

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.