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LIVING LIFE IN BALANCE;
SPIRITUALITY AND WELLNESS

BY

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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Life is a gift from God. Our quality of life is in the hands of each individual. I believe to live life to its fullest a person needs to have a balance of the body, mind and spirit. Yoga, Tai Chi and running are important forms of physical activity. They each have a rich history and have an importance to many cultures throughout many generations.

Yoga and Tai Chi also have unique spiritual roots. The belief systems in place for each activity enhance the overall experience. Combining the spiritual practice along with each activity give the person a sense of completeness.

Running also has an important history to many cultures. Many that run, also incorporate meditation as a form of spirituality to the practice. Running to some can be a form of a moving meditation. It has been found that running can trigger endorphins to give the runner a sense of completeness. Running allows the runner to gain both physical fitness and mental purity.

Yoga, Tai Chi and running also incorporate nutritional aspects to each activity. When practicing all of the activities it is suggested that whomever desires the full benefits of the activity and spirituality stick to a clean diet. Foods that are created from the earth, and eaten with little or no additives are suggested.

The nutritional guidelines are also mirrored in many of the spiritual and religious practices. Depending on what faith or spiritual background a person may have, may dictate their nutritional practices.
It is believed that to live the best life a person’s world should revolve around physical fitness, good nutrition and spirituality. Each person should find their balance of taking care of their body, mind and spirit.
Dedicated to my family
for their continuing support and
for living a life in balance.
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I. Introduction: My Personal Journey

I tend to believe that people are influenced by the environment around them, their culture and also their heritage. I grew up in a suburban Midwestern town, raised by conservative and loving parents. My older sister and I were encouraged to be active and involved in sports and in a local Lutheran church. Growing up I never related my sports and activities with my church. After thirty-eight years of continuing to be active in both sports and church, I now realize how intertwined they are. As I learn more and dig deeper into spirituality, I have come to discover how much the human spirit and well-being are closely related to one another. To become better at physical fitness and well-being, many believe they also have to become more aware of themselves. To be one with their physical fitness, they also must become one with themselves and their spirituality. Many cultures and religions use different techniques and practices to better their spiritual lives with a goal to better their overall health. As I learn more about physical fitness, I realize that a person cannot be complete without being spiritually connected to some higher power. All cultures have their own way of uniting with a higher power and finding the right path to physical health. All cultures do believe that to reach peak performance each person must be healthy with her body, mind, and spirit.

My environment growing up in Nebraska influenced the sports I played. Had I lived on the west coast, I may have become an avid surfer or been exposed to other beach sports. Here in the Midwest, I participated in many sports popular here. I was active in soccer at a young age; one year my mother even helped coach the team. I became involved in basketball and again was coached by my parent, this
time my father. My parents always encouraged us to work hard and do our best. Quitting was never an option. As a result of their encouragement and tough love, I continued sports and athletics. Volleyball was introduced to me in seventh grade and soon became my world. I played on a club team as well as my high school team. Volleyball allowed me to travel to new states and eventually gave me a college education. Playing volleyball in college opened new doors, allowed me to travel to even more places and meet many people who would be a part of my life forever. Playing soon turned to coaching and led me to my first full time job teaching and coaching at Skutt Catholic High School.

Although volleyball was always a strong focus in my life; running, working out and staying active have remained an integral part of my daily routine. Coaching and my love of fitness and athletics led me to acquire my Master’s in Exercise Science. Through those classes and experiences, I became enamored with anything sports, fitness and nutrition. I have since “retired” from coaching, but continue to teach and work with athletes after school in the weight room. I also have the privilege to share my knowledge and love of sports, fitness, and wellbeing with my students. A few years ago I started teaching a Sports Health Care Class; it is now my favorite hour everyday. Sports have taken me so many places, not just geographically, but also through so many experiences of learning more about myself and my physical being.

My heritage and family have influenced who I have become and what I have been exposed to and been interested in. Even to this day, my family continues to encourage me in my sporting adventures. Not only do they encourage me by words,
but also by actions. Growing up I remember my father trying various new fads to stay healthy. I can remember him taking Echinacea pills to help with his immune system. When the weather was nice, my father would go for long walks at Zorinsky or Chalco Hills. If it was too cold to walk outside he would get up early to use his Nordic Track. He modeled for me how to incorporate exercise into one’s routine. To this day my father incorporates walks into his daily life. My parents now live in Vail, Colorado and he walks to and from work, a seven mile round trip. I feel blessed that my parents have modeled this lifestyle for me.

My sister was always involved in athletics. She was a Division I athlete at the University of Nebraska and currently is practicing as a registered dietician. In addition to my immediate family that supported me in my athletics and health interests, I have been extremely blessed to have healthy and active relatives on both sides of my family. To this day I have two uncles on different sides of my family, both in their seventies and still extremely active. One plays tennis five days a week and the other plays basketball, walks and hikes. My uncles, many cousins and other family members also enjoy outdoor activities and sports.

As I take a step back and look at each of my cousins, I see how much physical activity is a part of their lives. Just in this last year, I have had different cousins from various families compete in marathons, stair climbing contests, and triathlons. This past summer I spent two weeks in Colorado with family. Every day we enjoyed the mountains and either, hiked, biked, fished, kayaked or went for a walk. Every activity I did with either my husband, parents, sister or other family members. Not only do I feel lucky that they too are healthy and take care of their overall wellbeing,
but I also wonder how much our family has influenced each other to maintain overall wellness.

My spirituality has had some surprising twists and turns. I was raised Lutheran. Lutheran was the religion both my parents were raised in as well. I never questioned why but just went and enjoyed my time at church and Sunday school. I do remember my first realization that being Lutheran was not the only option. I believe I was in second or third grade, and I was playing on the playground with some other girls in my class. They were talking about these “special white dresses” that they were getting to go to church. What I realized after more questions and wondering why I did not need a “special white dress” was that they were what was called “Catholic,” and it was for their First Communion Service. I did realize there was a difference and that even though we both believed in God, there were other options and religions when it came to worshiping on Sunday morning.

When I grew older and attended college, going to church was not always my top priority. I strayed, not really for any better reason than that I slept in on Sundays instead of going to church. I did find that I missed something. It took me awhile to realize just what I was missing. I was missing that contentment, that feeling of completeness I use to feel when I was at church. I missed the calm I felt when I was younger at church camp, when we learned to be closer to God. During that time I did make a point to get up and find a church in Wayne, Nebraska where I was going to school. It helped fill the void for the time being.

As I became more independent, I found myself questioning my religion and other religions as well. Why can some religions say they are better than others? During a class in college, we read a book and discussed some of the Buddhist beliefs. I found it interesting and started to wonder more about what some of the other
religious teachings were. I soon found myself accepting my first and current job at Skutt Catholic High School. I began to feel that closeness to God again and find myself feeling more complete as I was able to pray and celebrate Mass with my students and athletes. I still questioned why certain prayers were said when and why the Catholic Church did something so differently than my own church. Through many years at Skutt, from reading many different books, and meeting new friends of various other religions, I am becoming more open and gaining a better understanding of other religious practices. Not all religions are the same; some aspects are very similar and some are extremely different. But no matter what the religious practice is, each person’s goal always seems to be the same: to seek enlightenment and find peace and love from a higher power.

My teaching at Skutt Catholic High School has also fulfilled another dream I did not know I had until it happened. I have been blessed to be able to travel to Europe with students during spring break. Until about ten years ago the furthest I had been outside of the United States was in Niagara Falls, Canada. These experiences have opened my eyes to different cultures. It has given me a whole different perspective about how we live. This new perspective gave me a new appreciation of modern conveniences I once took for granted. There are so many unique approaches to life that each culture and country has to offer. I feel so blessed to be able to experience these different cultures and then bring a small part of that culture back to my world within my family.

All of these experiences have made me who I am. I am a person who loves to learn new things. I always want to work at being physically and spiritually whole. I
want to continually work to balance my mind, body and spirit to be the healthiest I can be. I have had the wonderful opportunity to experience many different types and methods of exercise and health practices. Through classes in the Christian Spirituality Program at Creighton University I have had the opportunity to take Tai Chi and Yoga classes and learn how to tie them into my spiritual and exercise routines. Yoga, Tai Chi and running are parts of my exercise routine that are very important to my overall health and wellbeing. To better understand each of these different practices of well being I will look into the history, benefits and current beliefs of these holistic healing techniques and how they can better anyone’s mundane life into a rich and balanced life.
II. The Practice of Yoga

Many may have an idea of what Yoga is. They may think of “yoga pants,” people holding poses, or have a misconception that Yoga is not really exercise. To better understand Yoga, it is important to know where it comes from. Evidence that Yoga existed has been found on stone drawings from the Indus Valley Civilization, dating back to over 5,000 years ago ([www.yogaweb.com](http://www.yogaweb.com)). The term “Yoga” is a Sanskrit word from an ancient Indian language meaning to unite or join (Finney 20). Yoga is meant to unite the body, mind and spirit so that all three work together harmoniously. Yoga is a scientific system that combines Yoga postures, relaxation, breathing and meditation techniques with psychological, moral, and ethical principles (Finney 16). The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali have formed the foundation on which all Yoga is based (Finney 21). The Sutras were written approximately from 5000BCE to 300CE (Finney 21). These Sutras are written codes which to follow while practicing yoga. Through the findings of these Sutras and other archaeological evidence, the history of Yoga and its different stages have been discovered and been passed on to other generations to learn from.

There are five main periods in the history of Yoga. The different eras are; Vedic Yoga, Pre-Classical Yoga, Classical Yoga, Post Classical Yoga and Modern Yoga. If we better understand where Yoga comes from, we can better understand the purpose, the beliefs and the goals of this ancient ritual. These five eras are the evolution of Yoga.

Vedic Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit work “Veda,” which means “knowledge” ([www.yogaweb.com](http://www.yogaweb.com)). Vedic Yoga is the first in the progression of the
evolution of Yoga. During this era, the sacred scripture of Hinduism created these four Vedas (Morgan 40). During this time the Vedic people relied on the Vedic prophets to teach them how to live in a harmony between the world we live in and the world that was outside of the limitations of their mind. Yoga was also practiced using a collection of hymns and practicing meditation. It was the goal at this time to live in divine harmony. To better achieve this harmony, many that practiced this type of Yoga lived in seclusion in forests.

Pre-Classical Yoga spans a time of about two-thousand years. The Pre-Classical Yoga was a result of the creation of the Upanishands. The Upanishands were believed to be written around 800-400 B.C.E. (http://hinduism.about.com). These writings are believed to be the core of Hinduism and Indian philosophy. Also during this time the Bhagavad-Gita was created (www.abc-of-yoga.com). This story brought the thoughts of devotion, knowledge and selfless acts together into the one belief system. This belief system was the Hindu religion.

The third progression of Yoga was the Classical Period. The main ideas that derived from this era were the one hundred and ninety-five sutras, or words of wisdom. From those, Eight Limbs of Classical Yoga were created (www.yogaweb.com). At this time the Yogis focus was entirely on meditation and their practices were not yet focused on the body.

