

Chapter 6

If You're Already Spiritual, Why Practice?

In This Chapter

- * Understanding the purpose of spiritual practices
- * Choosing practices that appeal to your individual nature
- * Uplifting body, mind, and spirit

Spiritual Wisdom

How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice! Practice! Practice!

—Anonymous

How do you get to spiritual fulfillment and enlightenment? Practice, practice, practice. Make effort, effort, and effort and receive grace, grace and grace. One spiritual analogy describes the spiritual journey as being like a bird with two wings. One wing is your self-effort, and the other is divine grace. Your sincere efforts on the spiritual path draw grace to you, and that grace makes it easier for you to continue and enhance your efforts.

Growing Through Spiritual Practices

Does butter exist in the milk? Yes, but only with churning does the butter take on its delicious solid form. In the same way, the Divine exists in you and your life, but only with the churning of spiritual efforts and practices does the butter of your delicious higher nature shine forth.

Without churning, you may never know that butter exists within the milk; and without spiritual practices, you may never know your own greatness. With churning, the butter comes up on the surface of milk, and with spiritual practices, the awareness of God arises in your mind.

Even if you are fortunate enough to have a deep spiritual experience without doing any specific spiritual practices, it is your effort, intention, and actions that keep the flame of this spiritual experience burning brightly in your mind and heart.

So many practices to choose from!

The train of self-effort combined with divine grace is one that you definitely want to get on, and you can board this train just by starting to direct your time, energy, attention, and efforts toward spiritual practices. Pretty much any action can become a spiritual practice if you approach it with a spiritual attitude. Some traditional practices from various cultures include:

Meditation	Prayer	Scriptural study	Yoga
Rituals	Devotional chanting, choir, and singing		
Spiritual art	Martial Arts	Calming your breath	
Watching your mind	Joyfulness	Ceremonial dance	
Charity	Mantra, rosary, and dhikr recitations		
Archery	Flower arranging	Gardening	

Spiritual Wisdom

Understand this if nothing else: spiritual freedom and oneness with the Tao are not randomly bestowed gifts, but the rewards of conscious self-transformation and self-evolution.

—Hua Hu Ching

Most New Age and new thought philosophies teach that you are already made of spirit, and that therefore, you are already inherently spiritual. Followers of these paths affirm these beliefs with statements such as “Everything works together for my good,” or “I am a radiant light of God.”

So the question arises — if you are already a radiant light of God, and if everything is already working together for your good, then why not just sit back, relax, and coast along for the ride? Why put time and effort into practicing spirituality if you’re already spiritual?

The answer is that it’s not so much that practices make you more spiritual as that they give you the ability to perceive, experience, and reveal your innate spirituality. Spiritual practices help you to perceive, honor, and express your bright, wise spirit that may have been hidden under layers of materialistic distractions.

If you’re a multibillionaire but you don’t know it, you may find yourself living like a pauper instead of in luxury. Similarly, if you don’t know that you’re an expression of divine universal spirit, you may think that you’re just a world-entrenched person living in spiritual poverty.

Most great skills require not only learning and initial practice, but also ongoing exercise. A great musician practices, a great athlete practices, a great dancer practices, and even a great thief practices. In the same way, you can practice spirituality and become a greater, more spiritual *you*.

Don't Forget

In the spiritual realm, it is not that “practice makes perfect,” so much as that spiritual practices *reveal* your perfection. Chapter 3 explains that you are both perfect and imperfect, divine and ordinary. Chapters 4 and 14 show how your spiritual journey is ultimately a path from limited self-identification to elevated awareness.

Spiritual practices help you to move forward on your journey, growing smoothly and steadily, into greater realms of spiritual power.

Spiritual Wisdom

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act but a habit.

—Aristotle

Consider

While choosing whichever practices work best for you, remember to keep your focus on your greater spiritual goals. Keep your eyes on the prize. What’s more important than perfecting every outer practice is for you to approach whatever spiritual practices you do with a good attitude and a clear intention for spiritual growth.

Just as religions often tell their adherents to give a certain percentage of their money as a tithe, so you should give some percentage of your time, energy, and thoughts to spiritual matters for the benefit of yourself and the whole world. Here are some ways that spiritual-based practices help you on your spiritual journey:

- By intentionally doing spiritual practices, you’re actively stating to the universe your intention to support your own personal growth. Strong intentions bring strong results.
- Spiritual studies and practices help you make decisions that are in harmony with the greater good.
- If you work in harmony with the universe, your progress will be more fruitful and joyful. When you make efforts to uplift your body, mind, and spirit through the power of spiritual practices, the universe doesn’t have to throw unending disasters and challenges into your life to force you to grow.

