

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.