Post-Classical Yoga was the time period where Yoga evolved from only a mind practice to encompass the body as well. In this time period the practice of Hatha Yoga was created. “Hatha” translates into “force” or “power.” This is the type of yoga that is most often seen at health clubs and practiced all over the world.
During this time the teachings of meditation and deep breathing began to encompass the whole body instead of just the mind and the lungs. The human body was now regarded as a temple, and Yoga was believed to rejuvenate the body.

The last and most current era of Yoga is Modern Yoga. This form of Yoga arrived in the West during the late 1800’s (www.yogaweb.com). This current practice of Yoga has evolved and is a result of a few of the Yoga gurus like Swami Sivananda Radaha. Sivananda was a Malasian Doctor that brought his teachings to America and Europe in the 1960’s (www.abc-of-yoga.com). He taught Five Principles that are still popular today: Proper Relaxation, Proper Exercise, Proper Breathing, Proper Diet, and Positive Thinking and Meditation. These principles are still used in many of the Yoga practices. However, many instructors may focus on only a few of the principles and may emphasize one more than others. Yoga is a practice that has spread over many cultures and traveled through many languages.

Yoga can be found and used in cultures all over the world. People use Yoga usually for the same purpose. The diversity of Yoga has contributed to its popularity for many centuries. As stated in *The Yoga Handbook*, “what helps the fisherman from Gambia experience peace is not necessarily going to help a financial consultant from the City of London, and what helps him might not help a housewife from Romania” (Finney 32). From the many different practices of Yoga, everyone can find what works for her. Even though Yoga originated from the Hindu religion, it has spread to almost every culture, religion and country.
With the expansion and translation of Yoga to so many different countries and cultures, many have put their own stamp on its practice. From these different translations and evolutions, over ten types of Yoga have emerged. Some of these Yoga styles are created for a certain purpose or a certain group of people. Many people may wish for different results from their Yoga practice. Some styles are more gentle and some may have a goal of attaining stamina, flexibility and strength (Finney 12).

For example, Bikram Yoga was developed by Bikram Choudhry from India. He created a series of twenty-six postures that are done in a heated room. This program has been developed to work muscles, tendons, ligaments, joints, internal organs and glands. These postures are also believed to release some of the body’s toxins while sweating in the hot atmosphere (Finney 12).

While Bikram Yoga may be more intense, Kripalu Yoga is more for the beginner and is more gentle. Kripalu Yoga coordinates breath and movement and is a progression of three stages. It is primarily used for the beginners of Yoga as it allows the new student to practice the poses and holds each pose longer than in most types of Yoga. Kripalu Yoga also acts as a moving meditation while trying to coordinate the mind and the body (Finney 13).

Each form of Yoga has its own goal and focus to fit all types of Yoga students. Kundalini Yoga was brought west in 1969 by Yogi Bhajan (Finney 14). Kundalini Yoga focuses on the awakening and release of the spiritual energy known as the kundalini. Breathing, meditation and some of the classic postures are incorporated into this practice, but can be very difficult. With the many different types of Yoga,
anyone can find something that may benefit her. No matter what Yoga is chosen to participate in, it is important for the student to go to a qualified teacher so that the postures and practices are done correctly to benefit the body, not harm it.

Many people may believe that only women partake in Yoga. Anyone of any age and any gender can participate in Yoga. Many may not think professional football players would use Yoga to enhance their performance. Still, professional athletes make up a large portion of the population that incorporate Yoga into their exercise routine to keep them healthy. Amani Toomer, of the New York Giants has said “Without Gwen’s help – I can honestly say I would have had to retire two years ago.” (http://poweryogaforsports.com). Gwen, is Gwen Lawrence, who has a background of Sports, Dance, Message Therapy and Yoga and developed a Yoga training tailored to athletes. This hybrid form of Yoga which she has named “Power Yoga for Sports,” is preventing injuries and giving the elite athletes better flexibility. Gwen believes that with her Yoga training, the athletes have stronger joints and a better mental focus on the field or court (http://poweryogaforsports.com). Her Power Yoga has been used by many of New York's professional teams as well as a few celebrities; David Letterman, Glenn Close and members of the Presidential Bush family. Yoga is not just for women wanting a peaceful hour of exercise and meditation; Yoga can benefit anyone in all walks of life at any fitness level.

Meditation is a practice done by people from all walks of life, for different purposes and in different settings. There are various benefits for meditation. Meditation has been clinically proven to reduce high blood pressure and improve overall wellness (Finney 196). Meditation allows for better physical and mental
Those that meditate gain a better sense of being, emotional stability, and the ability to deal with difficult situations. At one time in the evolution of Yoga, meditation, to strengthening the mind, was the sole purpose. Of the many types of Yoga, some are geared more towards meditation. Japa Yoga is practiced to help control the mind. Japa Yoga is used to help the mind from wandering. Through concentration and a system of repetition and mantras, calming and cleansing of the cells in the body are achieved (Finney 43). Practicing Yoga is a way to open the mind. In Yoga, the mind is believed to be a collection of thoughts, which Yogis refer to as chitta (Finney 200).

II. a. Types of Yoga

http://www.chakras.org.uk/chakra_yoga_health_holistic_ashtanga_eight_limbs_raja_yoga.htm
Many people often find their mind wandering throughout the day. By using meditation as a form of strengthening the mind, people find increasing clarity comes with practice. Yogis believe that our nature is to be at peace. Jnana Yoga is a form used with meditation to help those that have an analytical nature and reflective mind. With practice, Jnana Yogis can detach themselves from a troubling situation and allow themselves to find inner peace. Even while not actually practicing Yoga, a Jnani constantly is detaching herself from the situation and allowing nature to be in control. The control of thought process is important to Jnana Yoga. Those that practice this form also never dwell on negative thoughts because of the harm that they could create. They are able to detach themselves from these negative thoughts by letting them go like a passing cloud (Finney 42). Once the mind can settle they have achieved their goal.

The practice of Yoga and spirituality go hand in hand. Although people of various races and religions practice Yoga, it is an integral part of the Hindu religion. Although from the evolution of Yoga, this practice has now passed to other religions. Specifically, Bhakti Yoga is the Yoga of devotion and also a practice that has a deep appreciation of nature. In this Yoga, each session is an offering to God, no matter what religion the Yogi practices (Finney 38). One’s God maybe Moses, Christ, Nature, Allah or Krishna. All Bhakti Yogis direct their constant love and devotion to this omniscient and omnipresent divine being of their choice. Bhakti Yogis live daily in the presence and awareness of their chosen deity. The Bhakti Yogis surrender the individual thoughts and turn them over to God’s will. Even Yogis who do not worship a certain religious figure practice this Yoga and treat all possessions and
objects with care and love. Serving with love is the main goal (Finney 54). Although a loving and caring spirit is the main goal of Bhakti Yoga, all forms practice with the belief of doing good for all around. All religions have some sort of moral code, whether it be the Ten Commandments, or the Ten Virtues of Buddhism. The practice in many types of Yoga is to enhance physical abilities, but also to enhance the quality of life for everyone (Finney 54). All Yogis will expect not only to do good, but also to go deeper into an understanding of true nature and the true self.

In addition to the mind and the physical activity, nutrition is a large part of overall wellness. Yogis approach food the same way they do meditation and spirituality; they seek pure and natural foods. Sattvic diet is the yogic diet (Finney 218). This diet includes whole grains, legumes, fresh fruits and vegetables, seeds, honey, milk and nuts. Not only do some devoted Yogis eat only these certain foods, Yogis also believe it is important how the foods are prepared and when certain foods are eaten. The food should not be over or under ripe, and should not be over or undercooked. If it is either, it is believed to affect the body and mind in a negative way (Finney 219). Notice that meat was not mentioned. Yogis believe that the body is not intended to eat red meat. Recall that Yogis want to promote love and peace. By killing animals they believe they are harming the animal, and therefore there is no meat in a Sattvic diet.

In addition to having a clean and natural diet, the Yogi diet takes into consideration not only what is eaten, but how one eats it. Again the process of promoting peace and tranquility are important not just in meditation and yoga practices, but also in the way food is eaten and prepared. Anna Yoga is yet another
form of Yoga that incorporates redefining the relationship between yogi and food. Eating a Yoga diet is believed to nourish both one’s body and one’s spirit (Charlton 4). One rule to follow when adapting this Yoga diet plan to everyday life is to consider the source of the food. Food that grows in the sun is regarded as the highest in importance on the food chain, and considered the most life-giving (Gargulinski). Animals are considered to be lower on the food chain and would give “second-hand” nutritional value to the diet.

Moderation is the key to many things. It is also the key to a Yoga diet plan. If a Yoga diet is desired, one must remember to incorporate it gradually into the current lifestyle. Slowly replacing unwanted food with healthier or Sattvic foods should be the plan. Abruptly changing a diet could harm the peaceful rhythm that is being desired.

Fasting is important to Yogis. Those that practice Yoga stress the thought of staying pure and natural. One way to achieve this pure state is to include fasting in the diet routine. This practice of fasting may rid the body of unwanted toxins (Finney 225). Fasting can be done various ways. Some that practice fasting on a consistent basis fast for half days, while others do so for a full day. This practice of fasting should be done either once a week or once a month. Fasting can include drinking water or can involve eating only fruit. If a fruit fast is the method of choice, it is suggested that one fruit be used at a time (Finney 225). Whether partaking in a Sattvic diet or fasting, each must be done in moderation at the start. The suggestion for this new lifestyle is to incorporate one food and one new practice at a time.
Yoga has various benefits. Many see results physiologically, mentally and spiritually. These benefits from Yoga can be experienced by children, adults and elderly. Approximately 11 million Americans are feeling the benefits of Yoga (Yoga Health Benefits: Flexibility, Strength, Posture, and More). Physically, people see improvement in their flexibility, strength and balance. Mentally, the feeling of being more grounded, or having a greater sense of calm and peacefulness is achieved. Everyone will have different results depending on which form of yoga is practiced, but with any form the benefits are almost guaranteed.

Children in school often do better when experiencing a break or having a recess. What some schools have done is to incorporate Yoga into their standard curriculum. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is being implemented in The United States, United Kingdom and Canada (Yoga Benefits Kids). Teachers were having difficulties with students’ attention span and conflicts on the playground. After incorporating Yoga into their curriculum, they found the students’ behavior improved, and also their test scores rose as well (Yoga Benefits Kids). MBSR has been found successful in three countries, but those are not the only countries using Yoga to enhance children’s health and wellness. In South India research was done on the effects of yoga. Heart and breathing rates were physiological aspects that were researched. After the use of relaxation techniques and Yoga, there were a substantial decrease in the students’ resting heart rates and lower breath rates (Yoga Benefits Kids).

Overall Yoga is a great addition to anyone’s daily routine. Yoga has huge benefits to both physical and mental health. Often patients are choosing to seek out
other methods of wellness besides popping pills. Yoga has even been found to improve levels of cholesterol and triglycerides. In addition to all the other benefits some studies have also found Yoga can give breast cancer patients better health and less overall fatigue after their radiation treatments (Van Dusen). Yoga is used here more as a relaxation technique and a way for these patients to feel powerful over their disease.

