



# Pick Your Path to Health

## Celebrate Your Spirituality

It's a New Year, and you've already started making promises to yourself. You know, the ones about the new exercise plan, healthy eating, spending more time with the family, and so on.

But if you're not careful, your promises will fall victim to your busy schedule faster than you can say, "I am a priority!"

Are you really a priority? Or, do your needs come at the end of a long to do list: parenting, work, housework, etc.?

Most Latinas take care of everybody in the family before doing something for themselves. For women, who are some of the busiest people on earth, finding and celebrating your spirituality within everyday activities may be the single most generous thing you do for yourself this year.

### What *Is* Spirituality?

Spirituality has many definitions, some of which are:

- A belief in something greater than oneself
- A sense of connection with all living things
- An awareness of the meaning of life
- The development of values

Spirituality is also closely associated with religion, but spirituality does exist outside of religion as well.

So the most important definition is *yours* to create!

"Getting together with other women is a start," says Robin Liten-Tejada of Arlington, Virginia, who participates in women's retreats and many other activities that help her find the spirituality within her.

Liten-Tejada explains that she's always been interested in spiritual things. She finds spirituality in nature in activities such as bird watching and other activities such as women's retreats.

At one retreat, she says one of the activities included drumming. When she returned home, she looked for drum circles in her neighborhood and she says that it led her to make connections with other people.

So whether you find your spiritual strength from simple, enjoyable activities such as drumming or commune with other women, creating your own spirituality is possible in simple, easy to do steps. But you must make the time for yourself today. Liten-Tejada says she has noticed that most of the women in her retreats are in their fifties and that many women seem to wait until their children have left home to begin to do something for themselves.

You take care of everyone, but who takes care of you in your twenties, thirties, and forties?

"We possess so much power we don't even realize we have and we don't access," Liten-Tejada says of women.

### **How Do You Go to the Grocery Store?**

To begin to create your own definition of spirituality, observe how you approach ordinary events, such as grocery shopping. Is it a chore, a stressful outing left to the last minute?

"The way in which we go to the grocery store may tell us everything about the way in which we live a life," says Rachel Naomi Remen in *My Monastery Is a Minivan* written by Denise Roy (Loyola Press, 2001, Paperback \$14.95).

If you could make the time, how would you like to approach ordinary activities? Can you associate buying food with nourishment for the body? Or, can you find and enjoy the beauty in the multitude of colors and textures of the fruits and vegetables at the market?

Look back at your own family traditions with food. Do you recall the care and love given by your mother or grandmother to every meal they prepared? What did they know that we have now forgotten?

Did your ancestors find a strong connection between the food they prepared and the earth? Look back at other activities your ancestors did—explore the spiritual value of each and borrow liberally from such a rich cultural heritage.

Whatever form your spirituality may take, the beauty of the process of creating your own spiritual connections is that you define them.

Whether it is related to food, or to finding the joy of playing in the park with your kids, or sharing a quiet evening with a loved one at home, or rejoicing with a friend, or finding joy in the fresh start of a new year, celebrating your spirituality is possible.

## **How to Begin**

Each person approaches spirituality differently. Some prefer private prayer, while others prefer attending church services, and yet others may find spirituality in physical exercise, reading, or community service.

Begin by considering your spirituality as part of your every activity and not a chore you have to do.

"You don't step on the path of practice for a few minutes a day, then jump off to go about the rest of your life," write Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat in *Spiritual Rx: Prescriptions for Living a Meaningful Life* (Hyperion, 2000, Hardcover \$23.95).

"This path also encompasses the joy you feel in a job well done...the affection you have for your pet, and the communion you experience in a circle of close friends..."

Your own path may include how you react to everyday situations, how you communicate with your family and friends, and how well you take care of yourself.

"It makes me feel so strong. This is who I am inside," says Liten-Tejada of how the activities she participates in make her feel.

Don't wait until your fifties—start on your path to spirituality today!

*Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."*