"We need the courage to enter into ourselves with the great respect and mystery that combines the faith of a child, the abandon of a mystic, and the true wisdom of an old shaman."
—Don G. Campbell (1989, p. 12-13)

Emotional health is deeply connected to sensory experience. We are innately hardwired to experience the world through the senses of sight, touch, smell, taste, and hearing. The mechanisms for survival are dependent on creating and remembering experiences that keep us safe from harm and offer pleasure. The limbic system in the brain records memories of positive and negative experiences, and the mind responds with thoughts and feelings which get stored as emotions (Carter, 2009; Dubuc, n.d.).

Sensory input can calm or excite. It can impact us in a positive, uplifting manner or drain our energy, leaving us irritated, sad, or listless. We can react to an experience before even being aware consciously of the stimulus. Besides being the seat of emotions, the limbic system is responsible for making value judgments. This occurs on a subconscious level and can impact behaviors (Dubuc, n.d.).

Throughout history, the five senses have been valued as an important component in healing practices for the body, mind, and spirit. Egyptians used aromatherapy-scented baths, music, and touch as part of healing prescriptions. East Indian Ayurvedic health traditions consider sensory impressions as crucial to our health as the food we eat: "Just as the food we eat creates our bodily tissues, our sensory impressions..."
Hanson, PhD explains: tools. In the book, Buddha’s Brain, neuropsychologist Rick Buddha’s Brain positive emotion and finding a fresh perspective can be effective to change. When a negative memory arises, connecting to a negative experiences, and create a new positive imprint. 

Bringing a negative experience to mind makes it vulnerable to change. When a negative memory arises, connecting to a positive emotion and finding a fresh perspective can be effective tools. In the book, Buddha’s Brain, neuropsychologist Rick Hanson, PhD explains:

Painful experiences are often best healed by positive ones that are their opposite – for example, replacing childhood feelings of being weak with a current sense of strength. If sadness from mistreatment in an old relationship keeps coming up, recall being loved by other people, and let those feelings sink in. Add the power of language by saying something like this to yourself: I got through all that, I’m still here, and many people love me. (Hanson & Mendius, 2009, p. 74)

Wounds of the heart can be healed by the inner physician through positive sensory input such as aromatherapy, imagery-inducing music, gentle touch, and whisperings of affirmations and encouragement. Psychiatrist W. Dean Belnap, MD felt that using the five senses in a plan of care can create new pathways and cellular changes in the brain, calming the mind and emotions, thereby relieving stress, anxiety, and depression (K. Grant, personal communication, March 13, 2017).

Here are some suggestions for integrating experiences related to each of our five senses into our day:

**SIGHT**

The sense of sight allows us to take in the details of the present moment. The more intentional we can be in that moment, the more profound the meaning or our experience can be. Create rich, positive memories by being out in nature, watching sunsets, and marveling at the landscapes and wildlife. Our memories are influenced by our emotions; be mindful of thoughts and feelings. Uplifting images can bring peace and contentment. Keep within reach pictures of people or scenes of nature that evoke a smile or warm the heart.

Imagery is also an excellent way to create positive new directions and goals, replacing lower vibration thoughts with encouraging and soothing images. Like a computer, negative thoughts and programming can be dumped from our mind’s hard drive and replaced with improved thoughts, images, and corresponding emotions that raise our spirits and foster emotional health and well-being.

**TOUCH**

Physical touch is essential to life. It confirms what we hear, see, and smell. Numerous studies have demonstrated the effects of positive and negative touch, and its absence. Soothing, gentle touch has been shown to calm the nervous system.

We are wired to connect with people on a physical level. Touch is fundamental to health, communication, and bonding. A pat on the back or a caress on the arm may be gestures that are taken for granted, but “They are our primary language of compassion, and a primary means of spreading compassion” (Keltner, 2010). Ask for a hug; give a hug. Make the application of body lotion an intentional act of self-compassion and nurturing.

