



HEALING RITUALS:

Strategies to develop rituals that promote wellness and help patients meet their goals.

PREVALENCE AND POWER OF RITUALS

- Rituals are found across all cultures and are documented throughout time.
- Rituals reduce anxiety, alleviate emotional pain, provide opportunities to experience joy, and build relationships within communities.



PAIR DISCUSSION

- Talk with someone at your table about a personal ritual that you do or you have developed within your family that is meaningful to you. Has it changed over time? How does it help you? How do you feel when you are talking about this ritual?



HOW DO RITUALS HELP US?

- ❖ Create a structure to express intense emotion
- ❖ Mark transition so that we can hold duality
- ❖ Create opportunities to gather
- ❖ Describe what cannot be said with words
- ❖ Cause growth and change
- ❖ Impact thoughts and feelings positively
- ❖ Improve confidence

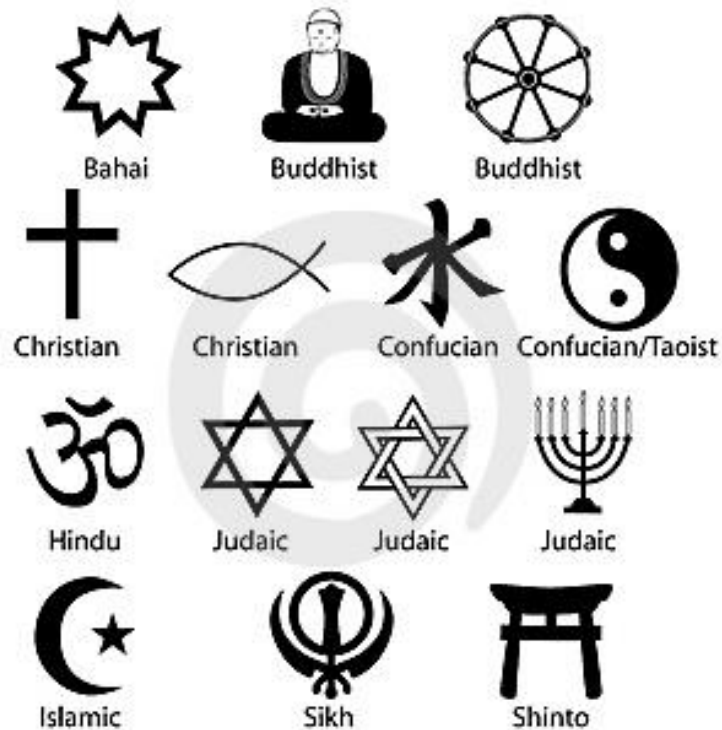


HOLDING SPACE FOR DUALITY

- Rituals are the vehicle for focusing on health while you simultaneously accept the illness is present
- Rituals allow the mundane to shine and become special.
- Allow you to be in the old role and the new role at the same time
- Create a safe place to hold the incongruities between the actual and the ideal



RELIGION IS OFTEN THOUGHT OF THE PRIMARY PLACE FOR RITUALS



RITUALS CAN BE FOUND EVERYWHERE

- You can have many rituals as a part of your life and not be associated with a religion
- Women fared better than men in concentration camps because they built networks, bonded quickly into family-like groups and made rituals that celebrated or honored special days and events.



ARE THERE RITUALS IN MODERN DAY WESTERN MEDICINE THAT HELP HEALING?

- Yes!
- The bedside exam is a healing ritual
 - ❖ Patients expect this ritual to build the relationship
 - ❖ Studies show that the context, locale, and quality of the bedside evaluation are associated with neurobiological changes in the patient.
(Benedetti F., Carlino E, Pollo A. How placebos change the patients brain. Neuropsychopharmacology. 2011;36:339-54 PubMed)



HOW IS THE BEDSIDE EXAM A RITUAL?