As with any exercise, it is always important to consult a health care provider before starting any type of Yoga. New students must realize their limits and learn the basics first before attempting some of the more strenuous moves and poses. It is also important to attend classes with experienced and credentialed instructors to learn the proper way to execute each pose (Yoga Health Benefits: Flexibility, Strength, Posture, and More). People will experience a sense of “wholeness” and happiness after practicing yoga (Finney 7). Yogis can differentiate between finding the happiness that the world brings and the happiness that is fulfilled from within.

My first experience with Yoga was in a “Mommy and Me” Class with my son. He was about four years old at the time. We learned some of the basic poses and then ended the class with meditation time. It was a nice break from living through those preschool years and it gave us a fun and physical activity together. The Yoga class and the meditation was a great way to relax and be peaceful at the end of a long day. It was both invigorating and relaxing. The class was beneficial to me, but the best benefit was being able to experience it with my son.

The small introduction to Yoga enticed me to participate in a few other classes as the years went by. I enjoyed each class but always seemed to want more
cardiovascular activity in my exercise routine. A few years ago, I was able to take a Yoga class at Creighton University through the Christian Spirituality Program offered in the summers. This was the first experience I had that connected exercise with my spirituality. It was enlightening to me how fitness and physical activity could be paired so closely with God. I did enjoy each class and found myself practicing Yoga myself at home. Yoga is an amazing healing, spiritual, meditative, and physical activity that has passed the test of time. Yoga is a wonderful meditative healthy living practice, but it is not the only practice that has roots in Eastern Society and has lasted the test of time. I do suggest Yoga to anyone who is trying to broaden her horizon of physical fitness and spirituality. With so many different types to choose from and so many benefits to this amazing practice, it would be hard for someone not to find a type of Yoga practice to connect with. Although Yoga is amazing, it is not the only Eastern form of exercise that has spread to our culture.
III. The Practice of Tai Chi

Tai Chi, like Yoga, comes to us from the Eastern World. Tai Chi is an ancient Chinese martial art that is now practiced throughout the world. Its roots are in ancient Chinese history and its exact origin is not fully determined, although by many it is estimated to be thousands of years old. The formal name of Tai Chi Chuan was believed to be coined in the seventeenth century as the new form of kung fu. Basically Tai Chi is a combination of martial arts, healing and philosophy (Pawlett 7). Because of its Chinese origins, many of the words come from the Chinese culture. To understand Tai Chi it is helpful to understand the vocabulary used by those that practice Tai Chi. Many styles have evolved from the early teachings, but most of the traditional styles have the following elements: health, meditation and martial arts. Many of the forms of Tai Chi are named by the creator of the form. Gaining a better understanding of the key elements of Tai Chi will allow for a better understanding of Tai Chi as a whole.

Taoism is at the roots of Tai Chi. As a director of a mind-body research center, Peter M. Wayne states, “Tai Chi’s roots are also intertwined with traditional Chinese medicine and philosophy, especially Taoism, and with another healing mind-body exercise called qigong” (Brown 2). Taoism is not necessarily a religion, but more of a belief system or a philosophy. Taoism is not considered a religion because no deity is worshiped and there is no belief in a supernatural power (Pawlett 14). Taoism is a way of looking at the world and considering one’s self and the relationship that exists between the universe and self. Everyone experiences
different feelings when the seasons change, or when the days get shorter. Taoists notice and consider what the universe changes do to our feelings inside. The yin and yang is also part of the framework upon which Taoism is based. Along with Taoism, Tai Chi has also been derived from the “Book of Changes” or the I-Ching (Pawlett 15). To many in the eastern world the Book of Changes is important and a vital source of thoughts and ideas. These thoughts and ideas base their beliefs on the two polarities in the universe and the movements between them and each person. Without the philosophy of Taoism, Tai Chi would not exist.

III. a. The practice of Tai Chi, the movement of yin and yang, pulling and pushing
Wu Xing is the phrase in Chinese that means the “five elements” (Pawlett 22). The Taoist way of looking at the world involves these five elements or phases and how we are involved in it. The *Huangdi Neijing* is a book that dates from the Zhou Dynasty around three thousand years ago. It also involves how our physical and mental health are affected by the changing of seasons. Many people are affected when the seasons change outside. Some get tired and more dormant in the darker winter months. Many become more active and excited during the spring and summer months.

The *Huangdi Neijing* has created five elements to explain and name these changes that happen physiologically with the changing of the seasons and the world around us. The five elements are Water, Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal. These elements and energies relate closely to our seasons. Water is an energy at rest or of quietness. Winter is the season of water, when the world is locked in a frozen state. A seed frozen in water is waiting for the yang energy to burst out. Meditation for the body is similar to the water element. The wood element is the movement that follows rest. The dormant seed now begins to sprout. A body is in a state of wood energy when it awakes from slumber, especially when it awakens and is preparing for an exciting day or to go on a vacation. It is exciting and one usually feels enthusiastic. Springtime is, of course, the wood element of seasons. The plants, trees and many animals experience an awakening in the springtime.

The third element is Fire. It is the ripening and swelling of life. The season affiliated with this element is summer. Nature is in an active or yang phase. The body experiences the fire element with the organ of the heart. The heart is the
center of love and happiness. The earth element is energy at harvest time. This is a mellow and grounded feeling. When practicing Tai Chi, many are connected to the earth and the ground. The time of day related to this energy is late afternoon. The Metal Element is an energy that is a letting go and relaxing. Metal energy is a division of activity into hibernation. Winter setting in is the season for metal. All of these elements make up the beliefs behind many of the Tai Chi movements.

All types of energy make up Tai Chi. Chi is another energy that is a large part of the Taoism beliefs and therefore a vital element in Tai Chi. “Chi” has many meanings in Chinese, but in Tai Chi it refers to the vital force of energy that flows through the channels of the body. China is not the only country that uses these belief systems of energy traveling in the body. In Japan this vital force is referred to as Ki and in India it is known as Prana, Sakti or Kundalini. Even here in the United States, Hawaiians refer to this energy as Mana. All cultures and religions seem to have a word that describes a life-giving and life-flowing energy. It can also be similar to what many in the western world believe to be power or movement of the Holy Spirit.

It is believed that everything in the universe, humans and even non-living things, have chi. The intrinsic energy that flows through the body, travels through what are called meridian channels. It is believed that living things have three sources of chi: the energy that you are given at birth, the energy you receive from food, and the energy you receive from the air (Pawlett 27). The use of Tai Chi is believed to help regulate the chi and energy that travels through the body. When we practice Tai Chi on a consistent basis, it is believed that there can be an
accumulation of chi. This accumulation of chi can also bring positive changes to the metabolism and give a renewed energy in all aspects of daily life. In addition to enabling people to utilize the energy, it is also believed to better increase the self-awareness of the universe, which is also referred to as “shen.”

Shen is one of the elements of chi, and jing is the other. For anything to have life, it must have jing (Pawlett 16). This jing would include anything alive: plants or animals. Shen on the other hand is something that has a consciousness. As those that practice Tai Chi acquire this self-awareness, a sense of thankfulness, peace and joy are often another benefit. Some too that are masters at Tai Chi begin to build up the vital force and store it in their bones and often feel it build below their navel. They call this energy source in their core, believed to be two inches below the naval the “T’an T’ien.” Instead of body builders building muscular strength, they build up chi. Some, even refer to this as the “Growth of Clarity”: they become one with the work around them and grow in confidence and self-awareness. Chi energy can also be felt. Many say that their palms become warm while practicing Tai Chi. Concentrating on the soles of the feet they may feel what they call a “Bubbling Spring” beneath their feet. Even their inner organs become warm with this vital force. Thus they advise against drinking cold drinks directly after a Tai Chi session.

Along with the chi energy that can be awakened and become alive from practicing Tai Chi, many also integrate specific movements to wake up a series of “Eight Energies.” These energies often seem like various techniques, but as some master them it is understood that this energy is to be felt and becomes a vital aspect of Tai Chi (Pawlett 120). Some practice these techniques or concepts in not only Tai
Chi but also in other martial arts like judo. Once one has mastered many of these techniques, one may have the ability to control energy. It can prove to even be helpful in games like chess or other games of strategy. The Eight Energies are Ward Off, Roll Back, Press, Push, Pull Down, Split, Elbow Stroke, and Shoulder Stroke (Pawlett 121). Each one of these energies is created through a specific Tai Chi movement.

To better understand the movements of Tai Chi, it is helpful to understand the yin and yang. At a quick glance the yin-yang is just a graphic design. If we look past just the shape and focus on the colors and the contrast of the two parts, there is a relationship between the two colors. The yin is represented by the black portion, and yang is the white half. They even associate the yin and yang to parts of the body and the energies. The heart is referred to as the Great Yang, which corresponds to Heaven and the Sun. The Kidneys are the Great Yin and correspond to the Moon and the Earth. These thoughts are the basics of traditional Chinese philosophy. This is the relation of the strong and the weak, the young and the old, and man and nature (The History of Tai Chi). Understanding the yin and yang helps to understand the true definition of Tai Chi. Found in the “Book of Changes” it states “In all changes exists Tai Chi, which causes the two opposites in everything” (Laozi 65). Also the shape that it creates, a circle, also suggests that there is a cyclical nature of the opposites. Everything is composed of two opposites, but at the same time all things are believed to also be complimentary. The belief is that everything must be seeking a perpetual balance. When looking carefully at the symbol, notice also that there is a small circle of yang within the yin, and a small circle of yin within the yang.
An example of the body experiencing yin and yang is breathing. When breathing in, yin, the energy then becomes yang, and a breath out is needed. In life, a person that has found this balance of energy is believed to be harmonized with the universe. This balance is shown through the peace of mind and tranquility that she exudes. In the Tai Chi practice, there are many exercises that use the ideals of the yin and yang. For example, a push of the hand away from the body is yang, while pulling the hand back, moving towards the body is a yin movement (Pawlett 21).

III. b. The Yin Yang Symbol.
There are five main styles of Tai Chi or Tai Chi Chuan. From these five main styles, many other deviations have been created. The basic styles are Chen, Yang, Wu, Sun and Wu Yu-Xiang. Each of the five styles is named after the family or individuals that created it. When choosing a style of Tai Chi it is often helpful to understand where it originated and why the movements were created.

Of the five styles, the most popular is the Yang style. The Yang style is most often used strictly for physical exercise and healing. This style was a deviation from the Chen style. One reason why this is one of the most popular methods is that the founder’s family had a large desire to share its methods with the public, instead of keeping it to themselves (Yarmin-Garone). In the Yang practice the moves are circular and graceful. Although they are graceful, they are also effective defensive or offensive techniques. The graceful movements are combined with deep breathing and meditative visualization. These practices are to help with the circulation of the Qi. This is also known as Qigong training. The main philosophy here is that with only four ounces of effort 1,000 pounds can be moved. QiGong is a sequence of slow motion exercises. These doing this practice concentrate on the fluidity of the movement, becoming rooted to the ground and having control over breathing. QiGong’s purpose is to promote health and prolong life.

