

Healthy Farmer

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Take a Deep Breath

It is not unusual for the word “meditation” to conjure up images of the 1960s era and hippies. Some persons also think of meditation and prayer as synonymous. The practice of meditation is often viewed as a “fad” that isn’t really helpful. In reality, however, focused meditation and prayer have been demonstrated to be a significant way to decrease stress in one’s life. Meditation and prayer have a multitude of useful applications for people involved in agriculture.

It is well known that agriculture is one of the most stressful occupations. How we manage stress is something over which people engaged in farming have some control. While we can’t control the weather and have little influence over market prices and government policy that shape agriculture, we have the capacity to undertake meditation or prayer to help manage stress. Meditation and prayer are behaviors we can control.

Elizabeth Scott, M.S., wrote a recent article called, “Benefits of Meditation for Stress Management.”¹ In this article, she notes that we can experience multiple stresses in a day which can leave the body in a prolonged state of agitation. She then details the benefits of meditation and how it works.

Some of the benefits of meditation that Scott lists in her article are: slowing down of the heart rate and breathing, stabilization of the blood pressure, the adrenal glands produce less cortisol and the immune function improves.

How do meditation and prayer reduce stress? Do we have to practice yoga, transcendental meditation or Buddhist prayer techniques in order to achieve the positive effects? In a different article, Scott reports that researchers typically classify meditation into two categories: concentrative and non-concentrative. She describes concentrative meditation as focusing on a particular subject, such as a nearby object or a sound. Non-concentrative meditation/prayer has a broader focus and may include multiple objects and practices such as sounds, deep breathing and reflective thinking.

In her article, “Benefits and Different Types of Meditation Techniques,”² Scott lists three qualities that part of most meditation techniques.

Quiet Mind: the practitioner stops focusing on the problems of the day and stops trying to solve the problems.

Being in the Now: the focus is on the current; not the past or the future. Experience each moment as it comes.

Altered State of Consciousness: Scott mentions that this comes with practice. An experienced practitioner may be able to maintain a consciousness that is neither asleep nor completely awake.

Scott briefly describes how to practice meditation and underscores that it is free and always available, as long as you are able to find a few moments of privacy. Scott says to sit in a relaxed position. You may focus on a sound or your own breathing or simply empty your mind.

Healthy Farmer April 2010 page 2

While she recommends 5-20 minutes to meditate, free of distractions, sometimes that length of time is not available to busy farm people. Five minutes seems to be about the minimum, however, and it is important to have privacy. As Scott notes, long-term adherents to meditation may be able to practice it in any setting. In a busy office, one can sometimes sit at his/her desk in deep concentration for just a few minutes. The bathroom stall is a good place to take a few minutes to meditate, without anyone bothering you. It is useful to escape from the setting that demands our attention, such as the place where we are working and to find a quiet spot. Leaving the tractor cab for a few minutes to sit quietly next to the tractor and to concentrate on solitude and freeing one's mind from any intrusive thoughts allows our bodies and minds to decompress. Skilled practitioners of meditation can slow their heart rate by 30-40 beats per minutes in just a few minutes of concentrative meditation or deep prayer. These moments are healing because they allow our adrenal glands to stop pumping adrenaline, which accompanies stress. Blood vessels relax during meditation, our mind becomes calm and we briefly produce serotonin which gives us a sense of well-being.

Meditation and prayer are good investments in ourselves, to take better care of ourselves. After a time of meditation or prayer we usually can think more clearly and sometimes can conjure up resolutions to issues that before were too complicated to resolve.

The tractor cab can work if that environment is more hospitable than a blustery day. Turn the tractor off for a few moments, shake yourself loosely, breath slowly and deeply, and begin concentrating on freeing yourself from intrusive thoughts that might demand your attention otherwise. Speak softly to yourself such words as "calm down, stop thinking, relax, breath slowly, deeply and even yawn." As Scott notes, meditation does require patience and it can be hard to grasp at the beginning. It also requires the practitioner to stay on task without the benefit of an outside motivation. This may work for some people. Others, however, may prefer to have another person to help keep them motivated or to continue their healthy behaviors. Some people recite rituals, such as reciting the Rosary, or a redundant chant to help focus their mind and body on relaxing.

Meditation and prayer have a place in a farmer's life. While many farmers are highly spiritual people, we must take the time to open ourselves up to the act of meditation or prayer. We will live longer and better when we control stress rather than stress controlling us. Good luck!

1 [Scott, Elizabeth. Benefits of Meditation for Stress Management, About.com Guide. Updated January 22, 2010.](#)

2 [Scott, Elizabeth. Benefits and Different Types of Meditation Techniques. About.com Guide. Updated September 19, 2009.](#)



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