With a clear intention, it doesn't matter so much which specific techniques you choose to practice, whether big, small, creative, or traditional. Authentic spiritual practices are like different roads that point — with the compass of your clear intentions — toward the same direction of greater spiritual growth.

Consider

Here are some tips for your spiritual practice:

- If you haven't been living a spiritual life until now, don't feel guilty about what you have or haven't done. Just take steps to move forward in a more positive, spiritual way starting today.
- Don't think you have to be a martyr to do spiritual practices. Although the need for discipline and strength of will power do come into play on the spiritual journey, spiritual growth doesn't have to be "no pain, no gain." In fact, one purpose of spiritual practices is to *remove* your pain!
- Being lazy on the spiritual path is as easy as being lazy in the other areas of your life. You can always make excuses for your lack of spiritual accomplishments, saying things like, "Well, I didn't have this opportunity in life," or "I have too many responsibilities to include spiritual practices," or "The people around me insisted that I live according to their expectations instead of my own guidance," but excuses won't help you to grow.
- Regardless of who you are and where you've been, your spiritual growth is your personal responsibility. You are the one who will receive the benefits that come from your spiritual efforts, and you are the one who will suffer the pain inherent in living a life without the blessings of spiritual awareness, love, faith, and understanding.
- Certain usual ideas about worldly efforts don't quite apply to the spiritual quest. Spiritual efforts aren't just about doing more things or having a full schedule of spiritual events to attend. Sometimes just sitting quietly for a few minutes is the best spiritual effort you can make.

Don't Forget

Spiritual practices can sometimes be uncomfortable, such as when you begin meditating and find it difficult to sit still for long periods of time. Even with such discomforts, you may find spiritual practices to be quite enjoyable. In fact, they can be downright ecstatic!

Spiritual practices are their own reward

Spiritual practices are more than just tools to achieve a certain spiritual state. These practices actually become the reward of practice.

Spiritual practices bring greater happiness and blessings during your times of practice, as well as after you've done the practice. (See Chapters 7, 8, and 9 for specific practices to uplift your body, mind, and spirit.)

Even if you evolve and mature to a place where your spiritual awareness remains steady without doing specific practices, still, you may continue to find great joy and nourishment in continuing to do spiritual practices — not so much with ambitions toward achieving a goal, but as a celebration of spirit.

Just think, even if you didn't need food to survive, you'd probably still like to have a delicious meal now and then, or even very often. In the same way, even if you don't *need* to be doing spiritual practices to maintain your spiritual awareness, you may still like to have a delicious meal of spiritual practices occasionally, or even every day.

Wherever you are on your spiritual path, take refreshing breaks from worldly vibrations by delving into the holy waters of spiritual practices.

Don't Forget

Practices help keep your body, mind, and spirit “machinery” in good working order so that you'll be a better vehicle for experiencing and expressing Divine Spirit.

You can think of your body, mind, and spirit as the support staff for your journey. When one of these areas of your life is out of balance, the momentum of your spiritual journey may be adversely affected. For example:

- **If your body is ill or unwell**, its discomfort can distract your attention away from your spiritual journey. Even though many great spiritual people have shone their bright light in spite of having serious physical problems, for most spiritual seekers, keeping your body healthy and clear helps to keep your mind and heart clear and receptive to spirit, along with giving you the strength and stamina to pursue spiritual efforts.
- **If your mind is disturbed or scattered**, you may not be able to pierce through the outer world into peaceful spirit.
- **If your heart is hardened or closed**, you'll miss out on opportunities to experience the soothing sweetness of divine, universal love.

Consider

Getting spiritual is like getting healthy

Saying “I want to become spiritual” is like saying, “I want to become healthy.” You need to practice habits that are conducive to achieve your goal of becoming spiritual or healthy. For example, if you want to become healthier, you would want to know which kinds of foods are best to eat, how much water you should drink, and how much exercise will help to keep your body in great shape. In fact, people with different body types can require different diets and lifestyles to maintain their optimum physical health.

Similarly, if you’re looking for spiritual health, you have to know which qualities, disciplines, and practices will help you to think right thoughts, make right choices, and take actions that honor and reveal your spiritual nature.

