

## Foundational Spiritual Practices

### Introduction

In this article the word spiritual will be used many times. Spiritual will mean: *What we deliberately or intentionally do with awareness or with sensitivity.* (A long footnote is provided if the reader wants to know how this definition of spiritual came about.)<sup>1</sup>

### Different Spiritual Practices

If we were to write a list of all of the spiritual practices that we'd want to be a part of our life, our list could be quite long. The following is a partial list of what may be included as different forms of spiritual practice (what we deliberately or intentionally do with awareness or with sensitivity).

The list is in alphabetical order, so as to not put a higher meaning to some of the spiritual practices:

- ▶ Attending Bible or Holy Book study groups
- ▶ Aware walking
- ▶ Aware diet and aware eating
- ▶ Aware speech
- ▶ Being heart centered
- ▶ Being present
- ▶ Compassion
- ▶ Contemplation
- ▶ Devotional singing/chanting/kirtan
- ▶ Following Guidance
- ▶ Forgiveness
- ▶ Going to services at a church, temple, synagogue, mosque
- ▶ Going to spiritual or meditation retreats
- ▶ Faith
- ▶ Humility
- ▶ Letting go
- ▶ Listening to Divine Guidance
- ▶ Listening to others as they speak

- ▶ Mantra practice
- ▶ Meditation
- ▶ Mentoring others
- ▶ Mindfulness
- ▶ Practicing the presence of God
- ▶ Practicing kindness to ourselves and to others
- ▶ Practicing gratitude
- ▶ Pranayama/breathing exercises/abdominal breathing
- ▶ Prayer
- ▶ Reading Scripture/Holy books/spiritual books
- ▶ Relaxing
- ▶ Right action
- ▶ Service to others
- ▶ Spiritual pilgrimages
- ▶ Surrender
- ▶ Talking To God
- ▶ Tithing/philanthropy
- ▶ Trust
- ▶ Walking with God/bringing God into our daily life
- ▶ Writing/journaling
- ▶ Yoga asanas

### **Sporadic Spiritual Life**

Most people view their spiritual life as sporadic. Some days we think we've 'got it;' that we're tuned in and on a roll. Some days we're more 'checked out,' lost, more in our head, in judgement, in self criticism or in doubt. One minute we're deeply in our heart and in compassion. A minute later we can be boiling in anger.

This article addresses a way to more quickly bring us into a deeper connection if we're stagnating or if we feel like we're going backward. The article also addresses how to keep us more consistently going forward.

### **A Plant Needs Four Things**

A plant needs soil, water, sunlight and a proper temperature in order to grow. Every part of its growth comes from these four things. The more optimal that a plant can have soil,

water, sunlight and temperature, the more it can grow to its greatest potential. If any of these four foundational supports is limited or diminished, then the plant will not grow to its best potential. Having a healthy plant is easy if these four supports are all consistently present in the plant's life.

### **Foundational Spiritual Practices**

A man in the last Thursday group was asked: "What are your foundational spiritual practices?" This brought everyone in the group to ask themselves the same question; including myself.

I asked myself: *What are my foundational spiritual practices?*

If we focus on the foundational spiritual practices, then our spiritual life will be optimal; our spiritual life will be continuously well fed like a plant growing strongly with good soil, proper water, sunlight and a temperature optimal for its growth. Take away any of our foundational spiritual practices and our spiritual life begins to wither.

### **Spiritual Life Can Be Very Simple**

We, as humans, tend to complicate many things; including complicating our spiritual life. The list at the beginning of this article lists thirty nine potential spiritual practices (and this is just a partial list of potential spiritual practices). If we tried to do all the practices that we felt are important every day, we'd probably feel like a spiritual failure because we weren't able to do our long list of beneficial practices.

Growing a healthy plant is simple for an experienced gardener. Give the plant its four foundational needs and it'll remain very healthy. If a plant is not growing well, an experienced gardener will know what to do to bring the plant back to healthy growth. Having a healthy and fulfilling spiritual life is also simple.

*A key to going forward on the spiritual path is knowing and practicing our foundational spiritual practices.* When we feel that we're not walking forward on our spiritual path, we, like the gardener, will know what to do. We can come back to our foundational spiritual practices to re-vitalize our spiritual growth. Then our struggle or our dry periods won't have to be so long, so dramatic or so demoralizing.

When I asked and intuited what my foundational spiritual practices are, they were different than my mind would have listed. My current foundational spiritual practices are four. Some practices that certain spiritual paths say are needed (and that are important) are not on my list of four. *These very beneficial practices are an active part of my spiritual life, and they're the result of the four foundational spiritual practices.*

*When my four foundational practices are practiced, the other very beneficial practices happen almost automatically; mostly without much will or without much effort. This is like a plant growing a leaf. The leaf grows automatically if the plant is given its four foundational needs.*

### **The Difference Between Foundational Spiritual Practice and Spiritual Practice That Automatically Flows From, And Is Dependent On, Our Foundational Practices**

I'll give an example of a spiritual practice (the leaf) that results from my foundational practice. I thought I would have listed sitting meditation as a foundational spiritual practice. Almost every path and everyone agrees that meditation is needed. I also agree. So it seems that I might as well write down sitting meditation as one of my foundational spiritual practices. I've sat for meditation for decades. Putting sitting meditation on my foundational practices list would seem a 'no brainer.'

