

Practice #7: Express Spirit in Action: Embrace Generosity and the Joy of Service
Chapters 31, 32, 33, 34, 35

OVERVIEW

[7] Express spirit in action: embrace generosity and the joy of service

Keywords: practical aspect of spirituality, action, service

Our transformed heart and mind; our new vision, our deepening wisdom -- all of these bear concrete fruit not only in ethical living but in various forms of compassionate service for our fellow humans. Again, this does not only benefit others; it actually benefits ourselves first.

Sample Exercises: Turn work into service; Change pain into compassion; Pay something forward; Give anonymously

1. The Spirit of Service (Chapter 31, Page 251)

Summary:

Giving can be a source of great satisfaction, but like living ethically and lovingly, openhearted giving is a skill to be cultivated and can be difficult at first. However, generosity matures as we mature and eventually flows spontaneously and enjoyably as spiritual life deepens.

Key Points in Chapter 31

1.1 In praise of service (Page 251)

- All the great religions encourage acts of service
- The great religions regard helping one another as more than mere obligation; they see it as a central human desire
- Human beings seem to be genuinely altruistic.
- There are barriers to true generosity
- Under the sway of attachment and fear, even giving to others can spring from unhealthy motives.
 - We can form attachments to people, like possessions
 - This makes giving a form of manipulation rather than generosity
- Developing the seven practices grows generosity

1.2 Stages of the growth of generosity (Page 253)

- Tentative Giving: Here we offer our gifts hesitantly and ambivalently, fearful that we might miss them later, and more concerned with our own fears than another's needs.
- Brotherly or Sisterly Giving: Here we give willingly, happy to share our blessings with others, motivated by their well-being as well as our own.
- "Royal" Giving: Generosity is now so highly developed, so effortless and spontaneous, that we naturally want to give the best of what is ours to maximize the happiness of others. Others' well-being is now as important as our own, and their happiness can only increase ours. At this stage it is clear that serving others can be a spiritual practice, a privilege, and a joy.

1.3 The joy of service **(Page 254)**

- Royal giving produces immense joy
- Generous people tend to be happier and psychologically healthier than selfish individuals and to experience a "helper's high."
- Taking time to make others happy makes us feel better than devoting all our efforts to our own pleasures.
- When emotions such as love and happiness are expressed as kindness, they grow stronger in the process.

1.4 Service as the supreme practice **(Page 256)**

- Generosity and service are regarded in some traditions as the essence of spiritual life, the practice upon which all other practices converge.
- Even the supreme goal of enlightenment is sought, not for oneself alone, but to better serve and enlighten others.
- It often happens that people "withdraw" from the world to cultivate their spirituality intensely. But they return to devote themselves to service. who had a profound spiritual realization then devote their lives to service. This is the cycle of withdrawal and return.
- Service is not only an expression of awakening, but also a means to awakening.

2. Develop a Generous Heart **(Chapter 32, Page 260)**

Summary:

The first six practices lay the groundwork for generosity, this practice is more direct.

Key Points from Chapter 32

2.1 The principles for cultivating generosity **(Page 260)**

- Seek Inspiration from Others
 - Befriending and working with generous people is an excellent way of gaining inspiration and making their qualities our own.
- Find how you would like to help
 - Get in touch with your feelings and find out how you would like to help.
 - Experiment with different types of service
 - Find what makes best use of your unique talents.
- The right motivation for giving

- The underlying motives with which we give determine their emotional and spiritual effects.
- This can include saying no, when giving does not feel right, there is no formula for the practice of compassion
- Start small
 - A key principle for developing a generous heart is to be willing to start in small ways.
 - Don't look for spectacular actions, but find ways to insert love into your deeds

2.2 The yoga of awakening service (Page 264)

- When combined with the right motivation, service is transformed into awakening service, or what Hindus call *karma yoga*.
- Acting for a higher purpose: Do service and work in the world, not for yourself but for a higher purpose
- Releasing attachment
 - Release attachments to the results of your contributions.
 - Work and contribute wholeheartedly, yet at the same time try to relinquish attachment to fixed ideas of how things should turn out
- Learn from All That You Do
 - By learning as much as we can from serving, we simultaneously grow in wisdom and effectiveness.

3. Exercises in Generosity and Service (Chapter 33, Page 268)

Summary:

Exercises in generosity and service

Key Points from Chapter 33

3.1 Exercise 1: turn work into service (Page 268)

- Much of what we do is already service
- Think about how you can transform your daily activities and do it for a day in the spirit of service
- Choose an activity and then think of ways in which it helps people.
- Concentrate on these benefits, then choose to see and do your task as a service to these people.

