

Living the Life of a Spiritual Renegade

Extracts from A Spiritual Renegade's Guide
to the Good Life (Beyond Words, 2012)

“It's totally possible to be happy –
not in some otherworldly heaven
or Pure Land, but in the here and
now. And no one has a better
chance to realize this than people
like us.”



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Class One: "Igniting the Happiness Revolution"

I. Inciting Happiness

The desire for happiness is actually not a choice. It is hardwired into our nature. It is hard to deny that we all are driven, from the time we wake up in the morning to the time we go to sleep at night, by an innate urge to avoid pain and obtain things and experiences that will make us happy. There is, you might say, a kind of will to happiness that underlies all our efforts - our desire for food and sex, friends and family, money and things, professional fulfillment, and entertainment and amusement. . . .

We have pursued happiness our whole lives and continue to do so in every activity in which we are engaged. But we've misunderstood and misdefined what happiness really is. As a result, we've been searching for happiness in all the wrong places. We have been so thoroughly misinformed about what it is and how to obtain it that when we hear someone say that the goal in life is to be happy we naturally assume that goal to be trivial, shallow, and superficial.

II. Consumerism and Contentment

So the goal of an authentic religious practice of any variety is to stop suffering and bring perfect happiness. And on the way to perfect happiness, one should be getting happier and happier. It is, as I've said above, a very good measure to how well you understand what one needs to do and how assiduously you are practicing your religion - "Am I getting gradually happier?"

In order to achieve ultimate happiness, we have to start with lesser versions of it. Did you really think that you'd just be unhappy for a long time and then suddenly become happy? Generally things don't work that way. One doesn't become a concert-level musician overnight, without years and years of lessons and rehearsing. Change occurs slowly and gradually, in small increments - and through regular practice. And that's how it works with the quest for happiness too. . . .

*Contentment is the antithesis of consumerism, the very opposite of the value system at the center of our current culture. And it is *sine qua non* of happiness. Without contentment, we can never be happy.*

*So what does that tell you about our shopping mall culture? Your unhappiness is its life's blood! Rebelling against a force like this is just an expression of sanity; remaining complacent is a recipe for certain grief. Among the most revolutionary actions a person could take in a society like ours is really no action at all. **Just stop. Don't buy any more stuff. Don't even want to buy stuff. Just be content. . . .***

III. Living in An Age of Miracles and Wonder

So we have these insanely charmed lives, complete with miraculous gadgetry like computers, cell phones, MP3 players and TVs, and we're mostly frittering them away with our consumerism and insatiable need to entertain ourselves - to keep ourselves amused with eating, shopping, watching poisonous TV shows and movies, playing computer games, and going on endless holidays.

But it doesn't have to continue like this. We can turn things around. . . .

To do so, however, we have to really get clear on those three things the Buddhist texts enumerate when discussing our "leisure and fortune."

- *We first have to recognize our advantageous situation for what it really is. Most of us remain by and large oblivious to the unbelievable facts of the lives we are leading. . . .*
- *Secondly, we have to realize what a life like this is really for. We have to recognize what we could do with this life if we just made a few adjustments. If we just reorganized our priorities a bit, with advantages like ours we could achieve the happiness we really want and that a spiritual life - if pursued with diligence and vigor - could deliver. . . . We could, with a life like ours, relatively easily move from being a helpee to a helper. **There is no one else on the planet who has a better shot at reaching the highest goals religion has always held out than us.** . . .*
- *And thirdly, the texts say we must also be aware of how very, very rare a fantastic, magical, and blessed life like ours really is. Do the math; don't forget the statistics. Acquaint yourself with the facts of your life. And then stop the obliviousness and the wastefulness with which you've been conducting it.*

IV. How Things Really Work

If it is true that we are living blessed lives of privilege and opportunity, we need also to know how such lives came about. Figuring out how things happen not only explains how we got the lives we have, but will also help us to take advantage of our circumstances in order to move ourselves into an even higher destiny - one in which suffering is eliminated, perfection is realized, and we can begin our true mission to really help others terminate their unhappiness too. . . .

So how do things happen? How does life really work?

One possibility is that things happen randomly, arbitrarily, and haphazardly, and this is actually and somewhat surprisingly one of the mainstream viewpoints of our current cultural milieu. . . .

A second possible explanation for why things happen the way they do is that God is micromanaging the universe. It's all just God's will. . . .