Then I fell into my sitting meditation practice. I realized that when the four foundations are there, my practice is strong. When my sitting meditation practice is weak, one or more of the foundations are also weak.

For decades, I thought that sitting meditation was one of my foundational spiritual practices. Don't get me wrong, I love my meditation time and I wouldn't want to be without it. *Meditation, though, turns out to be on the list of what grows from my foundational practices rather than being on the list of what makes up my foundational practices.*

### **The List Of Foundational Spiritual Practices Is Short**

If you're listing six or more practices as foundational, you may be making the list too complicated and setting yourself up for having a sporadic, or failing, spiritual life.

## My Foundational Spiritual Practices

I'm listing my four foundational practices in alphabetical order so as to not have one seem more important than another. These four practices are interweaved just as a basket made from four pieces of material is interweaved. This basket then holds the energy for the activity of my other spiritual practices. Without the four foundational practices, my spiritual life loses its fullness; like berries dropping through holes in the basket.<sup>2</sup>

### Abdominal Breathing<sup>3</sup>

Our breath connects our essence and our body. Breathing deep into our core helps unite these two aspects. Without breathing into our core, a vagueness of unity of essence and body develops.

### Listening To Guidance

Bible passages refer to a still, small voice inside<sup>4</sup> and that the kingdom of God is within.<sup>5</sup> My teacher, Charles, said that access to the greatest wisdom lies within each of us. He also said that he cannot hold a candle to how fully this wisdom can guide each of us. As he said these two things, something in me recognized a truth; the greatest wisdom for me lies within and that this wisdom can come from within and come to my consciousness.

### Relaxing

A relaxed state trumps a tense state. In relaxation there is a permeability, a transparency, for the Divine to enter. In a tense state, there is a solidness that impedes Divine Help.

### Writing<sup>6</sup>

Charles said that writing brings Guidance through our body and into physical form (words on paper). Through writing, Guidance can come fully into the physical world (rather than staying in thought form).

Charles emphasizes that God already knows everything inside us. There is no need to write a lot about what is inside us. Writing is primarily to receive from God. Writing is a physical way for the greatest wisdom to touch us. While writing, a dialogue can come up; i.e., talking with God, though writing is primarily to receive insight and guidance.

### When My Foundational Spiritual Practices Are Active

The more that my foundational spiritual practices are alive, the more the additional practices come to life. Everything else on the beginning list of thirty nine practices comes more alive, more invited and less effortful when my four foundational practices are well tended to. Then my life is much more full and fulfilling, and movement on the spiritual path is much more consistent and rewarding.

### What Are Your Foundational Spiritual Practices?

We benefit greatly when our spiritual path is customized. General formulas of what spiritual traditions say can be incorrect for our individual needs. Teachers within spiritual traditions will change for an individual what to do rather than just having the student follow the general guidelines.

We can spend our entire life and not practice our foundational spiritual practices. No wonder that there are so many unhappy people sincerely on the spiritual path! It's time to get out of the box of 'this is what I'm supposed to do' to have a full and fulfilling spiritual life. *It's time to find the answer that is true for you: What are your foundational spiritual practices that help the rest of your spiritual life grow the most?*

There may be no question that is more important and more overlooked for you than this question: What are my foundational spiritual practices? What are my soil, water, sunlight and temperature that makes every part of me grow?

May all people find what is essential to their practice.

### Footnotes:

1 When each person hears or says the word 'spiritual' they can have a different meaning for this word. The word spiritual will be used repeatedly in this article and it's good to start by coming to an agreement with what the word spiritual means. Spiritual will be used in a way derived from the dictionary.

The dictionary defines spiritual as: of, or relating, to spirit.

The word spirit has different meanings. The word spirit, as used in this article, is: conscious life.

‘Relating to conscious life’ is a beginning definition of spiritual by combining the above definitions of spiritual and spirit. Conscious is a word that has many variations. Conscious is defined as ‘deliberate or intentional’ and also ‘with awareness and with sensitivity.’

Now we can bring the definition of spiritual into a very clear understanding as: *What we deliberately or intentionally do with awareness or with sensitivity.* This definition takes away any religious meaning to the word spiritual, and let’s us use the word spiritual in a universal way.

I thank the many talks and writings of [J. Krishnamurti](#) in helping form this definition of spiritual. J. Krishnamurti went into great detail to make sure that he and the listener/reader would be relating to the same subject matter by going into great detail to define some words that have multiple or broad interpretations to ensure that he and the listener/reader would be communicating well with the words used.

- 2 It’s interesting to me that this analogy of a basket and berries came. For me there is groundlessness to spiritual life and yet there is also ground in our spiritual practice.
- 3 Previous articles have gone into detail about abdominal breathing. These articles, with the specific pages referring to abdominal breathing, are [Processing](#) (pg. 4), [Being Triggered](#) (pg. 5) and [Moving Forward When We’re In Reaction](#) (pg. 4).
- 4 [1 Kings 19:12](#)
- 5 [Luke 17:21](#)
- 6 A previous article was written entitled: [Processing Writing and Writing Spirit’s Messages](#). This article addresses some relevant aspects of writing.