- **Permission to be touched** which is a marker of vulnerability indicating the acceptance that this ritual is important for the transfer of knowledge
- Takes place in a special room
- The exam is a visual display of the **trust** in the relationship building
- **Validates** that the patient is being included in the process of healing because the **patient is being “seen”** and the doctor has to be curious about what information the body and mind can provide
- Conveys to the patient that they have the physicians **time** and **compassion**



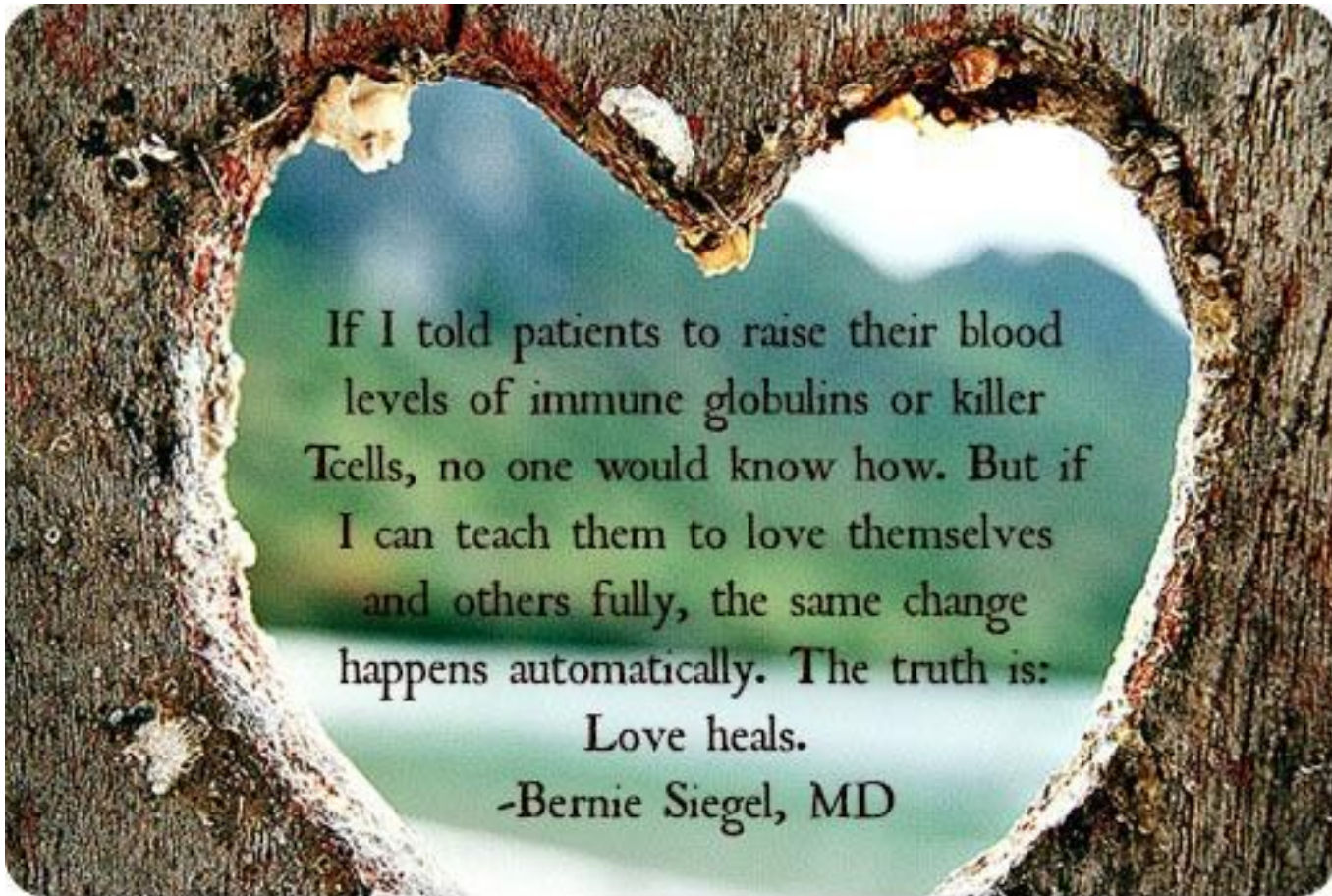
LOVE, MEDICINE AND MIRACLES

- ❖ Bernie Siegel, MD, taught his patients to embrace rituals of love during cancer treatments.
- ❖ He made the research visible that praying before surgery improved outcomes.
- ❖ Patients beliefs about their illness mattered.

“The truth is: Love heals.”

Bernie Siegel





If I told patients to raise their blood levels of immune globulins or killer Tcells, no one would know how. But if I can teach them to love themselves and others fully, the same change happens automatically. The truth is:

Love heals.

-Bernie Siegel, MD



USING RITUALS TO CHANGE A HABIT

- Replacing the behavior you want to change with a new ritual is found to be effective in decreasing anxiety and creating hope.
- Identify the cues and rewards, you can change the routine through use of a ritual.