Spiritual practices are essential ingredients for a vibrant and successful spiritual life. Practices give you the fuel to move forward on your journey of personal and spiritual evolution, and also the wisdom to know where to direct that power. Therefore, the goal of spiritual practices is two-fold:

- **Knowing what you want:** Spiritual practices help you gain the wisdom and guidance to make choices that lead in the right direction.
- **Empowering what you want:** Spiritual practices give more energy to direct toward your goals

Both of these aspects must come together for a positive spiritual journey.

Clarifying what you want

You got to be careful if you don’t know where you’re going, because you might not get there.

—Yogi Berra

Spiritual practices make all your thoughts and actions more powerful. Therefore, it’s important that you clarify and purify your understandings and motives, so your empowered thoughts and actions are focused in the right directions.

Conveniently enough, the best way to gain clarity in knowing what to want is also through spiritual practices for body, mind, and spirit:

- **How practices for your body help you to know what to want:** Keeping your body in good shape will help you know what you want, because the state of your body is reflected in the state of your brain — which is part of that body. And just as the “knee bone’s connected to the ankle bone,” so the state of your body and brain have a powerful influence on the state of your mind and spirit. (See Chapter 7 for more on practices for your body.)
- **How practices for your mind help you to know what to want:** Clarity of mind is important when you want to discern your best goals. Spiritual practices shine a light on these goals and give your mind the power of focus. This focus helps synchronize all your thoughts and actions, conscious and subconscious, toward your highest spiritual goals. (See Chapter 8 for more on practices for your mind.)
- **How practices for your spirit help you to know what to want:** Spiritual and devotional rituals open your heart to the nectar of devotion and help you stay receptive to receiving divine guidance while moving toward your highest goals. Practices such as prayers and chanting also bring feelings of love, joy, and happiness, which are important nourishment for your spiritual journey. (See Chapter 9 for more on practices for your spirit.)

Be Careful

If you try to access spiritual powers without preparation, you risk making choices that can create more harm than good. For example, certain occult or “black magic” techniques may allow you to access some measure of spiritual power without the proper spiritual preparation. However, powers that are used without the clarity of spiritual discernment can backfire and create harmful setbacks in your journey (see Chapter 16).

How practices keep grace alive

Grace is an unbidden gift of assistance from God or the universe. When grace descends into your life, it is your practice that helps keep that grace vibrant and alive.

For example, one of the most potent ways to experience grace is to be in the presence of holy and enlightened spiritual beings. Just spending some time in the company of high-spirited ones can bring amazing spiritual boosts to your journey, as the vibrations of your spirit resonate with their holy vibrations. One spiritual practice from India is called *darshan*, which basically means to be in the presence of a being who exudes grace.

Still, even if you’re fortunate enough to meet great spiritual beings and hear powerful spiritual teachings, all those blessings of grace may end up shimmering up as a fireworks finale, only to expire as they fade back into the night. Your spiritual practices and efforts are what help to keep these spiritual-grace fireworks blazing.

Applying steady effort

Approaching spiritual practices in a disciplined, steady, and ongoing way is like digging a hole to your own freedom. Sometimes you're able to see the light on the other side, while other times you may wonder why you should spend your precious time doing spiritual practices when you'd be just as happy sleeping in or going to a party.

Nevertheless, if you persevere in your efforts, one day you will attain the goal.

Spiritual Wisdom

A saint is a sinner who never gave up.

—Paramahansa Yogananda

Sometimes the benefits of spiritual practices are felt immediately, and sometimes you don't really experience the benefits until you've practiced for some time. For example:

- You may stand up from a long prayer or meditation session and feel a bit groggy; however in the long run, your mind becomes more awake and clear from the practice of meditation.
- Your body may ache a bit after a yoga session, but in the long run, it becomes more healthy and comfortable.
- Your spirit may feel extra tender and sensitive as you experience feelings of reverence and devotion, but in the long run, you become stronger and sharper than before.

Consider

Practicing the right way

Here are some tips to keep in mind as you learn spiritual practices:

- Be patient and gentle with yourself.
- Don't try to be perfect. You still get benefits even if you can't do a practice fully.
- Your attitude is paramount in any practice.
- Practice cheerfully.

Finding What Practices Are Right for You

As with everything on the spiritual path, there are no hard and fast rules when doing practices. Your unique and individual nature requires a specially customized path to rediscover your own true being. Understanding your soul's patterns and preferences can help you make decisions and take actions that are in harmony with your greatest destiny.

Some seekers find that a very strict schedule of spiritual discipline helps keep them focused and motivated. I certainly loved experiencing this kind of practice during my decade of monastic life in an Indian-based ashram that was filled with spiritual practices.