Over the years there have been many evolutions of the QiGong system. Certain trainers and teachers take the basics of QiGong and then add their own twist to them. This type of Tai Chi is important in the field of health care. There are also many healing movements that can be done in conjunction with acupuncture. It is believed that with the practice of QiGong and acupuncture health care systems may
help cure and treat diseases. One other major component of the Yang practice is that the students are taught to distribute their weight on one leg (Yamin-Garone). The students are to always stand with one leg bearing more weight than the other, also in this stance the knees never extend beyond the toes. These techniques help root the student and assist him with overall balance and body control.

A Manchurian military officer Wu Quan-You founded the second most modern and popular of the five methods, the Wu Tai Chi form (Yamin-Garone). Wu was influenced to create these movements because of the long garments that were part of the Imperial Court’s dress code (Pawlett 47). This is an example of how culture and the environment influence our views of health and physical fitness. We took the big movements of the Yang practice and made the movements smaller. These movements include grabbing, throwing, tumbling, and jumping. They are all unique hand movements. When practicing this method of Tai Chi, the students have a slow pace and transfer energy through spherical movements (Yamin-Garone).

Even though Wu Quan-You created these movements for his Imperial Court and for their clothing restrictions, the moves are still used today in many cultures and are a great asset to many people’s healthy lifestyles.

The Chen style combines some slow movements with quick and explosive blocks and kicks. To most observers this style may look similar to Kung Fu. This style of Tai Chi was created by the Chen family around the 1670’s. Chen Wang Ting was influenced by boxing and various forms of the Imperial army training systems. These methods of Tai Chi include ancient philosophical techniques of Daoyin and Tuna. Daoyin and Tuna are martial arts that together help with the clarity of
consciousness. Some of these ideas reflect the same practices of Taoism (History of Tai Chi). This practice was once a secretive practice and was only passed on by men from one generation to the next within their village (Yamin-Garone). In this style the emphasis is on lower-body positions and bigger motions. When practicing this method, students send energy through their legs and torso and then send it out through their hands and feet (Yamin-Garone). This Tai Chi practice is much more aggressive than some of the others. This is usually not a practice that is thought of as the slow and gentle movements of meditative Tai Chi.

The Wu Yu Xian style is once again named after it’s creator. Wu Yu Xian was trained by both Chen Masters and Yang Masters. So he created a combination of the two styles. This style was created in mid 1800’s (Pawlett 21). Students who practice this method tend to keep their arms on their respective sides of the body and use the small circles and small frame as in the Wu style. Students benefit from this style by strengthening their legs and loosening their waists. Of all the styles, this is the least popular and is rarely found outside of China (Pawlett 46).

The most recent of all the methods is the Sun style. Sun Lu Tang was an intelligent and skilled martial artist (Pawlett 44). Sun Lu Tang was a student of martial arts and once studied under Hao Wei Chen who taught him the Tai Chi style of Wu Yu Xian. Because of Sun Lu Tang’s background in martial arts and the expert teachings from Hao Wei Chen, he was able to develop the Sun style of Tai Chi. This is the fourth most popular style. When practicing this style, students will use soft flowing motions. This style has distinctive footwork that stems from the Wu Yu-
Xiang. One foot is always to follow the other when one moves forward or backward (Yamin-Garone).

Many people may believe that Tai Chi is only for exercise and healing purposes. Although those two benefits are a huge part of the world of Tai Chi, martial arts are also entwined into this ancient art. Martial arts are one of the key components of the creation of Tai Chi. Each move was created as a movement to obtain a martial art advantage. Martial Art and Tai Chi both involve movements with form. The moves, once perfected, are thought to give the best technical advantages to be used in combat situations. All of the great Tai Chi Chuan masters practiced Tai Chi for fighting purposes. Martial arts and health go hand in hand. A martial artist has to be healthy: otherwise he will not be able to fight well. Many people that are involved with martial arts also participate in and practice Tai Chi. There are many ways to practice martial arts; striking sandbags or lifting weights are two popular ways. Because of these movements Tai Chi is related to martial arts. The moves of both Tai Chi and of course martial arts have an added benefit of self-defense. These applications of the movements tend to be quite simple and benefit those being attacked. Often times in this frightening situation, the easier the movement, the easier it may come to a person when being attacked. After all, if Wu Tai Chi was created for the Imperial Army, it must have some promise for self-defense. If self defense is the main goal when learning Tai Chi, one should check with the instructor to verify about the type of Tai Chi that is taught.

Tai Chi is often practiced in conjunction with other Eastern Medicine techniques. Raiki is another practice that is often used with Tai Chi. Raiki is often
translated as a “universal life energy.” It is believed to be quite a powerful way to heal chronic ailments. It is a practice of laying of hands gently on the body to aid in the movement of the chi. Those that practice Reiki become more in touch with the energy that moves around them. The chi and energy that moves within us can also be referred to as the Holy Spirit for those that are Christian. Reiki is a natural progression from the Tai Chi practice as it is about the moving of the chi energy through the body. This practice can also benefit the other martial arts.

Meditation is another great compliment to Tai Chi practice. Learning to use meditation along with Tai Chi can enhance inner control and allows the chi to move more freely through the body. Meditation can also be used to have a better understanding of oneself. One important practice of Tai Chi is letting go of tension. This is both a mental and physical process. The physical process is the act of the Tai Chi movements, while the mental portion is through relaxation and meditation. Meditation is useful for anyone that wants to reduce stress. Many use the following process as taken from The Tai Chi Handbook.
1. Lie on a flat surface with little under your head so the spine is straight. Spread and relax your fingers and position arms away from the body.

2. Imagine that your body is made of layers of an onion or the rings of a tree. These layers are the layers of tension that you are about to dissolve.

3. Feel the skin on your forehead. Imagine the skin becoming more relaxed as you let go of tension. Imagine that the tension is draining away like water.

4. Move your mind through your body, using your imagination to release the tension in your neck, shoulders, arms, torso, legs, and finally, your feet.

5. Bring attention back to your forehead and start the process again. This time working the deeper layer. Move through the facial muscles and then down the rest of your body. Think of the diagrams in an anatomy book and that each muscle is relaxing. Finish with the tendons and muscles in your toes. If your muscles start to twitch, it is normally because they are releasing tension.

III. c. Mediation Sequence as taken from *The Tai Chi Handbook*
Tai Chi Chuan is another version of Tai Chi. It is a wonderful program for spiritual cultivation. Regardless of one's race, culture or religion, this ancient art form can be a wonderful way for individuals to explore their spirituality and enlighten their soul. When Zhang San Feng first developed Tai Chi from Kungfu, one of his main goals was spiritual enlightenment. He was on a quest to merge with what he called the great void. Chen Wang Ting, who created the Chen method of Tai Chi also had a focus of spiritual development. His practice of Chen moved away from the fighting and more towards the development of spirituality (Tai Chi Chuan for Health, Combat and Spiritual Cultivation).

As stated earlier, the roots of Tai Chi and many other forms of martial arts are deep in the practice of Taoism. Although this is not a religion, it is a spiritual philosophy that many parallel to spirituality or religion. As God and a higher power can be a source of inspiration and power for some, Tao is the fundamental source of oneness with the nature of reality and understanding the way life works. Both the belief of Taoism and the practice of Tai Chi become an understanding of Chi and how the energy moves through one's body. One main practice of Taoism is to be able to come to a state of “wu wei.” “Wu wei” is a state of “not doing” (Freke 30). Being in this state allows one to be a part of the natural existence and not interfere with what is happening in the world around each individual. Again the yin and yang are also a large part of this energy exchange and a part of the spirituality and oneness with the world.

Chi energy is important in the world of a Taoist and those that practice the art of Tai Chi. Many in the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) world believe that
there are certain foods that may affect the chi energy. It is also a belief of the TCM that our physical, mental and spiritual health is all connected and that each part is dependent and affected by the other (Wade). For those deeply involved in the Taoist and Tai Chi ways of life, foods and the diet are only a small part of the equation. They believe that not only what is eaten is important, but when it is eaten. Important to the diet are whole grains, breads and pastas made with wholegrain flour (Wade).

Taoists also believe it is important to eat plenty of fresh and locally grown fruits and vegetables. As with the Sattvic diet of the Yogis, the Taoist believe that pure and clean foods are the best. They prefer organically grown fruits and vegetables. As far as preparation is concerned, they prefer that the in season fruits and vegetables be prepared by either steaming or stir-frying them. Another similarity with the Tai Chi and Yoga diet is the integration of legumes, nuts and seeds into the diet. In moderation eggs, fish and seafood can also aid in a healthy diet. For those who insist on having meat in their diets, the suggestion is to eat free-range organic white meat such as turkey or chicken (Wade). Eating these whole foods and clean foods is very important to those that practice Tai Chi, not only for their diets but for their overall health and movement of the life giving energy of chi.

Tai Chi has many benefits. Whether Tai Chi is being practiced as a defensive tactic, health benefit or a spirituality connection, it has many benefits, regardless of the end goal. Basic benefits are the loosening of joints, easier free flowing movements and better blood circulation. Qigong and Tai Chi are excellent forms of physical exercise. In a complete routine or Yang style Tai Chi Chuan, almost every
muscle, joint and tendon in the body is used and strengthened. There are many studies that show significant improvements to muscle tone, blood circulation, posture, flexibility and balance. Along with the benefits to the body, the mind also reaps many blessings. Those who practice Tai Chi often say they have a clear and calmer state of mind. For many it can even increase energy levels, mood, self-esteem and quality of life (Block).

Tai Chi can awaken many different avenues to good health. Those who study martial arts or Tai Chi often find a sense of peace and may be able to feel an energy that moves through them. In this low-impact, slow-motion exercise, one goes without pausing through a series of motions named for animal actions — for example, "white crane spreads its wings" — or martial arts moves, such as "box both ears." As one moves, breathe deeply and naturally, focusing your attention — as in some kinds of meditation — on bodily sensations.

Tai Chi differs from other types of exercise in several respects. The movements are usually circular and never forced, the muscles are relaxed rather than tensed, the joints are not fully extended or bent, and connective tissues are not stretched.

Tai Chi can be easily adapted for anyone, from the most fit to people confined to wheelchairs or recovering from surgery. Some people that are wheelchair bound may even practice Tai Chi from the seated position. For this population, the moves are altered slightly so that they can still go through a session of Tai Chi. They also see many of the benefits that everyone else experiences, even though they are sitting down.
There are both physiological and psychological benefits to Tai Chi. People often say they feel more “grounded” (Pawlett 11). If those that are interested in bettering their lifestyle adapt any of these practices of Tai Chi, they will find their overall health to benefit, whether it be that they have taken up meditation, the eating practice of the Tai Chi masters or practicing one of the many forms on a regular basis. Even adapting some of the Taoist thoughts and ways may increase the overall outlook. When people begin to understand and connect with the earth they may find their days less stressful and more meaningful. A joyous outlook is also easier to attain when the yin and the yang is understood and the balance in life is flowing more freely. In spirituality, the more joy that we feel can often be a result of the closeness we feel to God or whoever is the higher power of choice. Self awareness is the root of Tai Chi. Circular and continuous free flowing movements are fundamental to the practice. Love energy is the fruit or the result of all of these things considered Tai Chi.

