

**Thinking Styles Shape Our Spirituality and World View**  
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“I pray best when I’m all alone in a quiet room.”

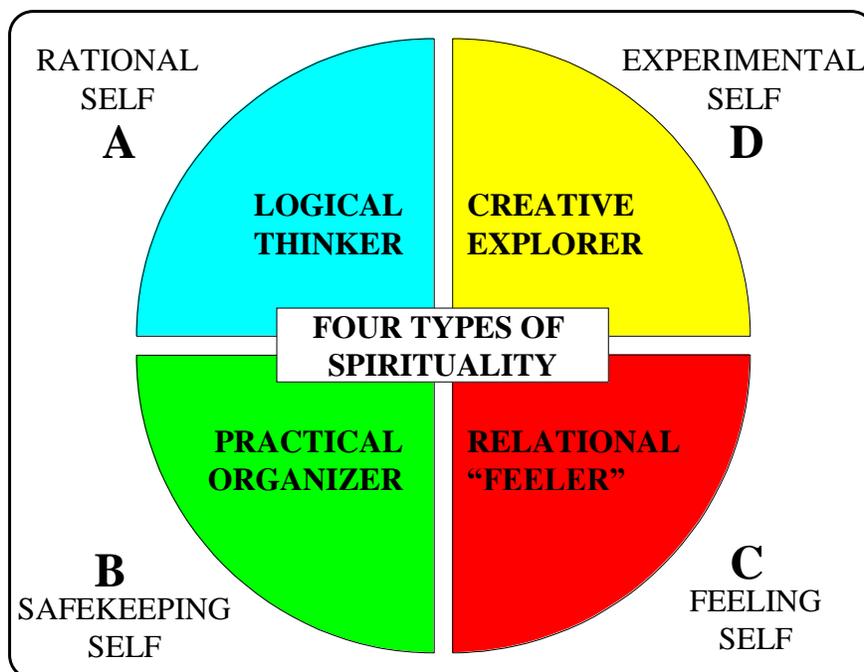
“I enjoy praying out loud with others.”

“I like to recite traditional prayers, such as the Lord’s Prayer or Psalm 23.”

“I prefer to pray while I’m moving in nature—walking, jogging or biking.”

Have you ever wondered why people within the same family often argue about the best way to pray or express their spirituality? Each brain is wired differently. Preferences about the best way to pray are linked to biological differences in how people think. Thinking styles are our innate inclinations for how we process and communicate information, as well as how we relate to God.

Similar to using one hand more than the other, we have a dominant part of our brain. Ned Herrmann, creator of the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument®, (HBDI) integrated the work of previous brain researchers to create a metaphoric model of a four-quadrant brain. He called it a “whole-brain approach” because it included the two hemispheres as well as the triune layers of the survival, emotional and higher thinking brain. Together, these parts form a physiological foundation for the four major brain styles. For easy reference, I’ll describe them as our Logical, Practical, Relational and Creative Selves.



Imagine your brain looking like a circle that's been divided into quadrants. The brain's pathways travel the easiest within the same vertical hemisphere—the Logical Left or Relational Right. With a little more effort, neural messages cross over horizontally to the other side to form a top and bottom half. The upper half values the head, whereas the lower half appreciates the heart.

However, the brain requires 100% more energy to communicate to the diagonally opposite corner. This means that the Logicals and the Relaters, as well as the Creatives and the Practicals often view each other as being their spiritual polar opposites.

Each quadrant of the brain has distinct characteristics, likes and dislikes. The following is a summary of each thinking style, worldview and how it approaches spirituality. You'll notice that the Logical and Practical Selves focus on the left-brain. The Relational and Creative Selves emphasize the right-brain.

### **LOGICAL SELF**

- Focuses on the facts      Researches and studies theological doctrines
- Analyzes and clarifies      Debates and seeks proof for beliefs
- Values clear direction      Prefers a hierarchical structure for leadership
- Maintains high standards      Focuses on ethics and obedience to God's will
- Wants results      Sets goals for spiritual development
- Prefers formal structures      Enjoys conventional prayers and worship services
- Asks "What?"      What does Holy Scripture have to say about this?
- Seeks wisdom      Likes inspired preaching and teaching

### **PRACTICAL SELF**

- Focuses on right actions      Follows through on "walking the talk"
- Likes step-by-step plans      Enjoys detailed devotional study guides
- Values tradition and order      Wants a consistent and reliable leader
- Maintains discipline      Respects and upholds traditional rules and practices
- Asks "How?"      How are we going to put this into practice?
- Wants to do things right      Seeks clear teaching on how to be a faithful person
- Prefers established practices      Likes predictable religious services and prayers
- Seeks security      Wants reassurance they're following the right path

### **RELATIONAL SELF**

- Focuses on experience      Seeks a personal relationship with God
- Likes to express feelings      Enjoys opportunities to share faith experiences
- Values harmony      Likes a pastoral leader who nurtures everyone's gifts
- Maintains relationships      Wants a community of supportive relationships
- Wants to belong      Desires that everyone get along and feel welcomed
- Prefers using all five senses      Likes to pray using movement and gestures
- Asks "Who?"      Who else has a similar experience?
- Seeks compassion      Emphasizes God's gift of grace and healing is for all

## CREATIVE SELF

- Focuses on having options Likes expressing spirituality in a variety of ways
- Likes to use imagination Wants worship to include the expressive arts
- Values the big picture Desires a visionary and innovative leader
- Maintains principles Emphasizes basic ideals, such as “God is Love”
- Wants to try new trends Willing to explore non-traditional forms of prayer
- Prefers using metaphors Explains sacred truths through images and analogies
- Asks “Why?” Why is this important? Why can’t we?
- Seeks to be inspired Listens and trusts intuition and personal conscience

Each thinking style experiences God in unique ways. Logicals know the Creator through Sacred Scripture. Practicals trust the wisdom of religious traditions and follow an established path of faith. Relationals are inspired by testimonials to desire a deeper union with the Divine. Creatives seek Truth from a variety of sources.

Our challenge is learning how to appreciate a whole-brained approach to spirituality that respects all four perspectives. A whole-brained spirituality integrates and balances contrasting points of view. Moral and ethical principles are valued as well as compassionate responses. Visionary ideals are blended with practical realities to maintain faith communities.

One way religious leaders respond to contrasting spiritual needs is by offering various types of faith activities. The Logicals and Practicals usually prefer traditional worship, whereas the Creatives and Relationals are drawn to contemporary expressions of prayer. Rather than require everyone to praise God in the same manner, participants can select from a variety of options. Choices may include Biblical or devotional studies, opportunities for social service and advocacy, prayer and share discussion groups, or contemplative meditation practices.

Unfortunately, our differences can become polarized into extreme positions. Many religious conflicts emphasize one perspective over another--grace or good works,

individual conscience or established traditions, scripture or personal experience. Congregations typically have a low tolerance for members who express their spirituality in ways that diverge from the communal norm.

We live in a turbulent time in history where our discomfort with spiritual diversity divides not only families and congregations, but also nations. These conflicts have escalated to theologically justify international “holy wars.” Our human community faces increased risks if we’re unable to find ways to bridge our distinctive spiritualities and worldviews.

As Albert Einstein said, “The problems we are causing can’t be resolved in the same state of consciousness in which we created them.” We’re called to respect the varieties of faith expression as complementary facets describing the same jewel we call God. Our survival as a species depends on our ability to use our whole, creative brain to discover new ways to honor how we think, relate and even, pray together.