Early each morning, I would awaken to a cup of piping hot chai tea and an hour and a half session of divine Sanskrit chanting (a great way to begin each day!). And this routine was just the start of our daily schedule. With midmorning, afternoon, and evening times came many more chants, rituals, and meditations, with lots of selfless service in between.

This disciplined environment of spiritual practices gave me a great opportunity to expand my spirituality from being a not-so-disciplined teenager who had been brought up as an atheist to the author of this book. This leap in growth came from a combination of self-effort and grace, blessings and practices.

Taking a disciplined approach to spiritual practices brings benefits and potential drawbacks:

- **Benefit:** A disciplined approach to spiritual practices strengthens your will power and ensures that you keep doing your chosen practices without giving in to laziness and boredom. A strong willpower helps to keep you moving steadily forward on your journey.
- **Drawback:** Some people get so rigid about their spiritual discipline that they lose the ability to receive and act on guidance that may be inspiring changes. As you continue to mature spiritually, you may enter a stage where rigid discipline and imposing your will is no longer best for you. The intelligent force of the universe may want you to be gentler in your practices or to focus on other lessons. In addition, you may start feeling proud or egotistical about your great discipline, which could counteract some of the benefits you receive by doing the practices.

Some seekers prefer to be more spontaneous and guided on what practices to do in each moment. This more spontaneous, “go with the flow” approach also brings certain benefits and potential drawbacks.

- **Benefit:** Approaching your spiritual practices freshly in each moment helps you to intuitively tap into the divine guidance from a state of inner surrender, openness, and enthusiasm. For example, when your body needs a bit more exercise, you can naturally spend more time doing extra physical practices; and when you need to give more focus to contemplation and meditation, you sense that and make the necessary adjustments in your practice schedule.

- **Drawback:** This freelance spirituality mode can also take the edge off your practices. Sometimes you don't feel like doing the very practices you may need the most, similar to how people often crave the very foods that they are allergic to. It may be the same with spontaneously choosing your own spiritual practices. For example, you may not feel like meditating during a particular period, because the deep, peaceful sensations you had previously enjoyed have been interrupted by feelings of jealousy or anger. Yet, this difficult time may be when concentrated efforts to continue your meditation would allow you to break through and become free, once and for all, from those inner tyrants. Or you may not feel like doing physical exercises when your body is out of shape (she says, while pointing at herself), even though those very exercises would help to bring you back into greater physical harmony.

Consider

Follow your inner guidance while still challenging yourself to be disciplined.

Discovering the techniques

So many options are available for learning various spiritual practices, from books to teachers to group meetings, classes, workshops, and retreats. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 suggest some practices to try, and plenty of other resources exist for trying out the practices of different traditions. These days, you can even learn about some spiritual practices by watching videos on the Internet.

My recommendation is to use your intelligence and intuition in exploring the kinds of spiritual practices you like to do. Ask and trust the power of universal grace to answer your sincere call and guide you to whatever and whomever you need to encounter along your path.

Be patient

A martial arts student went to his teacher and said earnestly, "I am devoted to studying your martial system. How long will it take me to master it?"

The teacher's reply was casual, "Ten years."

Impatiently, the student answered, "But I want to master it faster than that. I will work very hard. I will practice everyday, ten or more hours a day if I have to. How long will it take then?"

The teacher thought for a moment, and then said, "Twenty years."

Spiritual practices need to be approached differently from how you approach worldly ambitions. That's because, as explained at the beginning of this chapter, a good part of the spiritual journey comes as grace — blessings that come without necessarily being earned specifically by any efforts you've made. Part of the spiritual path is to lower your personal ego tendencies and increase your receptivity to spirit so a greater beauty, wisdom, and grace can shine forth in your life. Being overly ambitious and impatient on the spiritual path may actually end up blocking the way of grace and keeping you from moving forward.

Don't Forget

You're not alone in this journey of spiritual evolution. Many great benevolent forces exist within and around you, ready to guide your steps and protect you along your way. Through spiritual practices, you learn to be more receptive to the many sources of divine guidance available to you.

After you begin to master specific techniques, you can create your own palette of practices to draw from. You can apply the following tips to whatever practices you encounter:

- **Try the practice to see whether it's one you will like.** Give it a good chance! So many kinds of spiritual practices are available for you to choose from. Select practices that resonate with you, and be open to trying others.
- **Study the practice from those who already know it.** Learn from masters of the practice so that you develop a good foundation of understanding and experience.
- Allow your own inner intelligence to guide your steps as to when, how, and how much to do a particular practice.