There actually are explanations and reasons behind things - that nothing happens just by "luck," randomly and inexplicably, or by the arbitrary will of an inscrutable God. We have full responsibility over our lives and therefore everything we do matters.

Everything is an effect of a previous cause and in turn acts as a cause for a future effect. And not just sometimes. All the time! Everything is caused, always; everything is a result of an earlier action. Everything, without exception, lies within this nexus of cause and effect.

Exercise for Class One

Each day this week, spend a few minutes reviewing the “leisure and fortune” meditation:

- 1) Review your life and recognize how many advantages you have and how you are free from most, if not all, of the most serious disabilities that would prevent progress on a spiritual path.
- 2) Think about the significance of having a life like this. What’s the purpose of a life endowed with such advantages and free from most impairments.
- 3) Consider how rare it is to have a life like yours, and resolve to make the most of it.

Also this week, begin to integrate the following “Components of a Sane Life” into your daily schedule:

➤ **Every night get a good night’s sleep.**

Caring for your body and mind is a crucial part of one’s spiritual practice. Watching what you eat and drink and especially avoiding intoxicants are specifically mentioned in many religious texts. But you are also doing yourself and those around you a disservice by skimping on sleep and going through your day cranky and crabby. Every night get enough sleep so that you are properly restoring your mind and body and are in a calmer, more controlled state of mind less likely to be perturbed by the little irritations of daily life.

➤ **Every morning, before getting out of bed, loll about in bed for a while.**

Every morning luxuriate in that delicious semi-conscious state between waking and sleep and begin your day thinking about what a total miracle your life is, how many things are going right, how many advantages you have. But also realize that this kind of life will not last forever. We all will die, and we don’t know when. Recalling our mortality helps us get our priorities in life straight. So start every day appreciative of your life. Determine not to take this precious opportunity for granted and instead get out of bed resolved to make the very most of it.

Class Two: "Changing the Past"

I. Can We Change the Past?

On the one hand, the answer is "of course not." What happened, happened; what's done is done. You can't just up and decide that you weren't born where and when and into the family you were, as a person of a certain race, nationality, socio-economic class, and so forth. . . .

But on the other hand, we can learn to see them in a new light, and we can stop privileging one kind of narrative over others The past will change when we look at it differently. . .

*What we mean by the "the past" is, upon analysis, nothing other than an idea of what has already occurred, which we then carry around in our present minds. "What happened is really just (and always) an interpretation - it's what we **think** happened, or more accurately, it's what we **presently think** happened. . . .*

*We can change our **understanding** of the past. And adjusting one's current understanding of the past **is to change the only past that actually exists.** . . .*

*The past is just a story **about** the past, and we are who we think we once were. So who do you want to be? The embittered, unhappy self who is holding on to stories of the traumas and tragedies of the past? Or a healthy and happy self who has changed his or her backstory through the application of the healing balm of forgiveness? . . .*

II. Why Forgiveness is Good for You

We're all unhappy, every one of us, in part because of our past. We're all nursing our grievances, harboring our ill will, and bearing with our bitterness and pain. There are different degrees of injury, but we're all the walking wounded.

*And let's be clear about another thing. Revisioning the past doesn't mean you can just make stuff up or pretend that things didn't really occur. It's neither helpful nor intelligent to disingenuously make believe that what happened didn't. It did happen. The sh*t did happen - maybe not exactly as you are remembering it, but something did occur and that something hurts. . . .*

Not forgiving someone who hurt you doesn't hurt them. It hurts you! It destroys your peace of mind, and it undercuts any hope you might have of finding happiness. You cannot enjoy the pleasant things about your present life when you are fixated on painful memories about the past. . . .

So it is important to review over and over again the following: *We cannot be happy people without letting go of the unhappiness we feel as a result of not forgiving.*

III. What Forgiveness Is – and Isn't

- *Forgiveness ISN'T about forgetting or denying what happened. . . .*
- *Forgiveness ISN'T about condoning or excusing. . . .*
- *Forgiveness ISN'T about whether or not the offending person "deserves" forgiveness or not. . . .*
- *Forgiveness ISN'T dependent on the other person apologizing or reconciling with you, but any such reconciliation IS dependent on first forgiving. . . .*
- *Forgiveness ISN'T an act of weakness; it IS an act of great strength. . . .*
- *Forgiveness ISN'T an act of capitulation; it ISN'T "losing." It IS an act of triumph over negative tendencies in you that prevent your happiness. . . .*
- *Forgiveness ISN'T primarily an act you do for the other. It IS the best thing you could do for yourself. . . .*
- *Forgiveness IS a unilateral and preemptive act on the part of the offended party. . . .*
- *Forgiveness ISN'T an act you do once in a while; it ultimately IS an on-going state of mind. Forgiveness should become a "lifestyle." . . .*

IV. From Forgiveness to Gratitude

Having dropped our crippling narrative of the past by forgiving, we are now in a position to rewrite the story in a more advantageous key. Once we let go of our negative depiction of the past, we can go further and replace it with a positive account of what happened.