**SMELL**

Aromatherapy, pleasant fragrances from flowers, our favorite foods, or any other aromas that have a positive memory attached to them are effective in accessing the brain’s seat of emotion, and therefore offer the opportunity for self-healing. Airborne odor molecules, such as essential oils used in aromatherapy, are registered directly by the brain via the olfactory receptor cells that send electrical impulses along nerve fibers to the olfactory bulb. The olfactory bulb is part of the limbic system, the seat of our emotions, desires, and instincts, which can trigger an emotional reaction within seconds of exposure to a smell (Carter, 2009; Sanchez-Vidana et al., 2017).

Aromatherapy has been studied as a complementary and integrative health approach for minimizing symptoms of emotional stress, anxiety, and depression (Sanchez-Vidana et al., 2017). According to Certified Clinical Aromatherapist Jane Buckle, RN, PhD, nurses use aromatherapy to enhance comfort, relieve pain, alleviate sleep disturbances, reduce stress and anxiety, improve coping, and increase their patients’ sense of well-being (as cited in Halm, 2008). The use of touch and aromatherapy can enhance nursing care through the promotion of relaxation, comfort, and nursing presence. Florence Nightingale used lavender essential oil to anoint the foreheads of the soldiers in the Crimean War in an effort to bring comfort to their final moments (Buckle, 2001). Compassion, light touch, presence, and soothing scents can offer solace and nurturing.

It’s best to choose an essential oil that pleases the senses and facilitates a desired state of mind. People can

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have particular scent preferences, for example, citrus, mint, floral, and woody scents, among others. Citrus oils are uplifting and calming. Mint oils are energizing and help with focus. Floral scents are calming and soothing. Woody and earthy essential oils are grounding. Dr. Deepak Chopra (n.d.) encourages inhaling the scents while feeling relaxed, calm, and happy so the body will be able to associate the scent with a pleasurable feeling. Before long, when inhaling the scent, the inner healing response will be invoked (Chopra, n.d.).

**TAStE**

Of all the senses, taste is the most personal. Beginning at birth, we associate thoughts and emotions with the taste experience, and these memories are stored in the limbic system. Whether we reach for an apple or that occasional piece of rich, dark chocolate, enjoy it! Macht and Dettmer (2006) found that the sensory experience of eating is what leads to increased joy; however, it is the thoughts we attach to eating the food that may dampen our experience and result in feelings of guilt. So be mindful in your indulgence, savor each bite, and circulate joy!

Do select foods that have a higher vibration such as eating the organic rainbow, choosing earth and animal friendly foods, and drinking purified, filtered water. Your whole self will benefit from these healthy choices.

**HEARING**

Many studies have been done demonstrating the therapeutic effects of music, such as a reduction in heart rate, body temperature, respiratory rate, and pain perception. Listening to music stimulates the alpha waves of the brain that release endorphins (Demir, 2012).

The human voice serves as an instrument as well. Karyn Grant, creator of the Healer’s Touch: Nine Touch Point Method ™ and Joy Coaching America, has found spoken affirmations to be an effective healing tool:

*Affirming words create positive reinforcements that raise the vibration in the body. This dispels self-doubt and mis-beliefs about oneself and helps to eliminate and eradicate negative and limiting beliefs. Loving lyrics, coupled with beautiful instrumentals, work through the right and left hemispheres of the mind-brain. This awakens new thoughts, which in turn stimulate emotional responses that redirect the heart’s desires and dictates one’s conscious mind into positive actions.* (Grant, 2017, p. 21)

Dr. Masaru Emoto (2004) demonstrated this in his experiments with the effects of words, music, and prayers on the crystalline structure of water. He found that positive words, prayers, and classical music produced beautiful structures in the frozen water molecules, while negative messages and heavy metal music produced distorted crystalline structures. Knowing that we are 60-70 percent water, the vibrations of words, music, and prayers may also affect our physical, mental, emotional, and vibrational bodies (Emoto, 2004).

