. The spiritual journey involves the purification of the unconscious; it is a humbling process, because it requires letting go of the self that we know and identify with. When we step onto the spiritual path, we are called to change how we respond to life circumstances and how we choose to be in every aspect of our lives.

To live fully, we must reflect on our "being" rather than our "doing." We must always strive to understand our true nature and allow our doing to become a reflection of our being. We must live being wholly alive in spirit, and it is in this way that we heal on the deepest level of being. All too often, it's easy to lose oneself in the distractions of daily work and responsibilities, and to disconnect from our true spiritual center. But we are not meant to merely function, we are meant to involve ourselves fully in life by actively living in accordance with what the soul is seeking. The first step is embracing the present moment—which includes facing the unknown.

Living With The Unknown

Fear is a natural and understandable reaction to illness; none of us wants to be sick, and few of us are prepared to deal with the many unknowns that come with the diagnosis of a serious illness.

As humans, we go to great efforts to delude ourselves that we are in control of our lives and our destiny. To this end, we do everything possible to exert control over our environment, ourselves, and other people. Most of us are uncomfortable living with uncertainty, and yet the truth is that by virtue of being alive, we inhabit the unknown—none of us can ever know with certainty what will happen from one moment to the next. If we relinquish the illusion of control, what then? Living in fear is not the answer. Left unexamined, fear tends to expand, reaching its constricting tentacles into more and more aspects of life, until we are left with little but fear.

The answer is to make peace with the state of unknowing. When we learn how to be fully alive in this moment—accepting that we don't know what the next moment may bring—we free ourselves to live a life that is richer and more fulfilling than life lived by the strictures of control. Instead of resisting what is and feeding fear, we can instead choose to practice prayer, meditation, and contemplation to encourage present moment awareness, expansiveness, and peace.

Cultivating Hope Versus Optimism

Optimism can be defined as the non-empirical belief that positive circumstances will result from uncertain or even negative circumstances—in other words, it is the expectation that good things rather than bad things will generally happen. On the surface, that sounds like a positive way to live. But there's a significant flaw in viewing the world optimistically. What happens when reality doesn't live up to our optimistic expectations? Optimism claims, *"Everything will be all right!"* But what if everything isn't "alright"?

Although some research indicates that optimistic people enjoy better health, it's unclear whether the correlations between optimism and better physical health are due primarily to the benefits of optimism, or the harms of pessimism, or both. There's nothing wrong with cultivating a positive viewpoint in life. In fact, it's essential not only for physical wellbeing, but also for spiritual, mental, and emotional health. However, it's more beneficial to focus on cultivating hope instead of merely relying on optimism.

Both hope and optimism are similar in that they both involve positive expectations of some sort about the future. However, hope accepts reality. Hope includes all of the psychological advantages of optimism, but it is rooted in something deeper. When we hope, we believe that God is at work to redeem all things, regardless of how things happen to be turning out today.

The optimist speaks about concrete changes in the future. The person who cultivates hope lives in the moment with the knowledge and trust that all of life is in good hands. The philosopher and statesman Vaclav Havel said it well, *"The more propitious the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the deeper the hope is. Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out."*

In speaking of optimism and hope, Pope Francis says: *"It is useful not to confuse optimism and hope. Optimism is a psychological*

attitude to life. Hope goes further; it is an anchor thrown to the future, which allows one to pull on its rope to arrive at the goal one longs for, by using our effort to move in the right direction. In addition, hope is theological: God is there in the middle of it. For all these reasons, I believe that life is going to triumph."

Do not worry or project negative beliefs about your situation, no matter what you have been told. Countless people get well that were told they had no chance for recovery. Always remain hopeful, and live in the present with gratitude and love in your heart.

Our *Doing*, A Reflection Of Our *Being*

Our culture and society emphasize doing instead of being, multitasking is considered a desirable skill, and we are generally more focused on quantity instead of quality in all aspects of our lives. Because our bodies are so efficient at adapting, we are often not aware of the negative impact that this fast pace of life is having on our *being*, which is in essence our spiritual nature. To live a life of balance, we must understand that life is not a race, and that true happiness never comes from doing more, or having more.