We move from forgiveness to gratitude. . . .

Gratitude is the opposite of taking things for granted. And the more thankful and appreciative we are, the more things we will observe in life for which to be grateful. Gratitude in this way snowballs into more gratitude. . . .

In order to feel thankful, you have to first be noticing how much is going right for you, how many people care about you and your welfare. Once your mind has turned in that direction, you are no longer feeling sorry for yourself. Presto chango - gratitude has turned depression into appreciation and thankfulness. . . .

*According to one dictionary definition, gratitude is “the recognition of what others have done for you.” This is a good word, “**recognition**.” When we remember, we **re-cognize** - think about something again. Recognizing assumes that we did, at one time, **cognize**, that we paid attention and were mindful enough to realize that somebody did a nice thing for us. So it’s not like you have to make up something that didn’t happen. To practice gratitude when it comes to the past is simply to acknowledge and **re-cognize** all that has happened that we can be thankful for. . . .*

It’s relatively easy to build up some gratitude muscles by exercising them in relation to the people in our past who have cared for and helped us. And it’s an important component of the larger project of rehabilitating the past. If we just spent more time remembering the many unselfish, compassionate things others have done for us, and less time obsessing over our complaints and resentments about past wrongs, we’d be happier campers. We’d be more inclined to have a healthier view of our lives because we’d be accentuating the positive rather than repeatedly dwelling on the negative.

But if we are to truly and thoroughly refurbish and revamp the past, the practice of gratitude has to expand to include not just the easy cases but also the difficult people in our lives. . . .

*The transformative magic lies right here: **if we can see a problem as a teaching, it is no longer a problem.** If we can learn from them, the difficult times we’ve had in the past cease to be either meaningless or irredeemable. We can then be grateful for everything that has happened to us and for everyone with whom we have ever interacted.*

Exercise for Class Two

This week, keep a gratitude journal. At the beginning of each day, write “Today I am grateful for” and make a note of the people and situations in your life you are most grateful for, and why. At the end of the day, make an entry under the heading “Today I was grateful for,” and review the important events of the day and why you are grateful for them.

Concentrate on the difficult people and events in your life. See if you can’t find reasons to really feel grateful even – no, *especially* – for them.

And add two more of the “Components of a Sane Life” to your daily routine:

➤ **Every morning, meditate.**

A daily meditation practice of at least twenty or thirty minutes is an important component of any spiritual practice. Make it an essential part of your day.

➤ **Keep track of your moral life, all day long.**

A real spiritual practice will also involve checking one’s morality periodically during the course of the day, preferably by keeping a journal or diary and consulting it every two or three hours.

Class Three: "Controlling the Future"

I. The Future Is Now

If "we are who we think we once were," it is also the case that we are who we think we will become. . . . What we anticipate will happen in times to come obviously colors the present mind that is doing the foretelling - the seer is impacted by what one thinks one is seeing.

All scenarios of the future are imaginary; they are projections from the present into a time that does not yet exist. But it is a sign of our perversity that more often than not the scenarios we envision are not the agreeable, if unrealistic, daydreams we've just spoken about. Rather, they are nightmarish visions that elicit anxiety, worry, and dread. It's like we're all living in a science fiction novel of our own composing, but almost always the future we're envisioning is dystopian, filled with potential tragedies.

*Everything that possibly **could** go wrong we imagine **will** go wrong. And then we worry. We conjure up hallucinations in our minds, and then we stress out about them. That's what worry is, right? Apprehension about what **might** happen in the future. . . .*

*To incite more happiness in our lives, we'll want not only to **change the past** but also to **alter our expectations of the future**. Although our present conjectures about the details of the future may not be wholly realized when the future becomes the present, the expectations of the future that we have in the present can be modified. . . .*

*Since what we call "the future" exists only as a part of our present, we can change it -- just like we can (and do) change the past. **The future**, like the past, **is in our hands**. We don't have to feel like we are either victims of an unalterable history or slaves to an uncontrollable future. It is our responsibility to take control of time and redesign it to our advantage - and it is in our power to do so. . . .*

II. The Big Five

While we may sometimes feel powerless and fatalistic about what will come, this doesn't always stop us from attempting to gain a modicum of control over it. We all do believe in causality; we take actions in our lives that we think will bring about a better future for ourselves. In order to allay our insecurities, we invest enormous time and effort in our attempts to ward off future suffering. And here's how we do it: We try to make more money, accumulate new possessions, advance our careers, improve our relationships, keep ourselves preoccupied with the latest entertainment offerings, and work to keep our bodies young, beautiful and healthy - all in the interest of present and future happiness.

