

# 18 Principles of a Spiritual Life

By H. H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

*Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is both visionary and practical. At the dawn of the new millennium, he calls for a return to the timeless values common to all religious traditions as a means to resolving conflict in the world today. He recognizes that this begins with individuals who embody those values in their own lives. In guiding people around the globe to finding this life for themselves, Sri Sri offers the eighteen principles of the spiritual path.*

When attention is given to the spiritual aspect of one's life, it brings responsibility, a sense of belongingness, and compassion and caring for the whole of humanity. Spirit upholds and sustains life. It makes you strong and solid. It breaks down the narrow boundaries of cast, creed, religion and nationality and gives you an awareness of life present everywhere. It is only through this awareness, this uplifting of consciousness, that wars can be eliminated and human rights restored in the world today.

How can these things be achieved? What are the main principles of a spiritual life?

## **Confidence**

The first principle of the spiritual path is to have confidence in yourself. Without confidence, achievement does not come. Doubt is what opposes confidence. Once you eliminate the negative, you will see that the positive has already happened. When doubt clears, confidence is there. So to gain confidence, you must understand what doubt is.

If you observe the nature of doubt, it is always about something positive. You never doubt what is negative. You know this from your experience. You doubt someone's honesty, but you never doubt dishonesty. You doubt the goodness of other people, but you never doubt their bad qualities. If someone says, "I love you very much," you say, "Really?" But if someone says, "I hate you," you never say, "Do you really?"

Understand your doubt as questioning the positive and having confidence in the negative, and know that if you are having doubt, there must be something good present. Approached in this way, doubt gives

you a means to move ahead. I am not telling you to drop your doubt. Doubt as much as you can! Give it your 100%. That will help you through it. Once you cross this barrier of doubt, then further progress comes.

### **Stop Blaming Others and Yourself**

The next principle is to stop blaming others and yourself. The spiritual journey is a journey to the Self, and when you are engaged in blaming yourself, you will not want to approach the Self. You will not be attracted to that. Without this movement toward the Self, toward spirit, you have a journey toward matter. The joy you get from matter is tiring. The joy you get from spirit is uplifting.

You will find negative qualities within yourself, but you don't need to blame yourself for them. Whenever you blame yourself, you are bound to blame the other, because self-blame cannot stand for too long. You will find reason to escape from it by hooking it onto someone else. This causes hatred to arise. And whenever you blame someone else, you are preparing again to blame yourself. There is so much blame being given today that it is dampening the consciousness of the whole world.

### **Praise Other and Yourself**

The third principle is praise yourself and praise others. Praising others goes a step beyond not blaming others. Praising kindles spirit and the presence of spirit is uplifting to yourself, to the other, and the entire environment. In praising yourself or another, a space is created within you that is filled with joy.

If you can praise yourself, you won't need praise from others. Often we think that praising ourself is ego, but, in fact, ego cannot praise itself. Rather it hopes for praise from others. And understand that all praise goes to the Divine anyway. If you say you have beautiful eyes, who made them? Every praise goes to the Divine, the Maker.

The act of offering praise expands consciousness. Something inside you opens up. Blaming shrinks consciousness. Since the spiritual dimension is an expansion of consciousness, of the mind, we do not want to counter that by blaming. Sincerely offer praise to someone and see how you feel.

### **Sincerity**

Sincerity is the fourth principle. In all things, be sincere. Do not fool yourself and do not try to fool anyone else. You are not on the spiritual path for anyone else's sake. Spiritual seeking without sincerity is empty. It brings no benefits. With sincerity, it brings peace, happiness and joy you can find in no other way on this planet.

## **Responsibility**

The fifth principle of the spiritual path is responsibility. The spiritual path is not escape from responsibility, but taking responsibility. However much responsibility you have taken for your life, by that much you are on the path. If you think it is difficult to manage what has been given to you to do, more will be given! People mistakenly think that being spiritual is an escape from hard work. No. The spiritual path is marked by effective and dynamic activity.

## **Let Go of the Past**

The sixth principle of spiritual life is the ability to let go of the past. See the entire past as a dream. Then you come to the present moment. You will find it is not necessary to make an effort to be in the present. The moment you let go of the past, your mind comes to the present on its own.

In the present moment, spirit is kindled—even a little spark is made into a glow. When you cling to the past, the spark is covered with ashes. Be in the present and blow away the ashes of the past.

## **Acceptance**

You need to know how to create a harmonious environment around you. You may think that your environment creates you, but in truth, you create your environment. See that what is, is. The acceptance of what is has two aspects. The first is the acceptance of the present moment as inevitable. It has happened as it happened. If you want it to be different, it can only become different in the next moment. Only when you accept what is and become calm, can you effectively change anything.

The second aspect is to accept other people as they are. Whatever behavior they are exhibiting, see that it is the best that they have to offer in that moment. Be analytical. Look for possible explanations for their actions. And simultaneously take responsibility for your own. In this way, acceptance becomes dynamic and your environment becomes harmonious.

## **Confirmation of Your Own Death**

The eighth principle of spiritual life is confirmation of death, the understanding that you are going to die one day. Because there is something deep within us that does not die, we may not fully comprehend the fact of our own death. The confirmation of death can bring you to the present moment. It can take you out of all the small temptations that keep you away from the present. Once you know that you are going to die, then the future will not haunt you.