Our life expression of *doing*, which is manifested in our physical activity, work, and play, reflects our inner *being*, and thus is an extension of our spirit. We must learn to challenge our learned habits of overdoing and overworking to create a life based on what is most meaningful to us as unique individuals. We must join together the thinking rational mind and our spiritual awareness to have our spiritual *being* and our expression of *doing* come into balance.

One important key to staying balanced is to not waste time or energy worrying about things over which we have little or no control. Instead, put your time and energy into focusing on what is in front of you that you can influence for the better, with the intention that your actions may positively benefit others and the world.

Developing and maintaining connection with our inner *being* requires quiet, peaceful, restorative time. It is only when we allow ourselves this time for self-reflection that we can be certain that we are living in accordance with our deepest truth.

How Prayer Can Nourish Peace Of Mind

A practice of daily prayer can provide great solace. But it's important to not pray with the intent of petitioning God. When we make requests of God, we are attempting to control outcome, which merely leads us back to fear when our problems are not solved in the way that they think they should be. We have no control over God, and we cannot know or understand God with words. The only way that we can know God is through love. We must relinquish the practice of asking God to answer our prayers. Instead, we need to let go and trust.

We must cultivate a place of inner peace, quiet our minds, and allow pure love to connect us to God. We must forget everything, and in this forgetting, we discover that God is everywhere, and that we are everywhere as well. In our willingness to venture into this place of unknowing, we transcend fear and limitation. We become more comfortable with uncertainty, and thus are better able to fully inhabit the present moment.

Contemplative prayer is a simple, accessible means to cultivate the discipline that the spiritual journey requires. In the silent repetition of prayer, we experience the presence of God and are receptive to God's intention. All world religions share a similar practice in invoking the name of God to find the quiet, still space within where God can be directly experienced. The practices of Lectio Divina and Poustinia are ways in which contemplative prayer can be woven into the fabric of daily life.

The Practice Of Lectio Divina

The practice of lectio divina (Latin for "divine reading") is an ancient method of prayer that employs the reading of scriptures to encourage communion with God, and in the process, inspire spontaneous spiritual insights.

Lectio divina is adaptable for people of all faiths; it does not matter if you are reading the Bhagavad Gita, the Torah, or the Koran. What matters most is the intention with which you approach the reading. There are four basic principles involved in practicing lectio divina: sensing, thinking, intuiting, and feeling.

Before beginning the practice of lectio divina, it's important to relax. Choose a comfortable, quiet setting where you will not be disturbed. It can be helpful to take several slow, deep breaths to relax the body and to begin to clear the mind of worrisome thoughts. You may also find it helpful to recite a brief phrase or word over and over—choose something that is personally meaningful to you, perhaps a brief prayer or simply reciting

the word, "Peace."

There are four steps to the actual practice of lectio divina:

- Lectio: Choose a spiritual reading, a passage from the Bible or other sacred text. Read the passage slowly, allowing the words to sink deeply into your consciousness as you read. Consciously attend to each word, bringing your attention back to the passage if you find your mind wandering. As you read, be aware of words or phrases that resonate with particular meaning for you.

- Meditatio: Take time to reflect, or meditate, on the passage that you have read. How does it apply to your life? How might you use the wisdom that you have been offered as guidance in your life? Be open to a unique, personal interpretation of what you have read.

- Oratio: It is now time to respond to what you have read by opening your heart, your mind, and your soul to God. All that is required is a willingness to begin the conversation with God.

- Contemplatio: You have now prepared the fertile ground of your mind, body, and spirit to be receptive to the guidance of God. In this step, you free yourself from your own thoughts, and simply listen to God.

The Practice Of Poustinia

To be constantly in prayer in all we do is referred to in Eastern Christianity as living within a poustinia. Although this originally meant a sparsely furnished room where one could focus solely on prayer, poustinia has come to mean any place where you can take refuge in God—especially within the quiet center of your own being. One can find communion with God in any locale, even in the midst of the busiest of lives. By cultivating a silent, still space within, the internal poustinia offers a personal, always available quiet place of connection with God.

