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Guidelines to Dedicated Discipleship



dedicated Firmly committed to a chosen way of thinking and living.

disciple Latin *discipulus*, pupil or student, from *discere*, to learn. An active adherent of a philosophical system or beneficial way of living.

Every person who wants to experience rapid spiritual growth that will culminate in illumination of consciousness should be firmly committed to discipleship. For assistance on a meaningful discipleship path, having the wise guidance of a competent teacher (guru) can be helpful.

Hearing about the facts of life and spiritual practices, and having a teacher as a guide and role model will not produce optimum results if what is learned is not effectively applied. With or without a teacher, discipleship must be experiential. Only the actions that produce psychological transformation can allow spiritual growth to naturally occur and innate Self-knowledge to be unveiled. What is referred to as spiritual growth is actually the gradual or more rapid spontaneous emergence of innate powers and capacities which, in many people, are confined and restricted by their ordinary, modified states of mind and consciousness. Hence their need to acquire higher knowledge and purify the ego (illusional sense of self), mind, and consciousness to allow their powers and capacities to be expressive.

Complacency (satisfaction with circumstances as they are), and allowing thoughts, moods, and behaviors to be influenced by nonuseful habits, subconscious tendencies, and the words and actions of others who are similarly inclined are common obstacles to spiritual growth. For discipleship to be effective, an objective, radical (going to the roots or source) examination of limiting modes of thinking, feeling, and behavior must be made and new, better choices resolutely decided. Constructive attitude adjustments, and behavioral modifications that allow thinking

to be rational and effective actions to be performed, will then empower you to accomplish meaningful mundane purposes and to also experience faster spiritual growth.

Situations and Relationships to Avoid

- **Teachers whose behaviors are not conformed to what they teach.** While a teacher who does not “live” what he or she teaches may be able to provide valid knowledge, it is better to have a teacher whose personal example is ideal. What is taught will then have greater influence because it will be transmitted with the authority of personal experience and the nonverbal sharing of the teacher’s mental states, states of consciousness, and spiritual forces will be influential.
- **Cultishness.** Obsessive devotion to or extreme involvement in religious practices or activities based on rigid beliefs and endeavors to control thoughts and behaviors of adherents rather than encourage self-reliant behaviors that nurture emotional maturity and authentic spiritual growth.
- **Circumstances or personal relationships that complicate your life or distract you from your highest aims.** Simplicity and purposefulness are essential for one who is dedicated to the spiritual path. Circumstances and relationships that are not yet ideal can be patiently endured until they are improved or changed. The key to being patient when it is necessary to endure temporary discomfort or unpleasant circumstances is to cultivate soul-contentment. When outer conditions are not yet ideal, be peaceful and calm. You will more easily avoid mental or emotional unrest while performing duties and nurturing your spiritual growth.

Intellectual discrimination, rational thinking, and the capacity to use common sense are necessary for discipleship and for relating to ordinary affairs. Discipleship is not possible for a person who is naive, irresponsible, lazy, or inclined to fantasize.

Authentic spiritual teachers may play one or more of the following roles according to their abilities and capacities.

- **The reminder.** The teacher who imparts valid information, explains higher realities and metaphysical principles, and helps disciples remember and reclaim their pure-conscious essence of being. The disciple's innate knowledge of higher realities is then unveiled and satisfying spiritual growth can be experienced.
- **The awakener.** The teacher who is at least partially Self-realized and whose active spiritual energies are transmitted to receptive disciples to arouse their dormant soul forces.
- **The bestower of liberation.** One who can guide and assist disciples to awaken through the final stages of spiritual growth to complete spiritual enlightenment: flawless Self-and God-realization that liberates their consciousness.

