

SPIRITUAL SKILLS For Life Mastery



Reverend Margaret Shepherd, MBA

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INTRODUCTION

The constant theme in all my teaching is *living from vision*. It is the cornerstone for ending your suffering and creating the life you want. Living from vision means creating a clear blueprint for your ideal life and keeping your energy focused on that vision. This engages the inspiration of Spirit and the laws of metaphysics, and bypasses your fears and old negative programming. You are entitled to have both material and spiritual fulfillment. This is how the universe works. We humans are here to grow spiritually and to learn to create in the material realm. Otherwise we'd be doing our spiritual growth somewhere else—someplace without bodies, the ozone layer, condominium fees and political parties and contests.

To lead a life of both spiritual and material fulfillment you need both worldly skills and spiritual skills. You get the former easily, through public education, professional programs, family, books, the internet, mentors, etc. Spiritual skills can be more challenging. You've probably never seen a course in them, and maybe you don't even think of them as "skills." Yet we live in an ordered universe, with systems for everything. There are systematic ways to forge a connection to Spirit—ways that are proven, simple, intuitive, and effective. They are not

mysterious or magic. Working with them over the years and studying them in various teachings has led me to define these seven Spiritual Skills.

In the traditional religions many of us grew up with, spiritual practice was pretty much limited to prayers. Sometimes you made them up on the spot, based on your immediate need for results, and sometimes you used the “canned” versions found in prayer books and sacred texts. I always thought the Roman Catholics had a good deal in rosary beads. They seemed to me so beautiful and such a neatly systematic way to handle the business of prayer. A classmate’s grandmother dies—say the rosary. You get in trouble for sneaking out of the house—say the rosary. Big trigonometry test tomorrow and you’re beyond clueless—say the rosary. We Episcopalians were so close yet so far—no rosary for us, but we had the Book of Common Prayer. Later I came to appreciate the value of both original spontaneous prayer and ritual prayer, and to know that each has its own place and its own power.

During my journey into other teachings that ultimately led me to what I call metaphysical spirituality, I learned other practices—meditation of course, and visualization, chanting, and service (giving your time, talents, and money away). As I began to work with practices beyond prayer, I came to see prayer as the foundation for all else. I also came to see how much more there can be to a personal spiritual practice. I learned that there are many paths to communion with one’s God. Each path has its own richness, depth, and utility. God is ever available and makes it easy for us to communicate. I now know a much more user-friendly God than the one of my childhood.

Once I became a minister and gained some courage to guide people to their own path of spiritual growth, I wanted to offer clarity on the different spiritual practices that I knew worked. I wanted to offer a larger menu to those in critical need, and those just desiring further growth. Here is that menu. Choose all or some. You will be nourished no matter what you order.

SOME UPFRONT “Q and A”

Before we proceed, let’s consider some questions that might arise. People sometimes wonder about these; maybe you also:

“What is the “right” way to do my spiritual practice?”

There is no “right” way. Results come from the action of moving your attention for a period of time to God or the Infinite Presence. There are many paths to God, many practices on those paths. Your work is to focus on God, employing whatever practice you choose to assist you. If you have that focus as your intention, you will succeed.

“How will a spiritual practice give me a better life?”

Having a regular spiritual practice takes your focus from the realm of effects to the realm of cause. The realm of cause is the realm of spirit; the realm of effects is the realm of the material world. You consciously create your life from the realm of cause; you can never change what is already created. Operating from the realm of cause, your

concentration, your thoughts, words and deeds are FROM your God-center, not your human ego or your fears or your sensory stimulation needs or anything else in the realm of effects. Spiritual practice leads you to always “check in” with your inner guidance before you think, speak, or act. Life is rarely about what you think it’s about. Leave the material evidence alone, and find the spiritual truth.

“How do I integrate spiritual practice with my daily life?”

This is a great question. You don’t want to find yourself sitting in meditation for an hour then screaming at other drivers in traffic, cheating on your taxes, hating your job, and affirming that you’re getting the flu. Spiritual practice is about cultivating your *constant* awareness of your *constant* connection to God. If you do it with that intention, God will keep you aware of that connection.

“Spiritual practice will make me closer to God. What if I don’t want to be?”

Before we get too much further along, we had better take a look at what you mean when you think about “God.” If you’re going to employ a practice to gain a closer relationship with God, let’s be sure it’s a God you even *want* to be chummier with. Be prepared to re-work your concept of God, or whatever you name the universal eternal power and presence. You may be moved to discard old childhood models of God that don’t feel right. They probably aren’t. They must be confronted because they can keep you stuck. It is important to define for yourself an unconditionally loving, supportive higher power to which you can feel personally connected. Through that power

you will heal, grow, gain skills and courage to live the life that makes your heart sing—your vision. As humans, we are operating with a human mind, and in case you hadn't noticed, that human mind has its limitations. I know you did well on the SATs and are good at your job and can think of clever retorts, but the truth is your human mind is limited. It is finite and that means it can't understand that which is infinite—namely God. Now the infinite part of you, your eternal soul, can. We are all mystics in varying degrees. However, it's the limited, finite human mind that is usually running the show, and that means we only know God in a limited sense. The point here is since you are essentially *making up* your concept of God, why not make up a better one?

A GRIP ON THE BASICS

Here is a list of the Seven Spiritual Skills, and a basic description of each. The following pages tell you more, and how to use them in your life.

The Seven Spiritual Skills are PRAYER, MEDITATION, INTENTION, VISIONING, VISUALIZATION and AFFIRMATIONS, SERVICE, TITHING. Each forges your conscious connection to Spirit. Each is a powerful affirmation of your personal power. Each serves both your spiritual and material growth.