ARE WE UNDER RITUALIZED AS A CULTURE?

- Maybe....
- We have an abundance of rituals around passages and health problems.
- **Can we name some?**
 - Weddings
 - Twelve-Step Programs
 - Graduations
 - Retirement parties
 - Funerals
 - Shiva Bar-Mitzvas
 - Quiceanera's
 - Funerals
 - Anointing of the sick
 - Fasting during Lent



TABLE DISCUSSION

Talk at your table about patients or family members that you have encounter that disconnected from rituals (under ritualized). What did you notice? What were the consequences?



WHAT EVENTS LACK CULTURALLY ACCEPTED RITUALS IN THE U.S.?

- Divorce
- Onset of menstruation
- Blending of step families
- Illness
- Moving
- Adoption
- Death through violence



HOW ARE RITUALS A PART OF THERAPY?

- They create structure for the therapy session.
- They focus on health
- Engage patients in creating their own change



DEFINITION:

- Prescribed symbolic acts that must be performed in a certain way and in a certain order and may or may not be performed with verbal formulas. They involved preparation and meaning. (Rituals in Psychotherapy: Transition and Continuity -Mickey Van der Hart)



DEEPENING THE DEFINITION

- Open aspects of therapeutic rituals allow for the client to add evolving and idiosyncratic meaning
- Closed aspects of the therapeutic ritual add safety and structure for strong affect and pass on new cultural information and give form to the action
- Hollow or empty rituals don't allow for the meaning to be reinforced and are more perfunctory than transformational

(Mickey Van der Hart)



THREE PHASES OF A RITUAL

- ❖ Preparation
- ❖ Experience
- ❖ Integration



WHAT ARE THE RULES?

- Rituals can be created within new systems and they don't need to be accepted by the larger culture norms to be effective
- They can be performed once, many times or with a prescribed interval of time.
- They can include others or be performed alone
- They require preparation



WHAT MAKES A RITUAL HOLLOW?

- Rituals can lose their meaning and value when they become more about status, dogma and lack meaning.
- Rote repetition of attending events or going through the motions of the event make them ineffective.
- If a therapist begins the closure portion of therapy without being connected to the client the ritual is minimized.



TALK IN PAIRS

- Think of a wedding ceremony that you attended that reminded you of your own commitments to love and your role as a community member supporting this new relationship. Contrast that with another wedding ceremony that you didn't feel the connect to the event or even notice how it impacted your own life? What was different?



WHY DO WE NEED RITUALS IN THERAPY

- Rich opportunity to intervene on multiple levels
- Provides clarity (symbols, repetition, songs, words)
- Provides you with a spiritual connection – We all need to be connected to something bigger
- Fits into any therapeutic model
- Verbal and non-verbal
- Helps us to develop change
- Integration of different parts of self



RITUAL THEMES

- Membership
- Healing
- Identity definition
- Belief expression and negotiation
- Celebration



BUILDING RITUALS WITH CLIENTS

- Collect data about the history of rituals in his/her life and systems
- Assess language for cues for symbols that fit with the individual or the system
- Therapist provides the directives
- Client provides the directives
- Timing and space



IN SESSION RITUALS

- In session rituals are usually used in unexpected and unusual ways to engage families and to break up rigid frames and to introduce change.
- Therapist use in session rituals when:
 - ❖ It is more likely to happen in the session than at home
 - ❖ A witness is needed
 - ❖ Therapy has become a “rigid ritualized” experience
 - ❖ Requires a safe place and someone to help the affect stay in a tolerable range



OUT OF SESSION RITUALS

- ❖ Repeated over several days or weeks
- ❖ Connection to people that do not come to therapy is required
- ❖ Location outside of therapy is deemed important (Past home, outdoors, place of worship)



RITUALS OF THERAPY SESSION

- ❖ Greeting
- ❖ Managing symptoms
- ❖ Process oriented
- ❖ Closure
- ❖ How are clients welcomed?
- ❖ Do they know what to do when affect gets too intense in the session?
- ❖ Are they aware of what phase of treatment they are in?
- ❖ How are we going to say goodbye?





Family Therapy



FAMILY THERAPY AND RITUALS

- Rituals tap deeply into a family's shared sense of identity and will tell you a lot about the functioning and health of the system.
- Rituals are things people often want to talk about
- Rituals clarify family roles, delineate boundaries, transmit information about family identity across generations



FAMILY SYSTEMS

Three types of rituals present

- Celebrations
- Traditions
- Patterned routines

What types of interventions are available to us?