The form of Tai Chi I was formally introduced to at Crighton was the practice of T’ai Chi Chih. I took the class almost two years ago, but to this day I still enjoy practicing the movements. Through this practice, I find that this can be a special time. It is an alone time from my busy life, but not alone from Christ and the world around me. As I practice Tai Chi I feel some of those popular responses of “feeling grounded.” I enjoy practicing T’ai Chi Chih and hope to continue the practice even without going to the formal classes. T’ai Chi Chih can be an outlet for both my physical fitness passion and for my relationship with Christ.
I enjoyed practicing the T'ai Chi Chih in the summer class through the Christian Spirituality Program. My struggles would be finding the time to practice all of the moves at once. My favorite times were the quiet times in the mornings or before bed. Interestingly, I would find myself trying to rush through them sometimes. When I made myself more aware of my rushing, I realized I tended to rush things more in the morning sessions, than I would at night. Reflecting on that, I would guess that I was not deep enough in the moment and would let my mind wander into all of the things I needed to do that day. In contrast, at the end of the day, before bed, I was more relaxed and was less likely to rush through the movements. Possibly with more practice I would be able to get in touch with the quietness and feel more grounded in the experience. As with anything, the more one practice the more one can gain from the experience.

In the few weeks that I had experienced a structured Tai Chi class, I felt a positive effect from the T’ai Chi Chih. It gave me some time to slow down and center myself. I enjoyed the slow but deliberate movements. I have also come to realize that the more I engaged in the movements both mentally and physically, the more I received from the movement. The times when I truly embraced each move in the morning and took my time, I felt refreshed and energized to start the day. At night when I was giving myself to the movements, I felt relaxed and ready for a good night’s sleep. The T’ai Chi Chih movements gave me an inner peace and better sense of well-being. I was never very good at Centering Prayer, but with T’ai Chi Chih I was able to open myself up and surrender to the moment and to the meditation.
I am finding for myself and discovering in myself that I need to take time out of my day and spend some quiet time with Jesus. I always make time to head to the gym or go for a run. I need to take some time for myself and make sure in all the nurturing that I do for my family and others, I also remember to nurture myself and my needs. What I am also realizing is that in these busy moments and the long days, I can find time to have conversations with Jesus and I can be praying even if I am folding laundry. The movements with Tai Chi allow me to both be in a state of meditation and also my body benefits from the slow and flowing movements.
IV. Running and other forms of exercise

The history of running is deeply rooted in Greek traditions and folklore. The tragic story of Phidippides is a classic to those that love the Olympics or love the
sport of running marathons. Phidippides was a messenger. At that time runners were used to pass messages from one city to the next. In 490 B.C. an army from Persia was trying to defeat the Greek Army. When the Greek Army defeated the Persians, it is legend that a messenger, Phidippides, was sent from the battle in Marathon to Athens to bring the good news. After he arrived and said, “Rejoice, we conquer” he fell to the ground and died (Lovett 13). Many historians debate if it actually was the messenger Pheidippides for various reasons, but even so, the legend became a part of Greek culture and was tied in with the roots of the sports festival they called the Olympic Games. At that time in history every four years “The Games,” as they called them, were held in Olympia. This occurred from the year 776 B.C. until 394 A.D. (Lovett 14). The Games came to an end in 394 A.D. when the Roman Emperor Theodosius banned all non-Christian celebrations in the Roman Empire. This would have been the end of the Olympic games, but luckily for the world, we would see them again!

The discovery of the ruins of the ancient stadium in Olympia added to the creation of the modern day Olympics. The newly discovered ruins and the revival of ancient Greek legends created interest in ancient Greek traditions. A Greek businessman, Evangelios Zappas, was interested in the past Olympic Games and also was intrigued to unite athletes from all over to compete. Although it was poorly planned, he staged an Olympic competition on November 15, 1859 (Lovett 14). It was a failure, but it did inspire a French baron, Pierre de Coubertin. Coubertin was a promoter of physical education in France. He wanted to revive the ancient games in hopes that they would also promote peace. After many meetings and much
persuasion he formed the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The first modern Olympic games occurred in 1896 in Athens Greece. Now, thanks to Pierre de Coubertin and the IOC, we can experience this brilliant display of athleticism, heart and desire, and a sense of a worldwide community every four years. This resurgence of the games also encouraged the running of marathons. A group from Boston witnessed the marathon at the Olympics and started the Boston marathon in 1897; it has been run in April every year since. Thus the sport of running and marathons began.

The marathon is a race that captures the challenge and endurance that many find the drive and desire to seek. When the Olympic organizers set up the first Olympic trial on March 10, 1896, it was the first organized marathon race ever run (Lovett 27). The start of this race led to millions of people training and running for years to come. When this race was revitalized and became popular here in the United States with the Boston Marathon, only men were able to participate. Women were not allowed in any of the marathons. There were a few women across the globe that would try to promote women being accepted into this sport. One woman even ran along the race route in the Olympics and finished by running around the stadium instead of running inside like the male athletes.

Through the years women began to overcome the critiques that said women could not and should not run such long distances. Many women protested and demanded to be a part of these races. Women even organized women’s only marathons to exhibit that they were fully capable of running the race. And many more women spent much of their time promoting their sport and their equivalence
to men. After many, women made their desires and abilities known, they finally were allowed their chance. Women first were allowed to participate in the world’s most famous marathon, the Olympic Marathon, in 1984. On August 5, 1984, Joan Benoit, an American, ran through the streets of Los Angeles and was the first woman to win in the first Olympic Marathon for women (Lovett 89). Joan was a hero not only for women, but for all people that were told they could not do something; they too, felt victorious. Thanks to Joan and the many women runners before her, women and men continue to take up the challenge to run in races and find the desire to run in full marathons.

Running was not always a sport or way for some to burn calories. There are many stories of people throughout history that would run long distances for pleasure and or necessity. Of course the story of Phidippides is a tragic story, but there are many more that are actually quite amazing and inspiring. Thor Gotass found stories of this nature and compiled a book. Among some of the amazing stories of running throughout the world are stories of ancient Egyptian rulers and naked men running races in 18th-Century England. Also, he includes a story of a Norwegian sailor who ran for days just to win a bet. We take for granted now that transportation is easy with automobiles, bikes and planes. The Norwegian sailor had to get from Paris to Moscow, so he took on the challenge that he could get there in fifteen days. For him to accomplish that feat, he had to run one hundred and fifteen miles a day. He managed to make it there and even arrived one day early. So many people and stories of running throughout the years, are looked at as an accomplishment or in some situations a way to retain a throne. Ramses II was an
ancient Egyptian ruler. One way he was able to prove that he was still vital enough to rule his kingdom was to perform a long-distance run every few years. It was said that he had been able to do this even into his nineties. The collection of stories is amazing. The other aspect we take for granted now is the gear we use for running. The Norwegian sailor or the Egyptian ruler were not running in the latest running shoes or wearing sweat wicking shirts. Most of these runners in ancient times ran barefoot.

Our ancestors were not infatuated with the latest workout or health craze to stay fit and trim. For many people years ago, their daily activities, chores or workload were their exercise routines. For example, if one lived on a farm one-hundred years ago, the daily activities of planting, harvesting, dealing with the animals and many other tasks were the “exercises” that people did day in and day out which kept them healthy. They did not experience the cubicle world or the sedentary lifestyle that some live now, day in and day out.

With the need of our current lifestyle to incorporate activity into our routines, many people pick up running as an exercise or sport. Running is a great activity and it is relatively cheap and convenient compared to some other sports or activities. For the most part, there is no need for special equipment, for travel to the gym, or for an expensive session with a trainer. All a person needs is a little desire and a pair of shoes and socks and one can head out the door for a run. Some people do not even need shoes, since they run barefoot. Running, with or without shoes is a great way to stay in shape even on a vacation, because the only thing needed in the suitcase are a pair of running shoes and shorts and a shirt.
Although there are millions of people across the globe who run, running is not the only form of movement and exercise that give people exhilaration and a “high” from physical exhaustion. Running for many people may be a slow jog, a fast walk or even sprint intervals. But running every day or a few days a week is a great exercise that many people take part in, not only for the health benefits, but also for other reasons. Running may give some the chance to get outside and enjoy the outdoors. Running in a new city can allow the person to become more familiar with the streets than driving through them. Many runners run for the gentle repetition of their footsteps, or the quiet time they can get away from their hectic lives. Some others take up running as a form of spiritual experience. Many people find when they are partaking in physical exercise outside in God’s creation that it is a spiritual experience as well as physiological experience. Hiking in the mountains and reaching the summit can be as rewarding for me as finishing a half-marathon or experiencing an amazing and uplifting Christian retreat. Running can even be an extension of Tai Chi, a movement with purpose, and if done correctly, should be effortless (Dreyer 3).

Running is just one example; rowing, cycling and walking are other forms of moving meditations. “Running the spiritual path doesn’t mean that you are going to attain enlightenment in a hurry. Running is simply another means of traveling the path” (Joslin xiv). Joslin also explains that God or the Divine of choice is found on this path and a runner must be aware of that Presence as she moves along that path. One other belief Joslin has about this running as a spiritual experience is that with any spiritual experience, whether it be going to church or sitting in meditation,
some sessions are better than others. Sometimes people go to church and hear the message and enjoy their time but may not feel totally moved by it. There may be runs during which the encounter with the Divine is amazing, and runs where it was nice and peaceful, but not overly inspiring or moving.

Many people run with music or even listen to downloaded books. Some runners run with friends and use the time to catch up after a long week. Why not use that time on the run to catch up with someone we all could spend more time talking to, God? In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, St. Paul says, “Pray without ceasing,” and a running meditation is just one other way to incorporate that belief into our busy lives (NIV). Many find ways to pray while doing other activities during the day. Praying while running helps this process to be able to add the Divine to various parts of one’s day. Praying or sitting in meditation is easy when one is sitting still in nature, sitting in quiet time at church or praying as relaxing while getting ready to fall asleep. What is difficult for most is to find time to pray while cooking, or cleaning or while working. A prayerful run allows one’s body to add prayer to an activity so it may become easier to pray while doing other activities. Anyone can go for a run and say a few prayers, but there are certain ways to structure the running meditation.

Many avid runners and meditation experts have given their advice for combining these two healthy activities together. Sakyong Mipham is both an avid marathon runner and a spiritual leader. Sakyong is a Tibetan lama and uses meditation in his running. He took up running later in life, but meditation was something that he has done throughout his whole life. He believes that there is a
connection between the mind and the body (Mipham 18). He also believes that although both the activities can be quite complicated at times, anyone of any race or religion and any ability can take hold of his ideas and put them to use in his training and spiritual life. Meditation is training the mind a little bit at a time, just as a runner trains for long distance running a few miles at a time and then as time goes on extends the miles. The minutes and time spent in meditation can lengthen as the “mindmuscle” gets stronger and more accustomed to the activity. Mipham writes,

> If we develop a relationship with our breathing, we do not have to struggle with it as much. As we become more familiar with the process of breathing, we are essentially developing a relationship with the most elemental aspects of being alive. (29)

Meditation is not always about withdrawing from the world. Meditation is more about discovering a still center from within and finding peace of mind (Freke).

Meditation in movement allows us to find an inner calm without closing our eyes and being completely still. Unlike Tai Chi or Yoga there is not a religious affiliation or religious following associated with the sport of running. The running meditations and spiritual moment are what the runner allows them to be regardless of his or her religious affiliation. That is the beauty of the Running Meditation; anyone can do it!