Consider

You must listen to your own inner guidance even while learning a practice. For example, if you've had a back injury and your yoga instructor tells your class to move into a backbend pose, you may choose to sit out that particular posture and do your own stretches or take a mid-class meditation break instead of doing that particular exercise.

Be moderate and balanced

Moderation and balance are essential ingredients for a fruitful spiritual life, helping you to enter the flow of spirit. Here are some ways to become more moderate and balanced:

- Keep your mind open to new ways of looking at things, without getting stuck in rigid or dogmatic opinions — and without being dogmatic about not being dogmatic!
- Don't be too hard on yourself — or too easy on yourself!
- Be disciplined yet still open to guidance; loving yet self-contained; successful yet surrendered; and clean yet comfortable.
- Be gentle with yourself and take things one step at a time, as your understanding, awareness, and devotion continue to improve with time and practice.

Letting your practices flow

If you're an automobile driver, think of how hard you had to concentrate when you first learned to steer, brake, and park in different situations. Eventually, after a great deal of practice, you mastered driving and could eventually drive without having to strenuously focus and remember all the rules. Your ability to drive naturally moved from conscious effort to subconscious skill.

A similar process happens when you perfect any skill, such as playing a musical instrument. You may study for many years to learn all the different notes, timings, and techniques. Then, after you've practiced different kinds of compositions and mastered various methods, you eventually arrive at a place where these techniques become tools of your inspired, creative consciousness. At that point, you can begin to create your own personal style of playing and perhaps even compose your own works.

This same shift can happen with your spiritual practices. You make efforts to purify your body, mind, and spirit, and eventually, those efforts become natural and effortless, as you make the practices your own.

You may also experience times when your practices don't seem to be as enjoyable as before. Adjusting your practices to suit your mood and feeling is fine, although persevering with spiritual practices during challenging times can also bring great rewards, including personal breakthroughs and inner strength.

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Consider

Even if you don't specifically set aside time to do practices, you can still find ways to sprinkle spiritual practices throughout your day. You can take moments, even during the busiest of days, to pause and focus your attention within, remembering who you really are (see Chapter 3). Even one moment of shifting your focus from outer events toward inner spirit can be like taking a spiritual vitamin that nourishes your journey. Do it now — close your eyes for a moment and enter the experience of spirit.

You can also bring spiritual elements into situations that may not be considered inherently spiritual. For example, while you're driving to work, you may want to play a tape with some spiritual music or devotional singing as you relax your body and mind into the meditative focus of driving. Or you can play audio of spiritual lectures and teachings to fill your mind with positive, uplifting words during your morning commute.

Be Careful

If you're playing audio of spiritual teachings and the voice tells you to relax and close your eyes, this instruction is *not* good to follow while driving!

Practicing according to your individual nature

Look at small elements in your life to find out more about your nature and how you can best learn spiritual practices. Do you prefer to follow rigid rules, or are you more intuitive and self-guided?

Do you always rinse and repeat? Do you carefully measure ingredients while cooking? For example, suppose that you're going to mix a drink of some protein powder or healthy greens powder. The label says, "Add 3 level teaspoons to water." Do you do it? Do you carefully measure 3 level teaspoons or just plop in a couple of heaping tablespoons? Either way or someplace in between is fine; however, you can use these simple, daily examples to explore questions such as how you like to follow instructions.

What kinds of guidance and training help you the most? Do you prefer to learn from books? From teachers? In a large group where everyone is doing the practice in the same way? On your own?

As a complex being, you'll probably find that some mixture of different approaches will suit you best.

Doing practices for body, mind, and spirit

Spiritual practices help to purify, strengthen, and elevate your body, mind, and spirit:

- **Practices for your body:** These practices include yoga postures, breathing exercises, martial arts, spiritual dance, and energy balancing — all for the purpose of making your "temple of God" (that is, your body) a worthy vessel to contain and carry the great energy of Holy Spirit. See Chapter 7 for an array of practices for your body.
- **Practices for your mind:** These practices include meditation, contemplation, repetition of mantras, study of spiritual teachings, and affirmations — all of which help to polish the mirror of your mind so it can reflect divine light more clearly and brightly. Check out Chapter 8 for a selection of practices for your mind.

- **Practices for your spirit:** These practices include rituals, prayers, chanting, singing of hymns, and other devotional efforts that inspire love, surrender, and faith. Flip to Chapter 9 to check out some practices that nourish your spirit.

