

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.

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.

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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.