The Necessary Characteristics and Capacities of a Person Who Wants to Be a Disciple

If you *want* to be a disciple, are you sufficiently prepared? If you do not have the following characteristics and capacities, acquire them. If you *are* a disciple, insightfully examine your mental attitudes and behaviors and make the improvements that may be needed. The characteristics and capacities that a disciple should have are:

- **Sincere interest in learning.** While acquiring knowledge of higher realities and improving functional skills, it will also be necessary to discard erroneous ideas that interfere with rational thinking, effective living, and spiritual growth.
- **Sufficient intellectual capacity to learn.** If your interest in learning is sincere, your powers of intellectual discernment can be improved. Discern the meaning of spoken words and the intention behind them. Attune your mind to the mind of the authors of written words and you will have access to what they know and what they are endeavoring to communicate. At all times, discriminate between what is true and what is not true. Errors in comprehension will result in flawed perceptions. When I was with Paramahansa Yogananda, I carefully listened to what he said, was attentive during interludes of

silence, observed his demeanor, and attuned my mind and consciousness to his. To disciples, he said, “I am pleased when you understand what I say. I am even more pleased when you understand without my having to say it.”

- **Willingness to use what is learned.** Acquired knowledge is powerless unless it is *wisely* used. When it is possible to do so, test what you learn to verify its validity and usefulness. Knowledge will then be of practical value. You will become skillfully proficient with practice.
- **Absence of mental perversity.** Perversity is a conscious or unconscious deviation from what is right or appropriate. It inclines a person to distort or adapt useful information for self-serving purposes to maintain their egocentric condition and to avoid having to change their thinking and behaviors. Perversity is a characteristic of egotism: an unrealistic sense of self-importance or competence.
- **Respect for what is taught.** When what is taught is true and helpful, it should be respected. If what is taught is not true, it should be disregarded. A competent spiritual teacher will teach only what is true and of value.
- **Respect for the teacher.** A courteous, honest relationship with one’s spiritual teacher allows the teacher’s knowledge to be verbally or silently transmitted easily, accurately, and effectively. Mental and spiritual attunement enables the student to receive nonverbal knowledge and support from the teacher’s illumined mind and consciousness.

The teacher’s primary interest is to help and encourage their disciples to wisely use their mental, intellectual, intuitional, and functional skills to actualize their own innate, spiritual qualities and capacities.

How to Be a Dedicated Disciple on the Spiritual Path

For a disciple who aspires to be spiritually awake and is fully committed to practices which allow ideal results to be experienced, discipleship is easy, natural, and enjoyable. A dedicated disciple should do these things:

- **Discipline your thinking, feelings, and behaviors.** Always think constructively. Be emotionally calm and Self-reliant. Adhere to a wholesome lifestyle and live in harmony with the rhythms of nature. Be compassionate, moral, ethical, and honest in personal relationships. Allow your actions to be directed by the life-enhancing impulses that arise from the core of your being rather than passively allow them to be determined by habits, moods, irrational ideas, or the words or actions of others whose views and behaviors are incompatible with yours. What you do or experience that enhances your life, continue doing or allow to occur; what disturbs your peace of mind or does not contribute to your overall well-being, avoid.
- **Live with a clear sense of meaningful purpose.** While you are incarnated, there are necessary duties to perform and useful purposes to accomplish. Your primary duty is to nurture your spiritual growth until you are fully Self- and God-realized. Live holistically: harmoniously integrate all aspects of your life while performing the actions which allow your spiritual growth to most easily occur.
- **Profoundly study metaphysical (higher) realities.** Do this regularly to nourish your mind with positive ideas and improve your understanding of your spiritual nature and your relationship with the wholeness of life.
- **Intensively engage in spiritual practice.** Spiritual practice is intensive when attention is focused and actions produce positive results. Besides daily practice of superconscious meditation, let how you think, feel, imagine, work, relate to others, and nurture the environment also be your spiritual practice.
- **Nurture a conscious relationship with the God.** An eternal, self-existing Reality commonly referred to as God pervades and enlivens the universe. You can partially know God by using your intellect; more accurately know God by direct, intuitive perception; and completely know God when you are Self- and God-realized. Cultivate constant awareness of the omnipresent reality of God at all times and your sense of communion with the presence of God will soon blossom as complete realization.