- Changed
- Dropped
- Revised



ASSESSING FOR RITUALS IN FAMILY SYSTEMS

❖ Orienting questions

- Has bedtime changed for the children over the years?
- Have birthday parties changed?
- Are the same people involved in night time rituals?
- When someone has either entered or left the family how has that been marked?

❖ Reflexive questions

- Five years from now, when Maria is living out of the home, how do you think her birthday will be celebrated?
- If you were to experience a loss in this family, how do you think you would mark it?
- What new rituals has the family created?



FAMILY DYSFUNCTION

- Ritual disruption – Stressful events caused the ritual to be stopped or negative
- Disorganized of ritual activity –Unplanned or last minute vacations
- Low ritualization – Eating dinner by the TV
- High rigidity in the ritualizes – Overscheduling events and forcing attendance



FAMILIES THAT LACK RITUALS

❖ **Orienting questions**

- How do you think any ritual process was interrupted (by war, death, suicide, migration)?
- Who did this interruption impact?

❖ **Reflexive questions**

- If members of your family had been able to celebrate the ritual more openly with more support from the culture how might they have done it differently?
- If you were to complete the ritual now in some way, what might you do?
- Who would it be important to include?
- What other resources can be called in to provide a supportive and safe environment?



The overall goal [of counseling] is to help family members become 'systems experts' who could know [their] family system so well that the family could readjust itself without the help of an expert.

Murray Bowen

QuoteAddicts



RITUALS HELP PROTECT AGAINST THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF ALCOHOLISM

- Researchers have found that children that have grown up in families in which both parents are alcoholics, their children are less likely to become alcoholics if the family rituals surrounding meals, holidays, vacations, visitors, evenings, and weekends remain intact during periods of heavy drinking. (Rituals for Families and Family therapy (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1988))



ADDICTION

Individual ritual

- Design a ritual to help the person in recovery acknowledge the drinking vs non-drinking self.
- Creating a healing ceremony to repair past hurts and discuss new ways of functioning.
- Imagine that your younger self is with you anytime you have a desire to use the substance

Family system ritual

- Work with the family to add a patterned ritual to restore functioning and connection.
- New rituals to repair times that were disrupted by intoxication.
- Creating a healing ceremony to repair past hurts and discuss new ways of functioning.



DIVORCE

Individual

- Design a being “seen” ritual for the age you were at when the divorce occurred. Have someone there that validates your story and reminds you that you will heal.
- Write a letter to your younger self explaining what happened.

Family system

- Create a ceremony that honors the good that was created in the marriage and discusses reasons that it ended.
- Create a place in the home where we can grieve the ending and talk about it routinely.
- Develop a new contract for co-parenting



ILLNESS OF A PARENT

Individual/Long term illness

- Develop a symbol of hope and healing
- Build a symbol around the new responsibilities they have because of the illness
- Create patterned ritual with the child that offers opportunity for age appropriate play.
- Create a deck of cards for each member to describe different aspects of how the illness has impacted them.

Family/Long term illness

- Create a visual image through a symbol that acknowledges that the parent does not have physical abilities but maintains strengths.
- Invite another adult to come into the system (during a session) that can help the system have power.



RITUALS FOR RESILIENCE AT WORK

Group rituals

- ❖ Debriefing sessions
- ❖ Breaks
- ❖ Meetings
- ❖ Using core values for decision making
- ❖ Goodbye parties

Individual rituals

- ❖ Wearing special clothing
- ❖ Routine work gatherings that process stressful events
- ❖ Routinely talking about mission or purpose



DAILY RITUALS

- Centenarians show us the value in a daily ritual.
- Dr. Mario Martinez did a study with 700 healthy centenarians and revealed that they indulge in pleasurable rituals daily, like one cigar, a small scotch, or a brownie. (Not a mindless binge)
- Daily rituals acknowledge the challenges with being human and give us a vehicle for nurturing, awareness and managing an uncomfortable affect.



DO WE NEED RITUALS AT WORK?

- Without honoring the pain and challenges associated with our work, we can get compassion fatigue.
- Rituals at work allow us to ease anxiety and deal with change.
- How can rituals help us deal with challenging patients?



TALK IN PAIRS

- Identify an area where you are struggling. Discuss ideas for a new ritual you can implement at work.