Hundreds of years ago as the sport became an event to watch instead of just a job of a messenger, people ate what they could hunt, grow or find. Nutrition and diet is becoming a popular topic in our society. With the emphasis on nutrition, people are starting to rethink their diets. People may think first of health, instead of what is the fastest and cheapest food source. Most runners are extremely careful about their diets. Of course the more serious the runner, the more intense and
serious is the diet and thought process of creating the perfect body for running. Marathon runners claim that it is important for them to maintain an unusually low body weight in order to run their fastest and reduce the strain on their cartilage, joints, and muscles. Thus, marathoners are often "startlingly thin," as they try to stay about ten pounds below their normal body weight (Fixx 75). They do this because they believe it to help them run faster and to make the whole process easier on their bodies. For those that have to run twenty or thirty miles, those extra pounds that they have to carry around do have an impact.

Besides runners being overall lean, they also take into consideration the fat intake in their diets. Muscles do not work well on a fatty diet, and therefore many serious runners try to keep their fat intake at 25% or below of their total calorie intake. In addition to the carbohydrates a runner consumes, protein is also a good supply of energy and should account for about 15% of their total calories. Besides the carbohydrates and protein, runners need to consume a large amount of fluids. Fluids allow the blood to transfer the glucose (sugar energy) to the muscles and create the ability to flush out the metabolic waste.

Our bodies are mostly water. Sixty to seventy percent of our body weight is water. Water itself does not provide energy in the form of calories, but it does allow the runners’ bodies to function properly. The intake of water is important to a runner’s diet. Water also helps maintain and regulate the core temperature of the body. When a runner is dehydrated he or she may experience muscle cramps and also could put themselves in risk for a number of heat illnesses. Runners sweat to dissipate heat which helps regulate their core. Runners should consistently hydrate
themselves, in hot or cold weather. In addition to drinking water, sports drinks with electrolytes and glucose are also a supplement for an avid runner. A good rule for anyone is to take his or her body weight in pounds, divide that number in half and that is the number of ounces of water to consume in the course of a day. A runner should increase that amount. The ingestion of water is just as important as any of the other nutrients a runner consumes.

**Before the Run**

Pre-run snacks boost blood glucose levels, and can top off muscle carbohydrate stores—essential fuel for longer, harder runs.  
2 hours hours ahead: try an option such as a bowl of cereal or peanut butter sandwich, or a small smoothie and muffin  
*Fifty to 75 grams of easily digested carbohydrate can be consumed two hours before a run.

**After the Run**

Post-run, snacks reload muscles with fuel, and your body with fluid and electrolytes. Post-run snacking is going to repair, restore, and replete, so I recommend both protein and carbohydrate containing foods.  

Aim for 12 to 15 grams protein, and 35 to 50 grams of carbohydrate  
• 8 ounces of low fat chocolate milk  
• Trail mix with dried fruit, soybeans, cereal or pretzels  
• A peanut butter and jelly sandwich or wrap  
• An energy bar with a mix of carbohydrate and protein  
• A handful of salted nuts with pretzels  
• Pita bread with hummus  

*By Monique Ryan, MS, RD, CSSD, LDN*

IV. b. Pre and Post Run Nutritional Table
To maximize the effects of the nutrition and vitamins that the runner eats, it is important also to eat at the appropriate times. A small snack before a run is important to not be too sluggish during or at the end of the run. Registered Dietician and consultant to many athletes, Monique Ryan suggests some of the food in the above table for pre and post runs.

There are many health benefits that serve as motivation for runners. For example, running helps lower blood pressure by maintaining the elasticity of the arteries. As a person runs, the arteries expand and contract more than usual, which keeps the arteries elastic and the blood pressure low. In fact, most serious runners have unusually low blood pressure. This is true not only for runners, but any well-trained endurance athletes; for example, swimmers and bicyclists. Running also helps maximize the lungs’ potential. Most people use only half the capacity of their lungs. When runners take deep breaths it forces the lungs to use more tissue and use some of the commonly unused lung tissue. Often, smokers can recover full lung potential through running.

Running strengthens the heart and helps prevent heart attacks. In addition to preventing heart disease, it can also be used to help treat patients with heart disease. Special classes designed specifically for cardiac patients promote running in combination with other exercises as a way to increase activity and rebuild strength. Individuals who have survived the first heart attack and have used this medically supervised running program see a decrease in the rate of death from a second heart attack. Dr. Terence Kavanaugh states that cardiologists have "learned how to fight back, and in that battle one of their most effective weapons has been
running" (Fixx 227). The large muscle exercise it provides helps keep the cardio system efficient and strong.

Raising the heart rate with any form of exercise is beneficial for heart health and overall health. In fact, the heart of an inactive person beats 36,000 more times each day than that of a runner, as running keep the arteries open and the blood flowing smoothly. In addition to helping the heart patients become healthier physically, it also helps these heart patients mentally. Many people suffer from depression after suffering a heart attack. Nearly one-third of heart patients develop a neurotic type personality or excessive depression after suffering a heart attack. Including running in their recovery and new health regimen significantly reduces these effects.

I can actually say that I remember that first “real” run I had. It was in my early teens and I had gone with my dad to The Chalco Recreation area for one of his walks. He would sometimes go around it twice, which would be twelve miles. I joined him on the walk for the first go around, then decided to start running the second lap. I thought I would stop when I got tired, but I remember thinking it felt so good so I did not stop until I got all the way around. The feeling of accomplishment was overwhelming!

Running was an activity I resorted to in college when I wanted some alone time. It was often therapeutic for me during those busy times. When I started coaching and teaching I did not find much time for my runs. I still however did find ways to work out. Daily exercise is something that is so much a part of me, which is like brushing my teeth or eating breakfast. It is just a part of my daily routine.
About eleven years ago I started running with a friend of mine who lived in my neighborhood. I found it exhilarating and refreshing to get up before dawn, run and watch the sunrise. Since then that I have started running in races. I have since completed a total of fifteen half-marathons here in Omaha and a few in neighboring states. This past spring I decided to accomplish something that I had wanted to do for a long time. I signed up for the full Omaha Marathon. I ran the twenty-six and two tenths of a miles on September twenty third. I did have that same feeling of accomplishment I once felt many years ago after completing that first long run at Chalco with my dad.

My day does not feel complete if some sort of physical activity was not a part of it. My favorite scenario is when I can get up early before my family, go for a run or head to the gym and arrive back home as they are waking up. To me this is great because I am a morning person, and I think of that time of day as my time. I can do something I love and not feel as though I am taking time away from my family. I try to incorporate running and other forms of aerobic exercise into my days. For my body and overall health I run only three days a week. Often I am by myself running with Christian music or other times I am blessed to run with one of my various friends that also enjoy running. However, I also enjoy quiet runs by myself in the mornings. I do turn off my music and allow myself to find inner peace and inner calm. While the sun is still barely on the horizon and some of the bright stars are still out, I am often able to be in the moment and reflect on my previous days and the day I have ahead of me. I also often take time in these peaceful moments to pray
and remember friends and loved ones. My favorite runs are in Colorado when I can also breathe in the fresh mountain air.

IV. c. Laura (Right) with Running Partner after completing the Omaha Marathon
I have always been a competitive person, whether it was playing cards with my grandmother or playing games against my sister. Sports through school gave me an outlet for my competitive spirit. Coaching also was my way to keep my mind and body active for competition. When I stopped coaching to spend more time with my family, I lost a piece of that competitive outlet. A friend of mine suggested we run in the Omaha Half-Marathon. Without coaching taking up so many hours of my life I figured this would be a great opportunity to stay in shape, be competitive and be committed to a new goal. I had never run in a large race like that and was hooked after the first few miles of all the people, the activity and the enthusiasm about getting out and running. I remember passing the eight-mile mark in the zoo and thinking every step after that point was the furthest I had ever run. That first race got me hooked. Races have continued to be my outlet for competition and they also give me a goal for my personal fitness and wellbeing. Now that I have completed my first marathon I am glad that I accomplished that goal I had made for myself. I know I will continue to run in races but for myself right now I believe that Half-Marathons are more my passion. I enjoy the competition and pushing myself to better my time each race. I will continue to try to race one or two half marathons a year and continue to push myself and give myself a reason to get out and enjoy the many benefits of running.
V. Spirituality And Religion

Physical fitness and diet are not the only components of a healthy regimen. Mental health is just as important as good nutrition and a consistent exercise program. Having low cholesterol and being strong enough to run a marathon mean nothing if the person is not happy and feels unfulfilled. Again, as defined by the World Health Organization, being healthy is comprised of a healthy body, mind and spirit. Yoga and Tai Chi are closely related to a meditation practice and have a spiritual background, although not all exercise regimens have a spirituality concept interwoven into their practices. Many individuals have a religious affiliation or have a religious or spiritual background. Incorporating religion or a spiritual practice along with a form of exercise has been proven to contribute to an overall healthy and happy life.

Religion is a term that is used for many different belief systems and is often hard to define. Many different groups that we consider to be a religion are often extremely diverse in their practices, policies and doctrines. For example not all religions are concerned with morals, not all religions have beliefs about an after life, and not all religions refer to God or gods. Often when someone is to define the word religion, the person ends up defining her own religion, culture, and religious practices. Religion is often looked at primarily for the codes and ethics that go along with the practice. If we are not defining a particular religion, it is hard to broaden the view to incorporate all types into one definition. Paul Connelly defines religion as follows:
Religion originates in an attempt to represent an order of beliefs, feelings, imaginings and actions that arise in response to direct experience of the sacred and the spiritual. As this attempt expands in its formulation and elaboration, it becomes a process that creates meaning for itself on a sustaining basis, in terms of both its originating experiences and its own continuing responses. (www.darc.org/connelly/religion1.html)

Connelly gives a broad definition to try to include every diverse type of religious practice.

The more direct definition from Merriam-Webster defines religion as, “The service and worship of God or the supernatural, commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance.” (www.merriam-webster.com) Many people consider themselves quite religious. In their formation and practice they attend services routinely and read the book repeatedly of that faith’s origins. Many Christian people, turn to the “Holy Bible” and attend church regularly. Although many people read and use the bible for their faith, there are many different versions of the bible that differ from one religion to the next. A bible that the Catholic faith uses has various books of the bible that are not found in other Christian bibles.

Each religious practice has its own belief systems and codes of conduct. Despite religious differences, Mahatma Gandhi had a beautiful way at looking at religion.

Religions are different roads converging on the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads so long as we reach the same goal? I believe that all religions of the world are true more or less. I say ‘more or less’ because I believe that everything the human hand touches, by reason of the very fact that human beings are imperfect, becomes imperfect (Freke 15).
Religions can bring much good and order into the world, although they also can bring pain and suffering. Religious persecution is also woven through the history of the world. Many wars have been started and many people have lost their lives because of religious persecution. One day, possibly the segregation between the religions may come to an end. Religions cause senseless division, when in reality people are just people, whether Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish or Christian. All religions have a universal Creator. Mahatma Gandhi also said, “God has no religion, so why should we follow something humanly contrived?” (Freke 30). Another thought of religion from the Christian perspective comes from James 1:27, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (NIV 2011).