Dedicated discipleship will permanently free you from all of the conditions that formerly clouded your mind and confined your awareness. You will discover that your mental states and states of consciousness determine your actions and everyday experiences and circumstances. The mastery of attention that you acquire will improve your powers of concentration and enable you to accurately discern the truth of what you observe. The influences of superconscious states brought forth by your skillful practice of meditation will purify your mind, clarify your consciousness, and elicit your innate powers and capacities along with flawless knowledge of your true nature and your relationship with the Infinite.

You do not have to be confined and limited by ordinary states of mind and consciousness during your sojourn in this world. The ultimate stage of spiritual awakening to which to aspire is to be Self- and God-realized: spiritually enlightened and liberated from conditions that formerly limited you.

Liberation of consciousness may be: 1) qualified or somewhat restricted; 2) unqualified because without restrictions of any kind. During the first the stage, Self-realization is mixed with erroneous beliefs, illusions because of mistakes in perception, subconscious influences, and personality-based views of one's self-identity and relationships with others and the environment. When erroneous beliefs are absent, errors in perception do not occur, subconscious influences no longer modify awareness or impel unwise actions, one's sense of self is not related to personality characteristics, and the universe is viewed as an interaction of cosmic forces produced and pervaded by a single Reality, liberation is complete.

Until liberation of consciousness is complete, because the ego (false sense of self) is not yet purified, one may still think of the ultimate Reality as a presence with which to enjoyably commune rather than knowing that one is a unit of it. Communion with God can provide a sense of being anchored in the Infinite and purify the mind and regenerate the body. As long as there is a sense of being separate from God, even though a sense of relationship exists, continued contemplation of the reality of God

is needed until actual realization (vivid experience along with accurate knowledge) of God is constant.

Glimpses of Self- and God-knowing may be had during early stages of spiritual awakening. With sustained aspiration and concentrated endeavor, Self- and God-knowing will prevail during interludes of superconscious meditation and when you are engaged in ordinary activities and relationships.

Have liberation of consciousness in your present incarnation as your ultimate aim. Live a well-balanced life, skillfully perform your duties, and adhere to wholesome lifestyle regimens and effective spiritual practices that allow your innate, divine qualities to emerge and be expressive. In the years that yet remain for you to live in this world, choose to do all that can be done to nurture your spiritual growth. Having done that, the supportive influences of grace will assist you to your freedom in the wholeness of God.

Dedicated discipleship will enable you to more easily rise above and efficiently remove all obstacles to natural spiritual growth and quickly fulfill your spiritual destiny.

*Affirm (Emphatically Declare)
With Self-Confident Intention*

Fully committed to spiritual discipleship, my thoughts and actions are always in accord with my resolute decision.
The complete Self- and God-realization to which I aspire,
I compassionately wish for everyone, everywhere.



Meditation Hall at CSA headquarters

Answers To Your Questions About the Spiritual Path

Readers are invited to send questions for possible use in a future issue of this magazine. By letter, or e-mail csainc@csa-davis.org

Is the guidance of a guru [spiritual teacher] always necessary for one who chooses the way of discipleship? If it is, how can a knowledgeable spiritual teacher be found?

The guidance, sustained support, and encouragement of a competent spiritual teacher is extremely helpful. If one does not have such a teacher, reliable information about higher realities, holistic living, and effective spiritual practices can be obtained from books and other available sources.

The best way to be attracted to an ideal teacher is to cultivate the qualities and capacities that will enable you to be a receptive learner. If you are destined to have a spiritual teacher, events will occur to make that opportunity possible.

Remember: your most important relationship is with the Source and within you is the potential to be spiritually awake. Your unwavering aspiration to be Self- and God-realized will empower you and attract events and circumstances that will support your endeavors. Profound metaphysical study will provide useful knowledge; holistic living will harmonize you with the rhythms of nature. Attentive spiritual practice will definitely unveil your innate, spiritual qualities and capacities.

I want to be an accomplished disciple. What are the obstacles to spiritual growth, and how can they be removed?