When you enter the poustinia in prayer, you begin to understand that as we come from eternity, so will we return to eternity. Within this simple state of mind comes a tremendous peace, a peace that shatters the illusion between life and death. As we understand that life is truly timeless, our attitude becomes like that of the poustinik, and all fear gradually disappears.

Finding God In Nature

Saint John of the Cross, a Carmelite priest and a great mystic, taught the monks a humble exercise; to sit and contemplate where they could view the open sky, hills, trees, fields, and growing plants, and to call upon the beauty of these things to praise God. This simple meditation on Nature reminds us of Divine Power, and the wisdom and goodness that exist in Her. If we stop for a moment to consider the origin, magnitude, beauty, fullness, activity, and order of all things, we cannot doubt the beneficence of God.

The Creative Self As A Path To God

Music and art provide the opening that allows us to journey to the depths of our being. It is here that we gain a sense of true freedom, a dwelling place for the spiritual journey. This deep opening is more often found in the creative self through music and art rather than the intellectual thinking self. Music and art allow us to lose ourselves, and to then find ourselves all at the same time.

Explorations of our inner spirit through music or art expose us to a place otherwise hidden, a place where we discover spiritual vitality, a place that lifts us above ourselves to a level of being we otherwise did not know we could achieve.

When you are liberated from self you are now free to be in a space that is both empty of self and full of God. This is where we experience unconditional love. If we have not experienced ourselves as unconditional love, we have not lived, because that is who we really are. Our hearts need to sing the melody of the deep music within. That is the true spiritual journey.

Love As Medicine

It's not uncommon that upon diagnosis of a serious illness, such as cancer, that people are often struck, as for the first time, with a deep understanding of the preciousness of life. Suddenly, our goals in life change—often radically—and we reevaluate who we are and where we are going. With great clarity, we become certain about who and what is important in our lives, and we know how we want to live out the rest of our days.

Rather than mechanically functioning in society striving for security and survival, the diagnosis of a life threatening illness can provide the impetus to begin to fully live. Sadly, although many people live 80 or 90 years or more, they have never truly lived, and they leave this life with deep regrets. How, then, shall we live? How do we live today so that at the end of our lives—whether one day or decades from now—we can say that we have wholly lived this precious life?

The answer can be distilled to the simple precept of love—love for God, for ourselves, and for all beings. Despite all that we have gained in the realm of modern life—including advances in medical technology—we have lost our connection to what is most important. We wander aimlessly, seeking the objective while forfeiting the subjective. Money, greed, power, and prestige are the objective, while our spiritual life and the pursuit of the divine love that is God is our subjective path.

It is only spirit that is eternal, and spirit, which resides in each of us, must be born and grow in divine love. This is our true nature. We must find true love and give love. We find this love within ourselves where God dwells, within each other by giving love, and within nature. We cannot own love, or buy it, or possess it, for true love is free and is always giving of itself.

As eternal spirit dwelling within the physical body, we are called by God to live. We are called to a life of joy and freedom, where our daily walk reflects the growth of our spirit. This spiritual growth is an active relationship with God that is reflected in how we help one another.

When we love selflessly, we are fulfilling our true nature and are filled with joy. We cannot live life with the goal of merely surviving. We must live life being alive in spirit, pursuing a journey of loving. When we live with the goal of loving unconditionally, we are creating a life that is whole and healed.

Living The Spiritual Pilgrimage

The mystery that surrounds spiritual growth can only occur if we are open to it. We cannot live life fully being spiritually stagnant, merely functioning, lacking imagination, with knowledge but no wisdom, with little or no creativity, without the expression of art and music, without the pursuit of selfless love. We must listen, with our hearts and souls, in order to follow our true path, which is the path of love. The pursuit of spirit is one of truth, beauty, and loving kindness, expressed as compassion, tenderness, concern for others, service, goodness, gentleness, forgiveness, and understanding.