There's nothing wrong in and of themselves with these things, and it is certainly not just by giving them up that the happiness we seek will be attained. Although, as we shall see, happiness actually isn't in the money, things, relationships, career, entertainment, or beautiful and healthy body, it also doesn't come about just by being poor, possession-less, unemployed, lonely, bored, and ugly and out of shape! That would be too easy!

*What's called for is a bit of mental detachment. We need to understand that our future well-being and security will not derive from the externals. For our own good, it's crucial that we stop ignorantly putting our faith in things outside ourselves. Linking our happiness to such external things is designed to bring us pain **when** (not **if**) they let us down.*

This is why all authentic spiritual traditions have emphasized turning away from an over-emphasis on worldly pursuits. Again, it's not because temporal things and activities are somehow intrinsically bad. But our naïve expectations and foolish attachments to them guarantee that they will not bring us the happiness we seek in them. . . .

III. Future Suffering Can Be Avoided

*There is a famous Sanskrit phrase found in the **Yoga Sutra: heyam duḥkham anagatam**, or "future suffering can be avoided." Just because we haven't succeeded in controlling the future in the past doesn't mean we can't do it at all. Suffering, as the Buddha pointed out, is caused, which is also why future suffering is not inevitable. If we remove the causes we eliminate the results that are connected to those causes. Conversely, happiness also is produced and does not occur randomly; if its causes are in place, the result must come. . . .*

When we've renounced our unrealistic hopes and foolish expectations, we can take the next step. We've divested ourselves of attachments that will only result in disappointment; now it's time to invest in what will really pay off in the future. Having given up on what cannot be relied upon for future security and happiness, we can take up attitudes and activities that will deliver the goods. And by doing so, we can create a positive outlook about the future that will add yet another beneficial component to our present mind-set. . . .

*The spiritual rebel gains control over what will come by understanding the process of cause and effect. We understand how things are really working and realize that **the future is the consequence of actions in the present**, a perfect mirroring of the causes we put into place in the here and now. It's all within the nexus of causality. Just as the present is a faithful expression of the past - of who we once were and what we once did, said, or even thought - the future will reflect the kind of person we are now and what kind of karma we're presently creating. . . .*

IV. Controlling the Future

Here is one way to state the main principles of karma:

1. *Actions are definite - they are certain to produce similar consequences.* If the cause is an act motivated by selflessness and kindness, then the consequence it produces will definitely be positive, and never negative; and if the cause is an act inspired by a harmful or selfish feeling, then the consequence it produces can only be negative, and never positive.
2. *There can be no effect without a cause.* If you don't create the cause, you will never experience the consequence.
3. *There can be no cause without an effect.* If you do create the cause, the consequence must occur.
4. *Karma grows.* The effect, either desirable or undesirable, will be greater than the cause. . . .

We can summarize all of the specific correlations into three basic (although, given the level of our ignorance and resistance, seemingly counter-intuitive) propositions:

- 1) *If you want something, make sure someone else gets it first.*
- 2) *If you don't want something, never do it to others.*
- 3) *If you want to keep something, give it away (or at least share it). . . .*

The following are the "Top Ten" actions that we should avoid (since none of us wishes for the negative consequences that these actions bring) and that we should cultivate (since we all seek the future results that these positive actions will bring). . . .

This is a handbook of life; these are the rules of the game. With these guidelines we can avoid all of the major undesirable things we worry will come in the future and, instead, create the causes for the kind of life we all really want.

