

CANYON RANCH.

THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN YOUR HEALTH

A CONVERSATION WITH CANYON RANCH PHYSICIAN NICOLA FINLEY, MD

February 2018 – Chances are that you have heard of the power of prayer to help people cope with and recover from illnesses. However, a broader notion of spirituality also has its place in this conversation. Nicola Finley, M.D., a physician at Canyon Ranch Tucson, shares how discovering and tapping into your spirituality can improve your health and wellness.



Q: WHAT IS YOUR APPROACH TO SPIRITUALITY?

DR. FINLEY: Spirituality is different from person to person and as a physician, I look at it in a variety of ways. Spirituality is what gives your life a sense of purpose and meaning. It's your belief system, your values. It's the connection to self, to community or to the divine or a higher power. I also look at it as what brings you comfort and joy—what brings you happiness.

At Canyon Ranch, we've been looking at spirituality as part of wellness for a very long time. I look at it from a perspective of coping: how do you tap into your inner strength during difficult times? Spirituality can bring much needed tranquility and peace.

Q: WHAT DOES SCIENCE SAY ABOUT SPIRITUALITY AND OUR HEALTH?

DR. FINLEY: The benefits of spirituality are being widely taught in medical schools today. Studies have shown that those with a sense of spirituality they can tap into, may have an improved ability to cope with illness, pain or life stresses.

There is also of research about spirituality and heart disease, the number one killer of men and women. One study looked at the effect of daily meditation and found that heart disease patients with the lowest scores of spiritual wellbeing had the most progression of coronary obstruction over four years, and those with the highest scores had the most regression.

Connection to a community is also an important spiritual component of health. In one study, veterans recovering from open heart or abdominal surgery who had a larger social network, needed less pain medication, stayed in the hospital for shorter periods and had less anxiety.

Q: HOW DO YOU DISCUSS SPIRITUALITY WHEN YOU MEET WITH GUESTS?

DR. FINLEY: I bring up spirituality with everyone that comes to my office and I find that most people are happy that I do so. Patients may not call it spirituality, but they want their physician to listen and understand where they're coming from—their value system and belief system.

I allow our guests to discuss what spirituality means to them. If it's religion, then I carry that conversation: *How do you express your religion?* If it's through prayer, I ask them how they utilize prayer, whether it helps them cope, gives them a sense of inner strength or comforts them. Other examples could be nature, animals, yoga, exercise—the list is endless. I support and trust that faith.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME DIFFERENT WAYS THAT PEOPLE CAN HARNESS THEIR SPIRITUALITY FOR THEIR HEALTH?

DR. FINLEY: By getting in touch with their belief system and values. Here is an example: I had a patient who was struggling to lose weight. When I asked what was important to her, she said that her son was about to get married in a year and that she was really looking forward to the wedding. So I suggested that she look at her weight loss as a preparation for the big day. I encouraged her to consider dancing as a way to lose weight in preparation for what she values—her family, her son and his wedding. I'd like her to think, *I'm dancing because I'm getting ready for something that I value, my son's wedding.* Then hopefully that will help motivate her long term.

It's really about what you value—why you get up in the morning.

Here is another example: I had a patient who was pre-diabetic for quite a while. Eventually she developed diabetes, and when I shared her lab values with her, she started crying. I said, "What's causing you to cry?" She said, "I don't want to have diabetes. I'm so afraid of diabetes." I told her that we'd talk about ways that we could treat it, but that I also wanted to talk about wellness. So I went back to that idea of what brings her joy. She replied painting, but that she hadn't done it for some time because she was so worried about her health. I suggested that she get back to it so she could feel a sense of relief and comfort. That way she'll be able to cope better with this chronic medical condition.

Q: HOW HAS YOUR OWN SPIRITUALITY PLAYED A ROLE IN YOUR HEALTH?

DR. FINLEY: I'm a practicing Christian and I also have a broader concept of spirituality, which includes yoga. I struggled with infertility. I believe that I was able to really ground myself through Bikram yoga—to be in the present moment and let go—and I think that is how I was able to get pregnant.

I also think of spirituality in terms of motivation. When I think about my own health—being motivated to stick with a healthy program of exercising and cooking healthy foods, as opposed to eating out—I have to tap into my inner strength.

One example that I often share with guests is that I had never run a marathon and I thought I never could. Then my mom passed away from multiple myeloma. I was able to complete a marathon because I had a higher sense of purpose: completing a marathon in my mother's honor. So that's another way that spirituality motivates me.

HOW YOU CAN LEARN WHAT'S SPIRITUAL TO YOU

If you're ready to put Dr. Finley's advice to use, you might find that you need to get in touch with your own spirituality. For some people, journaling is a great way to discover their spirituality. What you write down on a piece of paper about what is important to you might surprise you. "You need

to feel grounded and introspective so you can tap into your value system,” Dr. Finley says. Walking in nature can be another way to do that, since our environment plays a role in our spirituality.

Even if you’re not currently dealing with a health issue, you can begin to tap into your spirituality now, so you have something to fall back on later.

About Canyon Ranch®

Canyon Ranch® has been a pioneer and an industry-leading proponent of the wellness lifestyle for nearly 40 years, operating the world's most celebrated collection of life-enhancement properties. Canyon Ranch has wellness destinations in Tucson, Arizona and Lenox, Massachusetts. In addition, Canyon Ranch operates Canyon Ranch spa + fitness at The Venetian® & The Palazzo® hotels and Canyon Ranch spa + fitness onboard Cunard Cruise Line®, Oceania Cruises® and Regent Seven Seas Cruises® and on Celebrity Cruises®. Canyon Ranch is a 13-time winner of Travel + Leisure's Best Spa Award, an 11- time recipient of the Condé Nast Traveler Best Destination Spa Award and is recognized as the 'Best Wellness Program' by Virtuoso's 'Best of the Best' 2017 awards.