A house in not built by beginning at the top and working down. You must first create a strong foundation; only then can you build a strong house. In physical terms, this means supporting the body with optimal nutrition, rest, and appropriate exercise. In terms of the mind and emotions, we must learn to calm the mind, to forgive, to love, and to live with integrity in our relationships with others and ourselves. And in terms of spirit, we must nourish our connection to God through prayer and reflection. By attending to all of these aspects of our being, we can move beyond mere "survival tactics" and instead to living in a vibrant state of optimal health.

"God breathes through us so completely... so gently we hardly feel it... yet, it is our everything." ~John Coltrane

Suggestions For Nourishing Vital Spirit

- Immerse yourself in the sounds, smells, sensations and visual beauty of Nature. Walk or hike in the woods, in the desert, in a park, along a stream or by the ocean—sometimes alone to commune with God, and other times with a close friend with whom you can dialogue about spiritual matters. In nature, we can see God both through and in the beauty of our surroundings.
- Nourish your soul through spirituality, prayer and religion. Meditate, pray, worship, go on a spiritual retreat, and seek truth in a manner consistent with your beliefs.
- Sit quietly in the morning and evening and let your mind be still. You may find the practices of mindfulness, lectio divina, or poustinia beneficial for calming your mind and creating the spaciousness that allows for communion with God.
- Practice letting go of worry. As Pope Francis has wisely said, *"Do not be afraid of reality."* Reciting the simple prayer of St. Francis of Assisi can bring peace and comfort: *"Lord, grant me the strength to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."*
- Cultivate gratitude. As you awaken each morning, give thanks for your breath and the gift of your life. Throughout the day, consciously practice expressing silent or spoken gratitude for all of the blessings you encounter.
- Slow down. A great way to do this is to notice the beauty around you in everything you do. Is the sun shining? What do you hear? How does the air feel on your skin? Smell the flowers, watch the sunset, and listen to the birds and wind rustling through the trees.

- Leave some unscheduled time in every day. If possible, spend one day each week without any planned activities.
- Do something for someone else each day. Helping others is a selfless action, but in reality, our involvement with others and their problems often causes our own problems to dissipate.
- Mealtimes are an opportunity to nourish your spirit as well as your body. In the time honored tradition of breaking bread with others, sit down to eat with family and friends (and even strangers). Express gratitude for the food, and savor the meal together, accompanied by pleasant conversation and laughter.
- Reduce your exposure to unnecessarily stressful input. Limit your exposure to the news to once or twice a week. Reduce noise pollution by listening less to television or talk radio. Instead, listen to soft, joyful, relaxing music, or simply tune in to the sounds of nature.
- Eliminate negative habits such as smoking, recreational drugs, drinking excessive amounts of alcohol, or staying up too late at night, all of which erode Vital Spirit.
- Be positive and believe in yourself. Negative self-talk and continually doubting your abilities is a sure way to create unhappiness.
- Love your family and friends and practice forgiveness. When you learn to forgive, you develop the emotional confidence to overcome any difficulty.
- Laugh each and every day. Laughter is extremely important for a healthy, long life. Seek out humor and joy: watch children playing, read a funny book, watch a comedy, and even learn to laugh good-naturedly at yourself.
- Practice maintaining your sense of peace and calmness in any situation, no matter how upsetting.
- The expression of love is our true divine calling. Appreciate the love that you have in your life, and the love that you witness around you. Giving love is as nourishing as receiving love—tell your family and friends how much you care about them, and demonstrate your love through your actions.

One thing is for certain—we all will face challenges throughout our lives. How we handle these challenges—whether we are defeated by them or see them as opportunities—has a great deal to do with our well-being, our happiness, and our Vital Spirit. If we can find the opportunity that exists in every challenge, we will develop a resilience of spirit and a deep contentment that will sustain us throughout life.

"May God grant you always...

A sunbeam to warm you,

A moonbeam to charm you,

A sheltering Angel, so nothing can harm you,

Laughter to cheer you;

Faithful friends near you.

And whenever you pray, Heaven to hear you."