



Seducing Yourself into Spiritual Practice

*“What nine months does for a growing embryo,
forty early mornings with God will do for your growing awareness.”*

- Rumi

I can easily recognize a person who has an active meditation practice. Their presence radiates a natural contentment and joy. Their kindness and compassion is closer to the surface. They live more focused, often more creative lives, and are better able to keep equanimity under pressure, responding wisely to everyday challenges. If you want to live a graceful life, not just to have occasional moments of Grace, then some kind of dedicated practice wants to become your cherished friend.

Ultimately, all spiritual practice is an invitation for your ego to relax. This means relaxing **OUT OF** the incessant and often subconscious ego activity of grasping and rejecting what is. This keeps you living on the surface of yourself, chasing after fulfillment in the external world, seeking but never finding. As Hafiz wrote, *“the mind is ever a tourist, wanting to touch and buy new things, and then toss them into an already full closet”*.

Ego Relaxation does not stop at merely settling your internal agitation. It also invites you **INTO** more refined states where the sense of being a separate somebody gives way to boundless love, pure awareness, pristine purity, and so much more. As your practice deepens, ego relaxation brings you home to the non-dual recognition that you ARE this love, awareness, purity, and so is everything and everyone “else”. Connected inwardly to the luminous presence at your core provides a powerful platform from which to live meaningfully, navigate the world wisely and be a graceful human being in daily life.

If you have studied with me either in person or online, or have been engaging the exercises in [*The Way of Grace*](#), then you know how powerful inquiry can be in melting your ego activity and opening up direct experience of The Sacred. Your experience of inquiry will skyrocket if you also engage Devotion and formal periods of Meditation. These three elements make up the “trinity” of Ego relaxation practice. They each serve in complimentary ways to dissolve obstacles and open the gates to ever deepening Grace.

I began to meditate when I was a teenager. I had already been cracked open to experience the state of Boundless Love, and yet my everyday experience was full of undigested conflict and confusion. My first few years of meditation felt like stumbling around in the jungle of my own mind, getting nowhere. It helped to read, study, and get some proper instruction, yet like any meaningful endeavor, it required what Sufi’s call “*himma*” – a synthesis of willingness, steadfast



persistence and heart-full dedication. Somehow, when I wasn't looking, things began to change. My original motivation to get past my suffering and obtain "enlightenment" dropped away, and I started to call these periods of formal sitting practice my "morning gold".

These days, every time I sit at my meditation cushion, in front of my very simple altar, I feel like a plant that being spiritually hydrated by the living waters of Grace. While this phase of my life is extremely full sharing what I can to help others, my heart is always happy when it is my time on the cushion.

While every form of practice produces benefit, there is something that quiet time with alone with God provides that cannot be replaced by anything else. I want you to experience this nourishment for yourself.

I hope that these pointers inspire you to make the "gentle effort" to re-invigorate your existing practice or inspire you to actually make it part of your life. This is singularly the most nourishing gift you could give yourself.

Expect Resistance, but do not let it rule

Of course, your ego will throw up all kinds excuses why giving yourself at least half an hour a day for dedicated spiritual practice is impossible. In my nearly 30 years of supporting others on their path, I have heard them all! Best to expect that resistance will arise and refuse to judge yourself for it. Put a second cushion (or chair) out for your resistance, so it can be acknowledged and welcomed too. However, you do not have to let it rule. Just as a wise parent does not allow their child to eat candy instead of a proper balanced meal, ultimately you must engage your will and heartfelt motivation. Watch the video on your Course Homepage on "Overcoming Resistance to Meditation" for more assistance with this.

There is no need to make meditation another "should/ must do". Ego relaxation cannot happen through berating yourself into spiritual discipline. It is both more effective and much juicier to get curious about what would inspire "I want to". I call this seducing yourself into formal spiritual practice. Here's how that might look:

Create a sacred space for your practice

Psychologically it helps inspire a desire to go within if you have created a peaceful, beautiful environment in which to do so. This does not have to create a whole room, and it need not be grand. Just clean, calm, personally meaningful, and private. It could be a corner of your bedroom, your office, or your garden where you arrange an upright chair or cushion, perhaps a small table that can hold your journal, an inspirational text, any small objects that ignite your devotion. Creating a designated space where you will pray and meditate assists your



unconscious mind to register your commitment. Over time, it gathers presence which further empowers your gentle efforts.

This is our meditation space that evokes for me a sense of that “morning gold”, evoking that which supports and inspires my practice. Just knowing this sacred space is there provides a powerful reminder that whatever else is going on, there is always a calm and clear sanctuary, welcoming me to turn within, let go, and abide.