Consider

Spiritual practices do more than just nourish and guide your own journey. Through you, your practices also radiate a spiritual vibration to other people. You become a force of blessing to this world. Doesn't that sound great?

Strengthening your will power

Spiritual disciplines test and strengthen your will power. For example, you may decide to meditate for a half-hour every morning — but then some mornings you want to sleep in or are thinking about quitting meditation early to go have a nice breakfast (I know this one!). These will-power struggles give you a chance to increase your power of self-control.

Consider

Self-control is like a muscle that you strengthen through meeting challenges with your willpower. Gaining more self-control in one area also gives you the strength to free yourself from other harmful habits you may wish to drop in the future.

Suppose that you're considering ending your meditation early to have breakfast. You're sitting quietly, repeating your mantra, watching your breath, watching your thoughts, and quieting your mind, when suddenly you see in your mind's eye an image of eggs . . . with toast and a piping hot cup of tea. Yum. You try to push the image aside, but you can almost smell it, as your mind gets drawn into the imagined, tantalizing odors, flavors, and textures.

At this point, you may think, "Well, I'm not exactly focused on meditation right now anyway. May as well end it early and get on with my day." That part of the game is where your mind makes excuses to convince you to fulfill your immediate desires rather than to complete the spiritual practice at hand.

The important thing to notice is that point where your will meets the pull of the desired object. Your will is saying, "Hey, I made a commitment to myself to meditate for a half-hour every morning, and I'm going to do it." But the eggs are saying, "Come here . . . you are getting hungry." This uncomfortable but magical moment is when you can use your will power and intention to create a new pattern and strengthen your resolve.

In the midst of your inner struggle, there comes a time when you may be just about to give in. In that moment, you can take control, using the force of your will to say "No" to the desire. You can stay focused in your commitment to meditate for the full half-hour. This practice is just like exercising your muscles or your mind. Every time you conquer the pull of your senses, you become more in charge of how you live your life.

Changing your habits

Spiritual practices help you in two important ways:

- Getting rid of bad habits
- Making new, good habits

You have the power to transform your life, and spiritual practices are tools that can help you achieve your highest goals.

Consider

Even if you sometimes give in and lose the battle, whatever efforts you've put into confronting that desire or habit still bring you greater strength the next time. However, giving in to desires and habits without even making efforts to overcome them can weaken your will power.

This same technique can be applied to other will-power situations, such as quitting smoking or maintaining an exercise program. The key is to make a decision and honor it, keeping your word to yourself, which means remaining steady even over the many hills and mountains of temptation that may arise to test your strength.

Spirituality in Action

Taking a break from negativity

For one day, use your will power to catch every negative thought that passes through your mind. If you're complaining about the weather, or are upset that someone took your parking space, or are bothered or disturbed by anything or anyone else, catch those negative thoughts as if you were an expert goalie. Don't get negative about your negativity, but see these thoughts and hold them at bay with the power of your intention. Here are three ways you can get rid of negativity:

- Neutralize a negative thought by substituting it with a positive one.
- Study, remember, and contemplate spiritual teachings that help to move your mind beyond the temporary situations that cause negative thoughts to arise.
- Raise your perspective and self-identification into a higher, more spiritual perspective where you remember that everything ultimately happens for the best.

See Chapter 8 for more ways to calm and uplift negative thoughts.

Practicing being happy

You can develop the habit of being happy just by practicing feeling happy. This habit is not about deception or fooling yourself or others but, instead, tapping into an amazing spiritual law of life. Your inner being and outer expressions reflect one another:

- If you feel happy inside, it shows up in everything you do. (See Chapter 3 to explore how your inner feelings and tendencies express in your surroundings.)
- In the same way that your inner feelings are expressed outwardly, expressing happiness outwardly also affects your inner state of mind, thereby creating greater happiness inside yourself.

During good times, allow yourself to smile; and during difficult times, still do your best to smile. It doesn't even have to be a big, outer smile. Just think, "Smile." Think "Contentment." Sense what it would feel like to have a spontaneous, sincere smile playing on your lips. (Try it now!)

Be Careful

I'm not suggesting that you disregard your grief or sadness or that you walk around with a fake, plastic smile to hide what you feel inside. In fact, certain states of sadness or melancholy can be part of the spiritual growth process. Still, even in such cases, you can go through the grief or sadness while still lifting yourself above the dramas of your mind through spiritual practices. You can experience a sense of happiness that remains steady beneath whatever stormy waves may be pulling you into choppy waters.