Religion is often about who is following certain rules and credos. The resulting divisions create a worldview of “us against them.” Spirituality rejects this dualism and speaks of “us and them.” Religion is often about loyalty to specific institutions, clergy, and doctrines. Religion also is deeply rooted in tradition and teaching. Spirituality is based more on loyalty to justice and compassion. Spirituality also is more of the daily experiences each person has and creating an inner search within oneself. Religion talks about God. Spirituality, on the other hand, helps to make us godly. Spirituality is more of an action than a noun. Spirituality is considering qualities such as caring, kindness, compassion, tolerance, service and community, and how a person may create more of those qualities in
their daily lives. The two need not be at odds. Religion at its best is Spirituality in community.

Religious or Spiritual, each of the varieties has nutritional and eating practices in it’s faith or journey in Spirituality. Variations happen even within a particular faith. Changes occur between different denominations, branches or even nationalities. And some individuals adhere to the religious diets more strictly than others. The Catholic religion fasts from the consumption of meat on Fridays during lent. Fasting of meat is practiced by many. Even McDonald’s serves fish sandwiches, heavily advertises these sandwiches, and tries to capitalize on this religious practice each spring. The Mormon religion does not consume alcohol or caffeine. Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon religion, decreed that the people of the Mormon faith abstain from tobacco and also any hot drinks. Not only did Joseph Smith determine what the humans should eat but also what the animals should eat:

“Nevertheless, wheat for man, and corn for the ox, and oats for the horse, and rye for the fowls and for swine, and for all beasts of the field, and barley for all useful animals, and for mild drinks, as also other grain” (www.lds.org/scriptures 2012).

Islamic traditions consider eating as a matter of faith. Muslims eat for good health and are required to eat to only two-thirds of their capacity. Muslims fast during the daylight hours during Ramadan, in the late summer and early fall. The Jewish Religion has three main branches; Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. The Jewish dietary laws are known as “Kashrut,” which is considered the most complex of all religious food practices. Kosher is a word loosely used to identify the foods that are allowed or accepted.
Hindus avoid all foods which are not going to lead to spiritual development. Hindus do not believe in pain inflicted on animals, and therefore prefer not to eat meat. If meat is eaten, it is never beef because they believe that the cow is sacred. Buddhist dietary customs vary largely depending on how deep they are in their faith. Most Buddhists are vegetarians and do eat fish. A strict Buddhist monk will fast monthly on the full moon and also avoid eating solid food after noon. There are many different restrictions throughout the religions of the world. Within each religion there are variation on the restrictions. Some of the different religions share some of the same beliefs and restrictions. In the table below, some of the major religions are represented and some of the most common dietary restrictions.
**Dietary Restrictions for Common World Religions**

Spirituality can encompass people from any religious doctrine or culture. In addition to being a key component in physical health, the practice of Spirituality gives the person an overall peace of mind. Spirituality is God reaching out to man in love and man responding. When trying these traditional spiritual practices the person needs to be relaxed but alert, and be in a peaceful place. For any new concept, it is also important to practice regularly. These practices are about transforming the habitual state of mind and awakening to a new spiritual consciousness. It is also important to stay open to the activity as each experience may be different, and a heightened spiritual experience may happen at any time. However, these moments of grace are a gift and cannot be forced.

Spirituality may be practiced in various forms. Meditation is one way of practicing spirituality. Keeping a spiritual diary is another way to contemplate personal realizations, thoughts and feelings. Fasting and studying scriptures are yet other ways to become spiritually enlightened. No matter what path is chosen, it is important to do what feels right and to practice what resonates within.

Native Americans are also known to practice a spiritual belief system. What they practice is not necessarily a religion, but more of a cultural belief system and way of life. Although they have many traditions, codes of conduct and practices, they do not practice a formal religion. And like many other practices, these traditions and codes vary throughout the regions of the various tribes. They do, however, carry out a way of life that is spiritual and profound. The many different tribes across North America have many of the same belief systems. Tiyospeye and mitakuye oyasin are the words that best describe their basis and closeness to Mother
Earth (McGaa, 45). The tribes work together to learn and borrow from each other’s spiritual customs. “When something or some way proves more spiritually enhancing, they simply adopted what they considered as an improvement” (McGaa 45). Instead of criticizing their differences, they accept and embrace them, making each tribe benefit from each other. McGaa goes on to state that they did not allow their egos to get in the way and were not held back by any organized hierarchy of religious leaders. Native Americans also take great pride in their ability to keep their practices clean spiritually and not allow them to become tainted by commercialism.

Native Americans also have dietary practices. Most of their food comes from nature itself: what they can grow, hunt, and harvest from the land. In addition to these natural foods that they eat, they too have spiritual practices similar to many of the other cultures and religious practices. Native Americans also fast, often times in the mountains or off by themselves in nature. They call this practice a Vision Quest. While they are taking this special free time away from other pressures, they sit, reflect and fast with nothing more than mineral water for a few days (McGaa 76). While partaking in this Vision Quest, they are to sit and reflect and more importantly observe nature. They observe each animal that comes, the sun setting, and the moon rising. During the night they are to observe the canopy of stars in the sky and appreciate, feel blessed, and find profound insights as they are immersed in the “Oneness” of it all (McGaa 77). Their belief system is based on “The Creator” since all of this majesty is beyond any form of human comprehension, and it is also often call the “Wakan Tanka,” the Great Mystery (McGaa 77).
No matter what the religious practice or practice of spirituality, it is important for each person to feel a connection to a higher power. The benefits go beyond just the feeling of peace and wellbeing. The practice of spirituality can help in the physical health of the body. There is a large part of the medical community that focuses not only on the patients’ biological vital signs, but also the person and the wellbeing of the human being treated. These doctors are considered to practice Integrative Medicine. These doctors address the mental, social, and spiritual influences that affect the patient’s life. Integrative Medicine uses various scientific disciplines to cover all the needs of the patient and give optimal health (Bravewell 2013). Integrative Medicine also emphasizes the importance of bringing spirituality into the healing process. It encourages meditation and prayer in healing.

Spirituality is becoming a more important tool for doctors, so much so that medical school students often take a class in spirituality and faith. In 1992, there were only three of the one hundred-twenty-five medical schools that included courses on spirituality; now two-thirds of them include them in their curriculum. As Mary Jo Kreitzer PhD, RN, FAAN, at the University of Minnesota Center for Spirituality and Healing states,

Spirituality is part of the basic human experience. Whenever we search for meaning, or for a connection outside ourselves, we are acting as spiritual beings. Spirituality exists in our connection to other humans, our environment and the unfolding universe beyond, and the transcendent.” (Bravewell)

As time progresses, there are and will continue to be many more studies that report the importance of religion and spirituality as benefits to the physical and mental
health of patients. Stephanie Reid-Arndt, associate professor of health psychology at the University of Missouri states, “Our findings reinforce the idea that religion/spirituality may help buffer the negative consequences of chronic health conditions” (Religious, Spiritual Support Benefits Men and Women Facing Chronic Illness, Study Finds).

Along with the physical health of a person, psychological wellbeing is also another benefit of religion and spirituality. Such practices can provide a purpose and meaning to one’s life. Prayer and spirituality practices have been shown to promote better health, less hypertension, less stress and more positive feelings. There is also a lesser chance of becoming overwhelmed with depression. Overall there is a greater psychological well-being among those who practice spirituality. It also provides a framework for understanding the human experience and gives a rich source of strength to those that incorporate it into their daily lives.

A combination of health in various of aspects of life is important. A visual image of how our mind and body must become balanced to be healthy is shown below. The Wholeness Wheel of Spiritual Well-being was created to illustrate the various parts of our lives that must work together for an overall healthy life. It was created from a Christian origination, so Christ is at the center. This wheel is also a result of the thoughts of Martin Luther who said,

This life, therefore, is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal but it is the right road.
At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed. (C.H.A.M.P.S.)

V. b. The Wholeness Wheel of Spiritual Well-being

In the history of the medical world and those that strive for curing the ill and diseased, healing the soul has always been considered important. Dating back to the hospitals affected by the Black Death in 1348 all the way up to the 16th Century, hospitals took into account and used registers of their practices. The Florentine hospital and other Renaissance hospitals, incorporated the washing of the feet of patients in imitation of Christ (Cohn 2007). These hospitals were not just regarded as places of death as one may think; only 5 to 12% of those admitted during most of that time died during their stay (Cohn 2007). These hospitals at that time were regarded as temples of care for the body and the soul.

Time has progressed from the Renaissance. Medical and scientific studies are still trying to determine how to establish good care and maintain a healthy lifestyle. In 1974 researchers had collected data from a group of people over a nine-year time period. The purpose was to link differences between social behavior and mortality. Attending church services and being involved in a church was one of many social aspects studied. Being socially active and having a healthy social outlook was not only good for an individual's happiness, but also for her overall physical health. As the 1974 study proved, having friends, being married, belonging to civic organizations, and belonging to a church were all conducive to healthier and longer life. Berkman's study found a stunning fact. In every age and sex category, people who in 1965 had reported the fewest social ties were, nine years later, up to three times more likely to have died than those who had reported the most social ties. Furthermore, this correlation held true even after factors such as socio-economic status, smoking, alcohol use, obesity, physical activity, and use of preventive health
services were accounted for.

Berkman’s results stirred up curiosity in the world of sociology, and many other studies were done. All of the other epidemiological studies that followed had the same trends of evidence: having friends, being married, belonging to civic organizations, belonging to a church, were all conducive to healthier and longer life.

I consider myself more on the spirituality side of things instead of the religious side. One large reason is that although I was raised Lutheran and my ancestors on both sides were all members of Lutheran Churches, I find that I do not quite fit with the rules and beliefs of some of their teachings. I love going to church at my Lutheran Church, but that does not mean that I find God only in my Lutheran Church. I regularly attend Mass at my school, and for various reasons, attend Mass at Catholic churches here in the Omaha area. I find God in those church services as well. I do not see myself taking the classes or going through the process of becoming Catholic. Maybe my relationship with God will change at one point in my life and I will feel a need to be part of just one religious affiliation, but at this time I do not.

My husband was raised Presbyterian and did attend classes to become a member of my Lutheran Church before we became married. I do appreciate that we can bring our children to the church I was raised in and allow them to learn and grow through Christ. However, I do hope that their relationship with Christ does go further than our church building and that they do grow in their faith by experiencing giving to others and living loving and unselfish lives.
When I think of the definition of a “Church,” I think of the people that comprise the body of the church and the work and service to the community, not necessarily all the rules, regulations and doctrines that go along with it. I do understand that without those rules and doctrines there would not be a religion, or a church for that matter. I fully respect and understand those rules and doctrines but it is not my focus.