The primary obstacle is complacent agreement to remain confined by the illusional (mistaken) sense of Self. Your true nature is pure consciousness. When an illusional sense of Self exists and awareness is blurred, fragmented, and modified, it is not possible to be Self-realized. Mental states, feelings, and behaviors which interfere with spiritual growth can exist only when a mistaken sense of Self is allowed to prevail.

You are not a mere human creature aspiring or hoping to become a spiritual being; you are an immortal, spiritual being destined to awaken from all confining conditions. Know this to be true: go forward in the right way with decisive intention.

How can I experience quick progress on the discipleship path?

Objectively observe your habitual mental attitudes, modes of thinking, feelings, behaviors, circumstances, and preferences regarding personal relationships.

- Are you always optimistic? Cheerful, self-reliant optimism clarifies awareness and elevates it above ordinary, modified mental and emotional states. Expect to have good fortune and to be successful in your chosen endeavors.
- Is your thinking always rational and constructive? When it is not rational and constructive, go to the core of your being until you are calm and insightful.
- Are your behaviors always appropriate and wisely chosen, or are they allowed to be determined by whimsical moods or emotional reactions to events?
- Are your metaphysical studies consistently worthwhile? Do you sincerely aspire to know what is true or do you indulge in useless philosophical speculation?
- Do you regularly, superconsciously meditate? To derive the most benefit from meditation practice, go beyond transitory subjective perceptions and random thoughts. Contemplate and experience your real nature as pure consciousness.
- Are your everyday circumstances and environmental conditions ideal and satisfying? If they are, be thankful. If they are not, improve them.
- Do you interact with others who lives are well-ordered and purposeful? If relationships are based on personality issues, emotional needs, or sentiment, learn to make wiser choices.
- Are you always highly self-motivated and self-disciplined? The power to accomplish your worthy purposes is within you. Don't expect others to motivate or encourage you to be self-disciplined. Be inwardly strong, self-reliant, and purposeful.

- Do you waste time or dissipate your vital forces by talking too much, unwise or excessive eating, engaging in frivolous activities of various kinds, or not having a planned schedule of activity and rest?
- Do you allow false beliefs to influence how you think, feel, and act? Discard false beliefs; discover what is true. Ignore the misguided opinions that others might have.
- Do you always perform duties attentively and skillfully, or is your attention easily distracted? Mastery of attention will improve powers of concentration that will enable you to live more efficiently and meditate more effectively.

What are some basic guidelines for discipleship behaviors?

What you do that enhances your life and allows spiritual growth to easily occur is acceptable. What causes mental confusion or psychological unrest and interferes with spiritual growth should be avoided. This guideline is for every aspect of your life: how you think, feel, act, eat, interact with others, use your energies and material resources, and manage your life in relationship to time, everyday circumstances, and events. Cultivate Self-contentment and God-awareness. View memories of past experiences with dispassionate objectivity. Look forward with calm anticipation. Live fully in the present moment. Ever-aware that you are an immortal, spiritual being, think, feel, and wisely act in accord with that knowing.

The recommended practices which are common to many spiritual enlightenment traditions are to:

1. Avoid harmful thoughts, feelings, or actions.
2. Be honest in thoughts and deeds.
3. Be truthful.
4. Avoid dissipation of mental powers and vital forces.
5. Renounce inclinations or cravings to be strongly attached to material things while wisely using the material things which are necessary for your well-being.
6. Nurture and maintain physical health.
7. Cultivate soul-contentment, peace of mind, and emotional

stability in all circumstances.

8. Be mentally and physically self-disciplined.
9. Intensively contemplate and discover the truth about your essence of being by means of discriminative intelligence, intuition, and frequent superconscious meditation practice.
10. See through and rise above the mistaken sense of Self.

These guidelines are for every spiritual aspirant regardless of their cultural circumstances.

What is the final stage of superconscious meditation practice?

