

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.