- *Don't kill / Protect and honor life*
- *Don't steal / Treat other people's things with respect and practice generosity*
- *Don't hurt others with your sexual activity / Respect and foster others' relationships*

- *Don't lie / Tell the truth*
- *Don't use your words to drive a wedge between people / Speak in ways that bring people together*
- *Don't hurt people with your words / Use words that are kind and pleasing to others*
- *Don't engage in useless speech / Make your words meaningful and sincere*
- *Don't be envious of other people's lives / Rejoice in the little things that bring pleasure to others*
- *Don't be happy about other people's pain or problems / Be compassionate and empathetic*
- *Don't adhere to erroneous views / Adopt viewpoints that are correct. . . .*

Theory is one thing; action is another. Future suffering can be avoided; it is possible to rest easy in the present with confidence and trust that a happy future is ensured. To attain those desiderata, however, there are three things we must do: 1) stop creating new bad karma; 2) start creating new good karma; and 3) purify our old bad karma and strengthen our new good karma.

Exercise for Class Three

Keep a spiritual diary every day for a week and monitor your morality six times every day. Using the “Top Ten” list above, every two or three hours stop what you’re doing and check in on yourself. Be especially vigilant about the positive and negative actions relating to a goal you’re working for. For example, if you are interested in better health, be especially observant about monitoring actions that avoid harming the bodies of others and actively foster their physical health.

Two more of the “Components of a Sane Life” can be added this week:

➤ **Do something for someone else.**

Learning to live a selfless, other-directed life and diminishing our tendency to think only about ourselves is another crucial part of any spiritual practice. Every day do at least one little act of kindness for someone else. And keep track of it and be happy that you are doing things like this in your life. This reinforces the tendency to do more altruistic acts in the future, thereby creating the real causes for your own happiness and well-being.

➤ **Every day do some form of physical exercise**

It could be yoga, tai chi, dance, a morning run – but it’s crucial to get some movement every day in order to have the inner energies flow better. And be sure to do it with the right attitude and intention! Moving with thoughts of helping others in mind rather than narcissistic or competitive motivations transforms your daily exercise regimen into an important component of your spiritual life.

Class Four: "Relaxing into the Present"

I. Being Here and Now Happily, No Matter What

Staying attentive to what's going on in the moment is without question a crucial component to living a good life and to psychic health. Reality is literally invisible to you if your mind is stuck in the past or future. Abraham Maslow, one of the towering figures of modern psychology, declared, "The ability to be in the present moment is a major component of mental wellness."

Too much attention on the past and future can detract from life as it's unfolding. If we have one eye on yesterday and the other eye on tomorrow, we're going to be cockeyed today. Focusing on life as it is happening in the only time that actually exists is a key to contentment and happiness. . . .

It's relatively easy to embody the present moment when things are going well. We're attracted to the pleasant and therefore attentive to the present when it's enjoyable. But what about when things are difficult? When events are apparently not going right? When unwanted things occur? Can we be fully "here and now" even in these disagreeable circumstances? . . .

Whenever we feel unhappy it is not because of outside events or confrontations with dislikable people - although it might indeed seem like outer circumstances are clearly to blame. Our emotional distress is really due solely to our own self-destructive responses to these situations. It's not the things that happen to us that disturb us. It's being disturbed that disturbs us. . . .

II. Knowing What You Can Change and What You Can't

Realizing that it's never sensible to be anything other than happy is buttressed by another bit of wisdom for living rationally and happily: knowing the difference between things we can change and things we can't, and taking the corresponding and appropriate measures. . . .

*Surprisingly, what we actually **can't** change is the **present**.*

*And herein is an extremely important aid for maintaining a calm, cool demeanor all day long, no matter what may transpire. Realizing that **we cannot change the present in the present** will help us relax and accept what is, for now, unalterable. . . .*

III. Transforming Problems Into Opportunities

*So here is something we can actually do in the present about the present: we can adjust our **understanding** of what's happening in the here and now.*

Just as we can change the past by reinterpreting it, we can change the present by seeing it as a constant flow of unfolding life lessons. And when problems become teachings, they are no longer problems. . . .

- *See the “problem” as an opportunity to eliminate egoistic pride*
- *Use the “problem” to cultivate compassion for others. . . .*
- *See the “problem” as a lesson about karma*
- *See the “problem” as pointing to something we need to fix. . . .*
- *See the “problem” as a teaching about the true nature of life. . . .*

IV. Working Hard to Relax

It is important to work hard, wisely and effectively, for a happy life. If we're haunted by painful memories, we need to confront them and do what's necessary to transform them. If we are anxious about the future, we'll want to take the appropriate actions that will convince us that everything will be O.K. And if there are things that one believes need fixing about one's present situation - financial shortages, relationship problems, unsatisfactory job, health difficulties - then we need to address these concerns. Study the real principles of cause and effect and then work the karma to make the necessary adjustments.