Beyond preliminary stages of mental calmness, perceptions of subjective phenomena, and superconscious states mixed with thoughts and feelings, is the stage during which a meditator can easily contemplate, awaken to, and experience pure consciousness. With attention and awareness established in the higher brain, patiently observe and experience the subtle changes in viewpoint that spontaneously occur. By doing this, your awareness will be naturally restored to its original, pure wholeness. During meditation practice, whatever is done or experienced prior to the final stage is preparatory. At the final stage, no personal effort should be made to try to cause anything to occur. Surrendering personal desires, aspiring to be fully, spiritually awake, allow your innate inclination to be Self-knowing to determine your meditative experiences.

I sometimes have difficulty understanding philosophical concepts that are new to me. How can my ability to comprehend be improved?

Use a dictionary to learn the word-origins and definitions of concepts. Be patient: as you continue to study and reflect, your powers of intellect and intuition will improve. Innate knowledge will also blossom in your awareness. It is not uncommon for truth seekers who have studied metaphysical principles for many years to have difficulty grasping the meaning of concepts and words that are new to them. A few years ago, a man told me he had read metaphysical literature for forty years, had not

seen the word “superconscious,” and didn’t know what it meant. His studies and self-help practices had been focused on positive thinking, using affirmations and prayer, visualizing ideal circumstances, and programming the subconscious level of the mind for the purpose of having a happy, successful human experience. That it is possible to transcend ordinary states of mind and consciousness and be Self-realized had not been known.

I know some people whose dedication to discipleship seems to be sincere, who have been given or have assumed a “spiritual name,” or who seem to be trying to outwardly demonstrate to others that they are on a spiritual path. What about this?

Monastics and members of alternative life-style communities sometimes adopt a name which represents the qualities they aspire to express or indicates their choice to be separate from ordinary, secular pursuits.

It isn’t necessary, nor is it spiritually beneficial, to make a public display of one’s dedication to discipleship. What is more important, and more spiritually beneficial, is to cultivate Self- and God-awareness, live effectively, and quietly persist until full illumination of consciousness is permanently realized.

Some individuals who are new on the discipleship path, or have not experienced the benefits of inward nurturing of their spiritual capacities, mistakenly think that talking about their aspirations or dramatizing a pious demeanor may help others. Or, because of their inflated sense of self-importance and inclination to fantasize, they imagine themselves to be special agents of God through whom the world will be blessed. They have yet to learn that only by nurturing and actualizing their own innate potential to be spiritually enlightened will they be able to effectively assist others to their highest good.

I have read that the average person uses only about 10 percent of the capacity of the mind and brain. Do people who are fully, spiritually enlightened use 100 percent?

Neuroscientists usually say that the “10 percent” estimate is only an opinion. The capacities of a spiritually enlightened

person's mind and brain are more fully developed—or will be improved as superconscious influences continue to prevail.

Mental abilities improve when they are used, and it is now known that regions of the brain that process higher or refined states of consciousness are more developed in people who have been proficiently meditating for several years. Because the mind interacts with the brain, exercising the faculties of the mind improves brain function.

I have been trying to be attentive to discipleship practices for several years, without satisfying results. What else can I do?

Aspire to rise above ordinary states of mind and consciousness. Renounce (let go of) mental attitudes, ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that limit you. “See” yourself as being fully, spiritually conscious and awaken to that realization.

Constantly remember that discipleship requires learning and diligent application of what is learned. Always endeavor to do the best that you are capable of doing. As the weeks and months go by, you will experience satisfying improvement.

I am usually focused, energetic, and purposeful. From time to time my attention is scattered and I feel somewhat depressed and confused. How can I avoid those occasions of depression and confusion?

Adhere to a regular, daily schedule of purposeful activity and rest, good nutrition, regular exercise, metaphysical study, and meditation practice. Keep a written record of your duties, goals, and projects where you can frequently see it. When you notice that your attention is not focused or you are confused, remember that you are a spiritual being. Think, feel, and act from that state of inner knowing. Also, cultivate a vivid sense of being in tune with a larger Reality in which you exist and with which you have a permanent relationship.

A well-regulated mind results in happiness.

– *The Dhammapada / Buddhist scripture*