

Adding spiritual touches to physical activities

Spiritual Wisdom

Let them praise his name with dancing.

—Psalm 149:3

Physical practices help to calm, focus, and strengthen the energy in your body, bringing its vibration in harmony with your higher nature. Physical practices for your spiritual journey include tai chi and other martial arts, hatha yoga poses, Zen archery, breath exercises, and spiritual dances from nearly every religious culture and traditions.

By maintaining a spiritual focus in your mind and heart, even nonspiritual activities can be spiritualized. You can do everyday activities, such as playing sports, gardening, cooking, taking care of your children, working at your job, or walking the dog, with a spiritual approach.

Consider

You can also infuse spirit into usual physical exercises by adding spiritual touches. For example, you can turn an ordinary walk into what is called a *japa walk* by repeating a mantra as you walk.

Japa is a Sanskrit word for the practice of repeating a mantra — a potent spiritual word or phrase — over and over again. People who practice mantra repetition often synchronize the mantra repetitions with their breath's inhalations and exhalations.

To go on a japa walk, you coordinate your mental mantra repetitions and breath together with your footsteps as you walk with a peaceful, energetic, and steady pace. With a japa walk, your entire body, mind, and spirit are walking together in harmony, infused by the power of the mantra.

Different religious traditions offer different mantras, names of God, or scriptural phrases that can be used for a japa walk. Jewish and Arabic traditions call these sacred phrases *zikhr* or *dhikr*, which translate as “mind protector.” Some mantras are longer verses, but for the purposes of a japa walk, you may find it best to use shorter phrases that can be easily repeated in your mind and synchronized with your steps. You can also come up with your own positive phrases in your native language. Here are some holy words and phrases from different traditions that can be used in a japa walk:

- **Buddhist:** Om Mane Padme Hum, Om Vajrasattva Hum, Buddha, Quan Yin, Avalokitesvara
- **Jewish:** Shalom, Elohim, Adonai, Ehyeh Asher, El Shaddai, Ha Shem, Shekinah, Barukh Ata Adonai, Ruach Elohim, Moshe Yeshua Eliahu
- **Hindu:** Om, Shivo'ham, So 'ham, Hare Krishna, Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram, Hari Om Tat Sat, Om Shanti, Sat Nam, Aham Brahmasmi

- **Islamic:** Allahu Akbar, Bismillah Al-Rahman, Al-Rahim, Ya-Rahman, Ya-Salaam, Ya-Mutakabir, Ya-Ghaffar, Ya-Fattah, Ya-Hafiz, Ya-Sabur
- **Christian:** Jesus Christ, God, Holy Spirit, Amen, Ave Maria, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

Consider

You can also repeat positive mantras and words while doing various physical exercises and efforts, including household chores and other tasks that don't require a lot of mental decision-making.

Your body is a precious gift

Some spiritual sages have said that even the gods and angels long to take form as a human being, suggesting that it's only the human body, heart, mind, and soul that can experience the unknowable, supreme reality in a tangible form.

The Indian poet Surdas asked: *"This human birth is like a precious diamond. Why have you let it go to waste?"*

Remembering your physical needs

Sometimes spiritual people get so focused on the spirit that exists beyond the external world that they don't take good care of their bodies or physical needs. I'll have to raise my hand and admit to occasionally taking that mistaken approach. Others are excessively focused on what they put in and do with their bodies, whether by undergoing extreme health regimens or following rigid dietary rules. Some religious zealots have even harmed their bodies in the name of subduing the flesh and exalting the spirit, although the popularity of these extreme mortification practices has fortunately dwindled in recent centuries.

Be Careful

Harming your body in an attempt to honor spirit is taking a low approach to seek higher awareness. With a greater spiritual view, you come to see everything as a form of spirit and worthy of reverence — including yourself and your body.

Spirituality in Action

Thank your body

Take a pause to give thanks to your body right now. Close your eyes and feel the vibrations and energies that flow throughout your body. Put your hands on your head and heart and bless this divine vehicle of spirit. Let your healing energy flow from your hands into your body to wherever it is most needed.

Take in a deep breath of life energy and feel the energy spreading throughout your body — into your fingers and toes and to the tip of your nose.

To illustrate a good attitude spiritual people can have toward their bodies, my guru used to quote an elderly sage who was on his deathbed and preparing to leave his body and this world. The sage first said goodbye to his family and then began speaking to his own body, saying, “Oh, my dear, beloved friend. With your help, I have been able to pursue different things in my life and realize the Divine Self. You have always tolerated everything I have done to you without complaining. You have cooperated with me in my sorrow and misery as well as my joy. I beg your forgiveness for all the wrongs I did to you. Now I must leave you.” And with that, the sage took leave of his body.

Remember, it is your precious body that allows you to live and breathe on this beautiful planet, interacting with all the people and things you love.