I have had the amazing experience of being able to experience church services all over the world. I have attended mass in St. Peter’s Cathedral in Vatican City twice. I have been able to attend services in Athens, Greece; Malaga, Spain; Dublin, Ireland; and London, England. What is most magical to me is that even though in some of these services the pastors are speaking a foreign language to me, I still am able to walk away with a unique and spiritual experience. What a blessing to be able to witness another culture in such a way that I am fully engaged in the service not only with other religious and spiritual people, but with people from another culture and country. What is also just as amazing is watching my students experience different cultures as well, and watch as they too have this unique and amazing spiritual experience. That is why I believe that I will continue to consider myself to be a spiritual person and continue to enjoy the experiences from the Catholic faith that I am immersed in everyday at school, the Lutheran faith that I was raised in, and the eastern beliefs that I have learned to accept and bring into my world.
VI. Conclusion

Many religions, cultures, philosophies, exercises and dietary practices focus on overall health. Each one goes hand in hand and should not be incorporated into life without the other. Health is as stated by the World Health Organization (WHO), “a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO 1946). The definition of health is often debated, and has evolved throughout the centuries. Hippocrates (460-377 BCE) was credited for moving away from the belief that health was a divine gift and more into the physical sense that is supported by personal hygiene and balanced diets. His theory was to allow food to be medicine and medicine to be food. Hippocrates had a strong interest in the imbalance of fluids in the body and how that might affect a person’s health.

Diets have not been the only things to influence the definition of health. A verse in the Holy Koran states, “The Lord of the worlds; it is He who heals me when I am sick, and He who would cause me to die and live again” (Koran 26:80). As many things change with time and cultures, the Aboriginal Australians incorporate many facets into their definition of health. To be healthy to them it is important to have both community health and spiritual wellbeing. No matter what the century or culture, it is a resounding belief that health does not focus on just the biological aspect of the human, but also the mind and spirit as well.

The mind, body and spirit are intimately connected. Traditional healers are sometimes too focused on the biological wellbeing, instead of the human as a whole person. In recent years there have been more and more studies about the link
between the body and the mind. It has been found that when one suffers, so does the other. In some cases, emotions are so strongly connected to the physical being that they can produce physical responses. In the 1970’s psychologists and psychiatrists coined the term “psychoneuroimmunology” or “PNI.” This term links the connection between emotions, wellbeing and the immune-system function (Kelly).

Along with the coining of this term and many studies indicate that the mind and body’s health are intrinsically related, scientists discovered the peptide receptors, or chemical messengers, that are released when there is an emotional response (Kelly). These receptors were discovered by Candace Pert, Ph.D., a scientist at Johns Hopkins University. These peptides are in the body’s organs and tissues. They can store emotional information and explain why some people experience a “gut feeling” or why memories or emotion come up during certain events or even during acupuncture. This is perhaps the first tangible evidence that there is a physical connection between mind and body and a type of biochemical basis of emotion. This is evidence of what traditional Eastern healers have practiced and known to be true for centuries. This discovery also further explains the connection to the chakras and the seven areas around the spine where the energy or “chi” is gathered.

When the body is in balance the peptides and the receptors can do their jobs efficiently and correctly. When the body is out of balance by intense emotions, the body does not work as efficiently. Often people experience nervousness, and the peptides then have a miscommunication. That miscommunication could result in an
imbalance in the intestines and could result in diarrhea. That is just one example of a direct physical consequence of an emotional state.

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VI. a. The Chakras of the Body

http://wholehealthplus.com
Other findings of physical and emotional ties deal with stress. It has been shown that chronic stress can age human cells. Scientists at the University of California, San Francisco, compared mothers of children with chronic illness and mothers of healthy children. Their study found that the stress of caring for a sick child causes cellular changes. The markers and cellular changes showed that the stressed mothers’ cells compared to cells of a person ten years older. As a result, the stress caused by mothering their sick children aged the mothers on a cellular level and also damaged their DNA (Kelly).

Cancer has also been proven to be affected by stress and tension. A study done on mice with skin cancers at the Cancer Center at Johns Hopkins University measured the stress and rate at which the cancer was affected. The mice developed skin cancers more than twice as fast when exposed to the stressful situation (Kelly). The researchers believe that humans would have a similar response.

I agree with traditional Chinese Medicine that our physical, mental and spiritual health are all connected. What I wish is that more people in our Western Society of quick fixes would focus more on their overall health. I see so many people thinking that making a regular trip to the gym will suddenly make them healthy. There is so much more to holistic health than a thirty minute cardio workout at the gym. I also see many focus primarily on their diet, or whatever the fad diet of the week might be. They think if only they eat “low carbs” and count their calories on the latest phone app that they will be healthy.

The other facet of all of this is that I see many devoutly religious people that have never exercised a day in their life. As the “Baby Boomers” age and children are
growing up in a society of technology and fast food, I can only hope that more and more people will realize that to truly be healthy they need to incorporate a healthy diet, physical activity and a spiritual foundation. If they can incorporate all of these things into their lives, they will be able to attain a balanced and healthy life.

The moving meditation of Tai Chi and experiencing prayer while running have really touched a light inside of me. I personally am starting to feel a stronger relationship to Christ through Tai Chi, Yoga, running and my other nature inspired exercises. I have never been the type to sit still for too long, Tai Chi can channel my energy and put the busy crazy chaos into a rhythm. Not just any rhythm, a rhythm with a higher purpose. I am finding myself able to feel grounded but also open to the world and Holy Spirit that works within each and everyone of us. These practices have also been a positive experience enabling me to place myself in the moment and not worry about what is next and all that needs to be done. I am able to use meditation practice not only during Tai Chi but now also on long runs. Using running as an exercise for my body I am able to exercise my brain and unwind through meditation. Uncluttering my thoughts during that time better prepares me for a productive day. Although I do enjoy these exercises alone, there is also something so powerful when doing Tai Chi and Yoga in a group. Not only do I feel connected and grounded, but also I feel the energy of each and everyone in the class.

As the years have gone on, I am finding that it is important to take time to sit and nurture myself. I was at one time the type of person that only exercised. I exhausted myself at school and through coaching. Yes, I was “happy,” but I was also physically and mentally exhausted most of those years. I have learned and am still
learning that as I take more time to nurture myself, I renew my energy and
therefore become more productive and more engaged in my everyday activities.
These practices are allowing me to be more contemplative about my listening skills,
to be more engaged with the people with whom I am conversing. These self-care
activities make me sometimes less irritable, which can make my outlook on the day
and its craziness a little less challenging. Overall, these moments give me an
opportunity to tune out the hectic day and tune in to what is important, my
relationship with Christ. These activities are giving me a chance to work on my
“vertical relationship,” which in turn makes all of my “horizontal relationships” so
much more meaningful.

Sports, physical activities and exercise have always been a part of my being.
My parents have also led an active lifestyle and still do in their late sixties. My father
walks three and a half miles to work and then walks home after. Anyone would
want to make that daily walk along the Gore Creek in Vail, Colorado, since it is
beautiful. I have been blessed to be part of a loving and healthy immediate and
extended family. Experiencing an annual exhilarating hike on Christmas day up a
beautiful mountain through the woods with my husband, sister, uncle and cousins
solidifies our faith and values. We value our health and fitness, and we value our
relationships with each other. Family is an amazing gift that not only strengthens
one’s heart but also one’s soul.

Along with sports and many other activities, church and community also
have molded me into who I am. As I am growing older, I have tried to incorporate
more of a spiritual side or a contemplative side to my busy lifestyle. The Christian
Spirituality Classes have helped me along on this spiritual journey. The classes of Family Spirituality have strengthened my faith in God and my appreciation for the gift of family He has given me. Taking Tai Chi was just one more step along the road that could help me bring physical fitness and my spiritual life together.

Life is about living. The quality of life a person will live is up to that person. In this vast planet of Mother Earth and all that we have been blessed by The One, Yahweh, God or whomever one credits for one’s existence, be thankful and be all that He has allowed you to be. Each person makes their own choices in the life that they have. I truly believe that to get the most out of the time God put us here on this planet, we must each feel fulfilled spiritually, and feel whole with the connection of body, mind and spirit. If there is an unbalance among them, something is wrong and the true self will not be the best it can be. The Hebrew word “yatah” says it all. Yatah means to make well, sound, beautiful, happy, successful, right, to be accepted, make better and cheerful, benefit, goodness, find favor, be glad, show kindness and make merry (Copland 177). This word speaks of being blessed in every area of life, body, mind and spirit.
II. Appendix

A. The Wholeness Wheel

Martin Luther said:
“This life, therefore, is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed.”
The Wholeness Wheel is a guide to balancing all aspects of health and depicts the interconnectedness of the individual aspects of wellness. It is the picture of a process — dynamic, centered, in balance, contained, inter-related, vital, and colorful.

Many of us may feel that we realize our full wholeness potential at different times of our lives — peak athletic performance as a young adult, peak intellectual performance in college or graduate school, peak emotional health in a happy marriage, peak vocational health in mid-life in the attainment of a vocational goal. The wheel reminds us that, although peak experiences are wonderful and healthy, being truly healthy and whole is about being in balance and intentionally nurturing all aspects of health surrounded and supported by spiritual health.

**Physical well-being**

We are marvelously created by God. While we are not all born perfectly healthy and no one makes it through life without injury or illness, with tending and nurturing we can live well even with disabilities, injuries, or illness. Those with good health can lose it as a result of unhealthy lifestyles and behaviors. Keeping the wholeness wheel in perspective means optimizing our physical health through good nutrition, physical activity, and avoiding risks to our health. It does not mean worshiping physical health at the expense of other aspects of health.

**Emotional well-being**

Being emotionally well means feeling the full range of emotions and expressing those emotions appropriately. Not feeling emotion is a sign of stress or depression, just as having emotions that you cannot control may be the sign of emotional distress. Physical health problems can affect our emotions and emotional problems affect our physical health. One example is anger and hostility, an emotion that puts one at significantly greater risk for heart disease. Keeping our emotional health means taking time in the day to be peaceful and centered, just as it means sharing emotions with others.

**Social well-being**

We were created to be social persons by God with instructions to help and love each other. We are nourished by the love and intimacy of our family and friends. Isolation is a significant risk for depression and premature death. Whether we are introverted or extroverted, regular social contact is essential for health. Being healthy means having healthy relationships with family, friends, co-workers and others. Studies have shown that volunteering in service to others actually lengthens life.

**Intellectual well-being**

Alzheimer’s disease or dementia is feared by all who have seen or heard about the personal frustration or social disruption it causes. While we cannot be certain that we will never experience dementia or something similar, using our minds keeps them alert and active. Use it or lose it! Satisfy curiosity by seeking answers. We can stretch our minds by experiencing new things — music, art, hobbies, or travel. Pushing ourselves at work by seeking out new responsibilities and pursuing lifelong learning keeps us healthy and growing.
Vocational well-being
Having a sense of purpose is important in living a healthy life. We all want to feel that we are using the gifts God has given us to make this world a better place. We need to be aware of what those gifts are and make good use of education and training to hone our skills. We need to always be seeking for opportunities to make a difference. If not through our occupation, then perhaps through volunteering in the community, nurturing our family, or actively participating in church.

Spiritual well-being
Loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength impacts everything we do and everything we are. Starting first with your spiritual health makes balancing the wheel much easier because we know whose we are. Nurturing your relationship with God through daily prayer or devotion is the first step. Knowing that God is always present and has given us the gift of grace through the death of Jesus Christ allows us to stumble along the way and keeps us from getting lost.

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