## **Impermanence of Life**

The ninth principle is the impermanence of all that exists right now—the impermanence of situations, circumstances, emotions and people around you. Knowing that all this is impermanent raises the level of spirit. You can act with more energy, enthusiasm and vigor. We think that if we recognize that everything is impermanent, it will bring down our enthusiasm and lead us to a state of apathy. No. The correct understanding of impermanence kindles spirit. Whenever spirit is kindled, you feel uplifted. Enthusiasm and dynamism are present.

## **Trust**

Trust the supreme and infinite Intelligence which has formed this entire creation, from the

cosmic display to the interplay of genes and atoms and molecules. Just in the arrangement of electrons, something becomes a flower and something else becomes a stone, something is gold and something else is charcoal.

See that there is a basic substratum, an underlying intelligence, a unity, in this entire creation. And see that it is lively. We don't see the universe as a living thing. We see only matter everywhere; in our eyes only objects appear. We know there is a magnetic field in creation, but we often see it as a dead field. Pure consciousness, that which is the basis of mind, that of which you are a part and everyone else is a part, is such a field and it is alive. Understanding, accepting and trusting the Intelligence which creates and sustains all things is the tenth principle of spiritual life.

## **Unity in Creation**

When the human mind is stressed and tense, it judges, discriminates, loves this, doesn't love that, makes boundaries. And in so doing, it

removes itself from existence. This removal of existence from the flow of existence is called separation, but it is only apparent. Separation from existence is not possible. If a portion of a circle is removed, there is no longer a circle. See that you are part of existence, a fragment of the expression of the supreme Intelligence, the unifying force which underlies all of creation, all that is. This is the eleventh principle.

### **Your Nature is Love and Peace**

When you understand the unity in creation, you don't have to make an effort to love others. Love is your nature. Love is what there is. Nothing other than love exists. See that love is not an action that you do, not a moral obligation that you must carry out. See that you exist in love and everything else exists in love.

And know that peace is also your nature. At any moment, in any place, you can just sit and let go, knowing inside you there is a pure clear space, vast and deep. That inner space is what you are. When you feel this, you are in touch with your spiritual dimension.

“I have come from peace, I am in peace, I'll go back to peace. Peace is my origin and my goal. I am peace, I am space, I am love” This inner affirmation or experience makes you a seeker. Knowing that your nature is love and peace is the twelfth principle.

### **Balance**

The thirteenth principle of spiritual life is finding a balance between activity and rest—between enjoying your world and coming back to your self, and finding a balance between silence and speech. If you kept silent all your life, never uttering a word, you would not necessarily be living the spiritual life. You have been given speech. You have been given talents and abilities. Make right use of these things you have been given and balance that with meditation, the self-referral aspect of your consciousness.

### **Self Enquiry**

Self-enquiry is the next principle of spiritual life. Start with awareness of the feeling of your own body —your own skin, the feeling of your skin under your garments, and under the skin your muscles and nerves and then bones. Do not be insensitive to life, like an animal who only eats, drinks and sleeps. Observe every sensation. Have the keenest

awareness. In knowing your own body, you will come to know spirit—that which is different from the body.

### **Dispassion and Maturity**

Keen awareness comes with maturity, or you could say, with dispassion. Maturity and dispassion come together. You cannot be mature and not be dispassionate also. Dispassion is often wrongly understood to be a flat, dull state of mind or a negative mood. It has the connotation of being aloof and disinterested. This is not true. In dispassion, you are aware; you are intimate with yourself. In maturity there is no feverishness. In maturity there is royalty, there is freedom, there is understanding, there is mystery. This is the fifteenth principle of spiritual life, gaining dispassion and living maturely.

### **Appreciation of Beauty**

The sixteenth principle of spiritual life is to acknowledge the beauty in creation, the beauty in every person, the beauty within you, and to know this beauty in the nature of spirit. The mind runs after beauty, appreciates beauty, but there is a difference between appreciating beauty and wanting to possess it. In wanting to possess beauty, we lose our dispassion.

Know it is spirit that is beautiful. Wherever you perceive beauty, spirit is there. If someone is beautiful, it is because of the spirit in them. A dead body is never beautiful. Attributing beauty to spirit and differentiating that from matter takes you a long way on the spiritual path.

### **Worshipfulness and Honor**

The appreciation of beauty brings worshipfulness. You worship beauty, you adore it. Adoring and worshipping everything in creation as a reflection of the Creator is the next principle of spiritual life.

And honor everything. Honoring is more than an emotional response. It is an attitude. It indicates a balanced understanding of life. When respect and love are both present, that brings honor. When there is honor, the mind is one hundred percent present and a sense of sacredness comes. Love and respect bring honor and honor brings sacredness. You cannot feel for something and not feel its sacredness. Sacredness brings alertness in the consciousness. Awareness comes.

### **Life is Imperishable**

The final principle of spiritual life is knowing that life is imperishable. This is totally contradictory to the principle of knowing that life is impermanent, that everything is perishable. Now we say that life is imperishable; nothing can happen to it. Truth is always contradictory.

*Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is the founder of the Art of Living Foundation, a United Nations Non-Governmental Organization, and is the inspiration behind numerous charitable organizations focused on service and the promotion of human values. In 1982, Sri Sri began to teach Sudarshan Kriya, a powerful breathing technique that eliminates stress and brings one completely into the present moment. Today this program is taught in over 142 countries around the world as part of the Art of Living Course. More information is available at [www.artofliving.org](http://www.artofliving.org).*