What might your sacred space contain? What does your body need to sit quietly without being distracted? What inspires you most? Awakens that felt sense of infinite Grace? What would most beckon you to come and BE?

Create an altar

Within this space you may want to create an altar, containing whatever for you evokes the sacred. This may be a picture of a saint, of your teacher, evocative artwork, or objects from nature. Only place on your altar what has meaning for you, and do not allow it to become cluttered with anything that does not serve this purpose. I like to have something living such as a flower or plant to remind me that my soul is alive and unfolding, a candle to light as a beginning ritual, and a few of my favorite inspirational texts that I read from daily, especially on days when I feel the need for more inspiration. I also keep my journal here, as often a wave of clarity pours through at the tail end of meditation practice. This is highly personal, so create the space in the most meaningful way to you and then dedicate it to your practice.

Why not share a photo of your altar with your fellow students in the [Course FB Group](#)?

Designate a particular TIME for your practice:

Once you have created your sacred space I suggest that you set aside a particular *time* for your daily practice. Without this you will inevitably get pulled into daily tasks that arise unexpectedly, which can too easily sabotage your intentions.

First thing in the morning is an ideal time for practice. I strongly suggest that you stay away from all social media, emails, YouTube, television or talk radio until *after* your meditation, as engaging with noise of the world will make it harder to settle. This might challenge any addictions you have around your cellphone, computer or TV! If so, this would make a valuable inquiry at some point!

Making formal practice your first priority of the day embodies the all-important spiritual principle “*seek ye first the kingdom of Heaven, and all else will be added unto you*”. Besides, you will feel so much happier if you wake up and just make your way to the kitchen for that cup of



tea or coffee that you enjoy, brewing it mindfully (with your cellphone still happily sitting there on the charger in airport mode!)

With that delicious beverage in hand, step outside if you can, and consciously greet the day. Take in everything you see, hear and sense as the blessings that they are. Consider what causes everything to exist, including yourself. Consider who it is that looks through your eyes at trees, plants, and sky. Give thanks for the gift of life, even though it may not meet your personality's definition of "perfect".

If you have learned the Gayatri mantra with me on retreat, this is the perfect moment to chant those sacred syllables that effectively bathe your entire consciousness in light itself and the transmission of millions of beings throughout a few millennia that have worked with it! Or, say a prayer, like the Shema, the Lord's Prayer, the Metta Prayer, that most connects you to your spiritual lineage. Or write a simple one-line prayer that encapsulates your deepest intention. You might even want to place this beside your bed so you can just be with it in those fertile moments in bed as you are waking up and also drifting off to sleep.

If prayer does not come so easily, listen to some sacred music (chanting, soft classical or anything that nudges your consciousness towards remembrance). These simple elements can accompany you through waking up, hydrating, showering and finding yourself naturally walking towards that designated cushion or chair. Let it become as natural a part of your routine as showering, brushing your teeth and getting dressed.

Beginning your practice

Once in your sacred space, make sure your cellphone is off (better still – somewhere else entirely) and your loved ones know not to disturb you.

Find your best meditation posture that gives you a stable base and as upright a spine as is possible for you...either comfortable half lotus or in a supportive chair. Never cross your legs and slouch, as this will interfere with the open flow of subtle energy. Only meditate lying down if physical limitations require this, positioning your spine supported in its natural curvature (echoing the erect upright posture as much as possible). Let your tongue touch the roof of mouth lightly. Let your hands face upwards on your thighs, or together at your lower belly (especially if using the Mountain of Presence meditation).

Dedicate your practice to the benefit of all beings, and anyone in particular you know who could use spiritual support.

Give thanks for receiving your practices... and all who have played a part in handing them to you.



Ask for blessings upon your practice, calling upon the name or face of the Divine most natural to you. If you have a guru or teacher, visualize their hand upon your crown.

Turn your focus within, riding the natural flow of your breath. Feel each inhale as a “welcome”, and each exhale as a “melting”, just naturally letting go.

Engage a method of concentration of your choice, staying with that focus for at least 15 minutes. This is important to collect and concentrate your attention. The more distracted you are, or sleepy you get (two classical issues in meditation), bring more focus to the method. If you get pulled away into mental activity just bring yourself back).

When you feel sufficiently settled, let go of any effort and just BE.

Play with these pointers in your own way, adapting what makes you want to immerse yourself on the cushion. You will likely notice delightful phenomena that will take you the rest of the way: ultimately, being intimate with the depth of your Heart feels *really* good. It makes you happy in a way nothing else can. Conscious immersion with the God is the Beloved of your heart.

When resistance strikes, remember this gem of wisdom from St Francis de Sales:

“Half an hour’s meditation daily is essential, except when you are really busy - then a full hour is required.”