If there's something you can do about, why get upset? Just do it!

*But as we're working hard to improve our lives, some part of us also needs to be aware that this assumes that our lives **need improvement**, that the way things are is faulty or deficient. And this attitude is **not one of contentment**.*

*To attain real contentment we need to believe that life **is good enough as it is**; that things do not need to be different before we can be happy. If we are actually going to realize the goal, we at some point must realize that continuously striving to change our lives and ourselves is the very opposite of contentment.*

*There has to come a time when the mandate to “**relax and work hard**” is at least complemented - if not wholly superseded - by a the injunction to “**work hard to relax**.”*

*The practice of working **towards** contentment then becomes the practice of contentment - right here, right now. **Aspiring** converts into **accepting**. The distinction between the end and the means to the end collapses: the path to the goal becomes using the goal as the path.*

V. Dropping “What Should Be” for “What Is”

*Discontentment is articulated in conditional sentences, statements that begin with **if only** or **it should be** (and the negative version, **it shouldn't be**). **If only** I had this, or didn't have that. . . **then** I'd be happy. My life **should be** (fill in the blank: more of this, less of that), and **until then** I won't be satisfied. . . .*

*The samsaric viewpoint is conditional – **if only**. The nirvanic perspective is an unconditional acceptance and embrace of the indicative – of **what is**. And until the conditional gives way to the indicative – until we drop what we think **should be** and fully affirm **what is** – we will continue to be discontented and unhappy. . . .*

VI. Contentment Is Not Complacency

***Contentment is not complacency.** It is possible to be **both** satisfied with reality as it is *and* always working for the betterment of oneself and others. There need not be a contradiction here: complete acceptance includes happily embracing the opportunities we have to help make the world a better place. We stay content with what comes our way; we make the best of whatever hand we're dealt and play our cards to the maximum benefit. . . .*

VII. Living Your Life Like It's Golden

It's totally possible to be happy – not in some otherworldly heaven or Pure Land, but in the here and now. And no one has a better chance to realize this than people like us.

You can do it! But you have to work hard to get to the point where you have persuaded yourself that the life you are leading is good enough to be satisfied with – that it's good enough to be perfect.

You can't fool yourself about this. No one but you can determine whether your life is truly golden or needs more polishing. But contentment and happiness won't come until discontentment ends and wishing things were otherwise ceases.

Is it good enough yet?

Is it good enough for you to finally be content?

Is it good enough to be perfect?

Exercise for Class Four

For the next week, declare a moratorium on whining. Just try to go through the next seven days without complaining about anything.

Whatever happens, try to accept it without complaint, realizing that cause and effect is at work! If there's nothing you can do about it, why get upset? It is the result of a previous karma – the cement has hardened. What's the point of honking in gridlock? Check to see if there is any way you can reinterpret what's happening in order to see it as something other than a "problem." Can you learn anything from this experience?

And this week you can also complete the full array of the nine "Components of a Sane Life" by incorporating these last three:

➤ **At the end of the day do the "couch potato contemplation" on the goal**

At the end of your workday, instead of vegetating in front of the television or reading a magazine, curl up in your favorite chair or sofa, shut your eyes, relax, and think about what it would be like to achieve the goal of your practice – complete and total happiness. What would it be like to have no problems, physical or mental? What would it feel like to have a heart that's completely open and loving toward all beings? What would it be like to have no doubts about anything, no fears, no anxieties or worries?

This is actually a crucial component of a spiritual practice. If you can't conceptualize the goal, how do you expect to reach it? So every day spend some time visualizing your own future perfection, thereby creating some of the causes and conditions for realizing that perfection.

➤ **Every evening spend some time studying a spiritual text.**

Instead of watching television or reading a trashy novel, end your day with the study of a text that is designed to make you a happier person. Any text that teaches you to be more compassionate and loving towards others and less selfish is a "sacred" text, because it is designed to make you happier and live a better life. It's nice to end the day like this so as to have these kinds of thought swimming in one's unconscious as one sleeps.

➤ **Once a week, take a day off.**

Taking a holiday or "observing the sabbath" once a week is a time-honored spiritual practice. Having worked hard for six days, set aside a day for complete relaxation, restoration, and fun. Cultivation of your spiritual life should be regarded like running a marathon, not a sprint. Protect your practice by keeping it fresh and

avoiding burn-out. Take your weekly holy day of rest, and then return the next day to your spiritual life refreshed and happy!