3.2 Exercise 2: use the power of dedication (Page 269)

- Pause for a moment before each major activity in your life
- Then, instead of simply proceeding automatically with only your own well-being in mind, you dedicate the activity to your own awakening so that you can better help and awaken others.
- At the end of the activity, you pause again. This time you offer whatever benefits you have gained from doing the activity to the benefit of all people and even to all life

- This transforms these activities and also makes it clear that even the most humble of daily activities can serve the process of awakening.

3.3 Exercise 3: Change Pain into Compassion (**Page 270**)

- Downward comparison or comparing oneself with someone who is worse off, is an effective strategy for combating feelings of pain and depression.
- It can also be an effective means for cultivating compassion.
- First, think of some difficulty you are having; it could be physical, psychological, or spiritual.
- Next, think of people who are suffering even more from the same kind of difficulty or related ones
- Then think of all the suffering these people must be experiencing. Allow yourself to feel their pain.
- Recognize that just as you want to be free of pain, so do they.
- Let compassion for them arise as you hope or pray that they become free of pain.

3.4 Exercise 4: Practice all-embracing kindness (**Page 271**)

- Simply try to be as kind as you can to as many people as you can during a specific time.
- It is okay if the actions are simple

3.5 Exercise 5: awakening service (**Page 271**)

- The steps have already been mentioned, here they are summarized
- The first step is to begin by dedicating an activity to a purpose larger than your own satisfaction.
- The second step is to relinquish attachments to your ideas of how things ought to turn out.
- The third is to learn from the process.
- Choose a contribution you are already making and work your way through these steps

3.6 Exercise 6: helpers high, give anonymously (**Page 272**)

- Often the good feelings that flow from the act of giving itself become mixed with feelings related to rewards such as being praised or receiving a gift in return.
- There is power in anonymous giving as you receive the 'helper's high' without the praise
- Give a gift anonymously and observe the feelings that arise

3.7 Exercise 7: Take time for awakening service (**Page 273**)

- The practice is amplified by committing to it
- Begin by dedicating the time and all that you do during that period.
- Then, wherever you are, whoever you are with, and whatever you are doing, look for ways to help.
- Whatever you do, try to do it in a spirit of service.
- Whenever you serve, try to do it as awakening service in which you learn from each activity while releasing attachments to the way things turn out.

4. The Higher Reaches of Generosity (Chapter 34, Page 275)

Summary:

Work in the world and work on ourselves then become alternating waves of one great flow of awakening and service that guide and fulfill our lives.

Key Points from Chapter 34

4.1 Service and Spiritual Vision (Page 277)

- As awakening and service continue, spiritual vision begins to awaken and develop. As it does, we begin to recognize who we really are and who we are serving.

4.2 A world in need (Page 278)

- There is tremendous suffering in the world
- Look for ways, however small, to serve all living creatures and all of nature in its beauty.
- We are called to do what we can with as much wisdom, awareness, and love as we can.

5. Enjoy Your Awakened Self: Awakened Heart, Awakened Mind (Chapter 35, Page 280)

Summary:

The journey of awakening is the most remarkable adventure any human being can undertake. There is a rhythm to the spiritual life, and each of us needs to use the gifts of growing sensitivity and clarity to realize the practice that is most appropriate at a given stage.

Key Points from Chapter 35

5.1 Don't delay, start today (Page 281)

- Do not delay starting a spiritual practice
- Even if it is small, begin now, today.

5.2 Make practice the first priority of the day (Page 282)

- Make practice part of the routine, the first thing in the morning or block out time during the day
- You need to have a routine of some kind with sacred time carefully set aside.

5.3 Find spiritual friends and communities (Page 282)

- It is valuable to find friends who are on similar paths and who share the same values.

- When you use relationships to foster each other's learning, spiritual growth accelerates dramatically.

5.4 Find a guide **(Page 283)**

- A friend or mentor who has practiced longer, traveled the path further, and understands it more deeply can be invaluable
- There are no perfect teachers: There are only human beings who try to teach.
- Good teachers have done considerable practice themselves and live their message: Choose these good teachers!

5.5 Don't be discouraged by apparent setbacks **(Page 284)**

- It can feel as though the practices are making things worse rather than better, that we are regressing instead of progressing. This is actually normal and an important part of the process. As the saying goes, "Everything is hard before it's easy" (Goethe). It becomes easy through practice.
- If necessary, do less practice or a different kind of practice for a while.
- Do not judge or punish yourself for setbacks

5.6 Start again **(Page 284)**

- If you stop spiritual practice, start again! (Lat. *Nunc coepi* – Now I begin)
- Try not to feel unhealthily guilty or be too judgmental about yourself.
- Failure is just another opportunity to learn: "You either win or you learn (when you don't win)" (Brian Johnson). It's a win-win situation!
- Explore what factors got in the way of your practice and try to change them if possible

5.7 Practice for the benefit of everyone **(Page 285)**

- The power of practice depends on why it is done (your motivation)
- To practice for the benefit of all people-even all creatures is to expand our circle of care and to cultivate emotions such as love and kindness.