

Ask the Experts

Ready to expand your menu beyond facials, massage, and body treatments? From Reiki to Ayurvedic services, Anderson and Associates offers these guidelines.

Q. I own a spa and salon in a family-oriented community, and most of my clients are from the area. Recently, I've noticed more and more spas incorporating spirituality-based treatments into their menus. I'm uncertain about bringing this sort of thing into the spa and want to protect my business. What's going on, and how exactly should I proceed? —*Open-minded But Nervous*

A. Dear Open-minded But Nervous: For centuries the subtle, yet profound, connection between mind, body, and spirit has been studied and appreciated in many cultures around the world.

And when you consider affirmations and such light sayings as "Laughter is the best medicine," you come to understand that even in the West we grew up linking the three to our well-being, albeit unconsciously. The trend for many years in the spa industry has been to borrow some of the healing modalities from those cultures that look at the human body as a mind-body-spirit whole and integrate them into spa treatments.

Perhaps the nervousness you feel is due to a confusion between the definitions of "religion" and "spirituality." Before taking action, I invite you to examine the difference between the two. Generally put, religion is publicly

defined and sometimes politically motivated. Spirituality is often more personally expressed and may or may not require or benefit from an affiliation with an organized religion. It can mean different things to different people. So what, then, makes a treatment spiritual? For some, yoga, guided meditation, and Reiki fit in this category, while for others, they're not spiritual at all—they simply provide relaxation and stress relief, much like a good massage.

Spa services that you or your community might consider spiritual often draw from ceremonies and traditions that allow guests to relax and be receptive to the nurturing that is intrinsic to the spa experience. The rituals frequently come from ancient or faraway lands, and their lack of familiarity may initially make them seem overwhelming or intimidating. For example, Time Ritual at The Spa at the Mandarin Oriental, Miami begins with a footbath during which the therapist determines the client's Ayurvedic dosha and suggests appropriate treatments.

Before you can elect to incorporate such practices into your spa's menu, you'll need to be sure you fully understand their origins and the ceremonies that accompany them. Present the therapy with the respect it is due: Staff should be properly trained, the environment should lend itself to the experience, and the custom should be conducted with seriousness. If you are uncomfortable with the tradition, then it may not be the right menu addition for your spa.

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Practicing yoga is considered spiritual to some and merely physical fitness to others.



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Perhaps the growth of these “nontraditional” spa treatments on spa menus (and I use this term to mean the ones beyond skincare, massage, and body treatments, which you expect to find at all spas) is due to the increased acceptance by society in general that what we think and feel affects our bodies. Indeed, traditional medicine is investigating the power of prayer on healing and the power of a good attitude to increase lifespan. For example, studies show that seniors who are recovering from serious illnesses tend to fare better if they have a pet than those who don’t. Spa owners, too, are discovering and embracing the idea of an intangible sense of intent and its potency.

This principle is appearing not just on menus but also in business philosophies and attitudes. Incorporating spirituality into a business model is nothing more than doing good business: Treat your clients well; treat your employees well; treat your community well. Do this, and in return, you will be treated well.

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Which brings up another point: Your spa is yours! Trends in the industry may or may not have an impact on your business. If your client base is stable, if you are not looking to significantly expand, and if there are no new competitive forces entering your community, there may be no reason for you to embrace new trends in the spa industry. If you would like to consider some mind-body-spirit therapies, however, you might investigate the following:

- **Yoga** The practice of yoga—and even meditation—has become mainstream. If you have a spa with the space for it and want to find the right program, check out the various types of yoga. Ashtanga is good for a cardio workout, Hatha for body control, Iyengar for balance and alignment, and Kundalini for breath work.
- **Comprehensive Touch and Alternative Manual Therapies** Chiropractic treatment and deep-tissue massage can transcend traditional spa treatments. You might consider adding rolfing, myofascial release, neuromuscular massage, acupressure, shiatsu, Watsu, or Trager massage to your menu. In addition, practitioners



Many spas are now offering treatments with sound therapy, such as massage that incorporates the use of Tibetan Singing Bowls.

who provide manual therapies like these are often cross-trained in areas of subtle energy work, such as chakra balancing, polarity therapy, qi gong, and Reiki. Offering alternative touch-energy therapy as one component of a traditional massage has the potential to accelerate market acceptance.

- **Ayurveda** Indian-based treatments are popular and provide an additional link to the East-meets-West philosophies showcased in many spas. Elements of Ayurvedic treatments can be incorporated into most touch therapies.

There are multiple permutations of what you refer to as spirituality-based spa treatments. You may also want to look into aromatherapy, sound therapy, guided meditation, and others. The best way to speak with authority is from experience, so indulge in and experiment with these modalities. Then you can decide what treatments and spa therapies may appeal to your clientele. Be sensitive with your language and approach in presenting the treatments, and remember that spirituality is a personal journey. The best you can do as a professional spa operator is to provide experiences but not proselytize. Listen to your customers’ feedback. As always, your profit and loss statement will be your best indicator of your market’s receptivity in this area.

Namaste!—Peter C. Anderson and Michele A. Chandler

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