To evoke the sense of hearing, select pleasing sounds such as nature sounds, relaxing music, and inspirational songs or videos, and engage with people who share words of encouragement and pleasing tones. Limit exposure to news broadcasts and television programs or videos that have violence and drama, especially before bedtime. The last 45 minutes before retiring should be reserved for activities that raise your vibration, calm the nervous system, and relax the mind.

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**Create a Stress-Buster Box**

Collect the following items to create a fun, portable stress-buster box:

1. Picture of a person or place that warms your heart and brings a smile to your face
2. A piece of candy or a favorite non-perishable snack to nourish your sense of taste
3. A gem stone, a rosary, or piece of soft, silky material, like on a baby blanket, to hold
4. Your favorite cologne or essential oil to inhale
5. An MP3 player with your favorite songs

Each of these can serve as an anchor to pleasant memories that can launch endorphins, the feel-good hormones, and brighten your day.
We are more than the physical body. We each come with a unique history of experiences – memories imbedded with emotions and beliefs that set the framework for the personality and how we interact with the world. As a holistic nurse, I became aware of the gap or “missing piece” between the needs of the patient and what allopathic medicine can offer. In my quest for mind-body-emotion-spirit connection, I was led on a journey into integrative approaches to better understand the different facets or dimensions of God’s blueprint for the human being. I explored massage therapy, Healing Touch, guided imagery, clinical aromatherapy, reflexology, stress management education, and life coaching, among others.

Recently, I was introduced to a technique called Healer’s Touch: Nine Touch Point Method™, which incorporates the five senses into a healing session of gentle touch, imagery-inducing music, movement, and aromatherapy that is inhaled and applied to nine touch points. The technique provides positive touch while words of support, compassion and affirmation are sung or whispered in the ear. Compassionate touch and aromatherapy serve as anchors to the experience. After an intake and assessment, a musical CD and either a single essential oil or aromatherapy blend are applied to nine specific touch points on the body. These touch points represent energetic points that access meridians and chakras that nourish and energize the systems of the body. This clothed technique is simple, easy to perform, and can access emotions that may have been deep-seated for many years.

An 8-year-old girl along with her mother and her friend performed this technique on me. My heart was so touched by the sweet, tender, uplifting words of encouragement whispered in my ear by a child. It was as if my inner child was affirming my true self, the divine creation here with a purpose! In another session, one of the women sharing this technique placed a hand gently onto the area above my heart and the other hand on my forehead. I felt as though a loving mother was nurturing me, and tears flooded my eyes. The sense of compassion and nurturing that I have received personally from these sessions created a space that allowed memories to bubble up and be acknowledged, and stuck emotions to be released.

Many people have had childhood and adult experiences that left impressions on their hearts and in their minds in need of healing. Using techniques that integrate the five-sense experience, that tap into the subconscious, and support positive memory imprints can be a gentle, effective way to begin a journey of healing and a reconnection to one’s true self.

REFERENCES:
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Grateful Heart
Aromatherapy Blend
from the book The Joyful Heart
by Karyn Grant

Roman Chamomile 4 drops
Lemongrass 3 drops
Cedarwood 2 drops

Place in 10 ml roller bottle and fill with carrier oil, such as jojoba or fractionated coconut oil. Apply over the heart and pulse points. Set the intention of the blend by saying the blessing as you apply it.

Grateful Heart Blessing (adapted)

I am reconnecting with whose Divine child I am. I have been designed to feel the spirit of gratitude in all things. I am free to rejoice in humble gratitude for life as it unfolds each and every moment.

Carol E. Gutierrez, RN, MS, LMT has been a student of the healing arts since she graduated from college. She has a love of integrative and holistic concepts that delve deeper into the complex workings of the human being. After graduating from college, she became aware of the gap between what allopathic medicine can provide and what a person needs to completely heal. This started her on a journey of exploration into modalities such as massage therapy, Healing Touch, guided imagery, clinical aromatherapy, reflexology, stress management education, and life coaching. She is currently in the process of becoming a Regional Joy Coach through Joy Coaching America.