

Spiritual Practices Guide - Twelve Spiritual Practices

Finding ways to cultivate peace and add more joy enhances your life. When you take the time to be still and silent and time for yourself, your heart expands and the world begins to open to you in new ways. This guide has suggestions for those who want to begin a spiritual practice and for those who may want to explore additional practices to strengthen their Inner Light. There are references to God, Spirit and Higher Power. Use the language in relationship to spirituality that you are comfortable with. Choose the practice that resonates with you, and as your practice is strengthened over time, extend your time or add to your practices. Your journey must be your own. Your heart must ring true and your spirit must rejoice in your spirituality. Always be gentle, and be forgiving with yourself if you're unable to practice as regularly as you'd like. These suggestions haven't included all practices such as chanting, sacred reading, or fasting, but there are many for you to consider that may enhance and deepen your spirituality.

1. **Daily Intention Setting**: Our inner attitude impacts on our outer environment, and we always have a choice in how we think and act. Setting the intention in the morning that the day be full of grace and ease can make a difference in how the day unfolds. Being open to doing acts of kindness whenever the opportunity arises is also an intentional practice. And, as you go through your day set your intention to be grateful for the people and blessings in your life. You may want to begin a Gratitude Journal where you list 5 things you're thankful for each night before you go to bed. This will be settling and can give you a more relaxed approach to sleep.
2. **Meditation**: When we make room for silence, we make room for God. Being in the Silence is the fulcrum between our inner and outer worlds. It is the listening place that allows for a connection with our Higher Power. Meditation is a slow and steady practice that over a period of time will shift our perspective and bring balance and grounding, healing and growth.
3. **Prayer**: Intentional daily prayer in the morning or evening also allows for connection with one's Higher Power in asking for strength and guidance and help for others. Walking prayer can be done throughout your day when you have a few moments of quiet as a time to reflect on those who are in need. A thought can be a prayer.

4. **Breath:** Intentional breathing exercises are a conscious way to work with your breath to bypass the mind and enter a different state of awareness thus quieting your body and your mind. Deep breathing reduces stress, anxiety and depression and creates feelings of openness, peace and gratitude.

5. **Journaling:** Journaling can be done on a daily or weekly basis and is best done in a notebook, dating each entry. As a daily practice of 15 to 40 minutes, journaling allows for self reflection and self-inquiry. It helps to clear the mind and helps the mind find solutions to daily challenges and can be prayerful. Journaling can take different forms; for example, an artist might create a visual journal with notations.

6. **Body Movement:** You may already be doing Yoga, Tai Chi, or Qi Gong and have experienced a healthier body, as well as spiritual connectedness. Walking is another movement that can be incorporated into the day. If you're connected to your body, you're present, in the moment and grounded to the earth.

7. **Nature:** Being in nature whether it's walking through the forest, sitting in a park or beside a lake, or camping or canoeing connects us to creation and benefits all aspects of our being, body, mind and soul. Regular intentional time spent in nature is a spiritual practice.

8. **Discernment:** Discernment is the decision making process in which you trust your Higher Power to lead you forward on your spiritual path. This may involve living with a question as to what course of action would be in your highest good. You ask for guidance and then you pay attention to what is happening in your life. You live in such a way as to be open to synchronicity where an event in the outside world speaks to something on the inside. It involves trusting your intuition and higher self, and it involves being aware of subtle nudges from Spirit, and then acting on those nudges. **Labyrinth Walking:** This practice is used in many different faiths for spiritual centering, contemplation and prayer. The path of the labyrinth is walked slowly while quieting your mind and focusing on a

spiritual question or prayer. You can walk a labyrinth in your community, or you can trace the path on a handheld labyrinth, perhaps one you've made. When walked with a question, the labyrinth may be used as a means of discernment.

9. **Creative/Artistic Expression:** We are creative beings and we live in an amazingly beautiful, wonderfully diverse world that is creation itself. Artistic expression can be a healing experience and spiritual expression. Creativity opens the mind and allows us to explore the world and create an expression of what we experience. Painting, drawing, sculpting, dance, music, creative writing, photography, gardening are a few ways to express creativity. Ask yourself : What brings me joy? How you respond is what connects you to God and makes your soul sing.

10. **Walking a Pilgrimage:** Walking a pilgrimage is not undertaken lightly and is usually in response to a deep yearning or pull from Spirit. It may be undertaken as a search for meaning, purpose or for personal truth and can take weeks following an established way such as the 800 km Camino de Santiago in Spain. The way of a pilgrimage is for the pilgrim to travel as lightly as possible by carrying all of their needed belongings in a backpack and spending their nights in hostels along the way.

11. **Retreat for a Day:** Our modern life is busy and chaotic with constant noise from technological devices taking its toll on our bodies and minds. We have forgotten the importance of a day of rest such as the Sabbath in the Christian tradition and Shabbat in the Jewish tradition. Retreating for one day a week by not working and unplugging devices and then replenishing ourselves with time in nature can refresh and rejuvenate our bodies and minds. It is recognizing the importance of this and following through with intention that allows this to happen. Making a day for peaceful rejuvenation may be one of the most important spiritual practices that you undertake. It is no longer common in our modern world, but it is soul nourishing.

An Intentional Silent Retreat: A silent retreat in a designated retreat centre for an extended period of time, 3 to 10 days, is a deep spiritual practice where you take a vow of silence: no talking during meals, journaling or yoga. A silent retreat aims to quiet all the noise of life and allows you to reset, recharge and channel your attention inward.

This is where a deep level of solitary contemplation and personal reflection can be reached. Part of the day may include time spent with a spiritual director.

12. **Volunteerism:** An opening of the heart is an essential aspect of true spirituality and how better to open your heart to others than in the practice of doing regular volunteer work in community service. In volunteering you are of service to someone or something bigger than yourself and being of service to others is living spiritually. There are many opportunities for volunteering in your community. It's best to find something that resonates with who you are and how you want to be of service.

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