1. AFFIRMATIONS/VISUALIZATION

The power is in the word. Your word becomes your experience unless you negate it with other words, thoughts or refuse to accept it. Affirmations inform the universe and your subconscious mind you are willing to accept the power of your word. Affirmations are short, positive, present tense statements you desire to be true. Visualization has the same effect, but is created by mental pictures instead of words. You have 70,000 thoughts a day. How many times will you commit to this practice today?

2. CONSCIOUS INTENTION

Consciously setting your intention to *be* (not to do or have) specific qualities, will call forth those qualities from within your highest self, where they already reside. If I set my intention to *be wisdom* in all my business dealings, my

unconscious will focus on the wisdom that is within me and operate from it throughout the day

3. MEDITATION

Meditation benefits every area of life. Through it you find the stillpoint within—the place where you cultivate your spiritual intuition, and where the Infinite offers you clarity, courage, focus, revelation, guidance, peace, patience, and wisdom. Give yourself the gift of regular meditation.

4. PRAYER

Prayer is the primary anchor for the others. Affirmative prayer can create any experience you choose; it is *always* answered. The power of prayer is to realize its purpose is to change *your* mind, not God's; to trust; and to surrender the means to answered prayer to the universe

5. SERVICE

The spiritual practice of service serves you. It reminds you of your oneness with others. It cultivates the quality of commitment. It creates the reciprocal response of service to you. It assures you always have more to give; as you create the metaphysical vacuum, more good is called forth to fill it with matching energy. Expend yourself in service, and watch the universe expend itself for you.

6. TITHING

Tithing is a spiritual practice when performed as a conscious connection to Spirit. It comes from your

awareness that God is your only source; you are one with it and with the universal laws of attraction to the energy of gratitude and generosity. It is an ancient practice proven to enrich your life and move you to greater spiritual maturity

7. VISIONING

Visioning is a sibling of prayer and meditation. As you seek greater clarity, the visioning process asks questions of the Infinite, then awaits answers in stillness and faith.

APPLYING THE SKILLS TO YOUR LIFE

1. AFFIRMATIONS/VISUALIZATION

Understanding the Skill:

The power is in the word. Your word becomes your experience unless you negate it with other words, thoughts or refuse to accept it. Affirmations inform the universe and your subconscious mind you are willing to accept the power of your word. Visualization has the same effect, but is created by mental pictures instead of words. Affirmations are short, positive, present tense statements you desire to be true.

Applying to Your Life:

Affirmations and Visualization are especially helpful when you need to do a “U-turn” in your thinking. When you are really stuck in an old pattern, let’s say you keep attracting the same boss who doesn’t support you. You change jobs and get a new boss who is just the same as your old one—except with a different name and face and at a different company! You use the spiritual skill of affirming, “My boss and I have a mutually supportive working relationship.” And you visualize what that would be like, in clear mental pictures. The more you practice, the more you’ll find the situation changing to your ideal.

2. CONSCIOUS INTENTION

Understanding the Skill:

Consciously setting your intention to *be* (not to do or have) specific qualities, will call forth those qualities from within your highest self, where they already reside. If I set my intention to *be wisdom* in all my business dealings, my unconscious will focus on the wisdom that is within me and operate from it throughout the day.

Applying to Your Life:

This is a useful spiritual skill when you are trying to grow into a new behavior. The above example of claiming wisdom as your intention is a good one because it illustrates that your life experience is a choice, and setting your intention to be aligned with higher choices is a powerful spiritual practice. Sometimes we like to whine that we don't know how to change from being critical to being accepting, for example. This skill is about *just deciding*. Once you do, Spirit and the universe will take over and assist you in the new thoughts, words, and deeds that will create the better experience you want.

3. MEDITATION

Understanding the Skill:

Meditation benefits every area of life. Through it you find the stillpoint within—the place where you cultivate your spiritual intuition, and where the Infinite offers you clarity, courage, focus, revelation, guidance, peace, patience, and wisdom. Give yourself the gift of regular meditation.

Applying to Your Life:

I know that when I am really stuck—when I can't understand what's happening in my life, or why it doesn't look like I want it to, or when I don't know what the next step should be—meditation is the skill that attracts me. I know that if I can get still enough long enough the clarity will come. So, when you need guidance from wisdom greater than your own, sit quietly and allow your mind to be at rest. Set your intention (skill number 2) to be open and receptive and at peace. Invite the Infinite Presence into your consciousness, then give up any resistance and listen to what it has to offer. I've learned in my life that God always has a better idea.

4. PRAYER

Understanding the Skill:

Prayer is the primary anchor for the others. Affirmative prayer can create any experience you choose; it is *always* answered. The power of prayer is to realize its purpose is to change your mind, not God's; to trust; and to surrender the means to answered prayer to the universe. To pray an affirmative prayer is to claim the highest and best for the object of your prayer—the person, situation, place or thing—and then to know firmly that it is manifesting. You start by recognizing the presence of a higher power as the only power there is, and that It is always working for the highest and best in life. Then acknowledge that you are made of that same power, so that your own affirmative word is powerful. Then speak your word—what you want to see manifest—and let it go in gratitude! Know that it is done, and that the universe will handle the details. I'm really sure about this—God does not require your micromanagement assistance.

Applying to Your Life:

Prayer really is the foundation spiritual skill, the all-purpose one. I do want you to understand that God does not have a list of what it's OK to pray about and what it's not OK to pray about. I had a client who had to implement some new policies in her company but she was afraid to move forward. Prayer and meditation and visioning had led her to create the policies, but now she was frozen in fear (you know, those “but what if” fears). I told her “Well, pray for courage!” She didn't want to because she believed

God had done enough for her business and now she should just muster up her own courage. Not so! There is no “enough” from God. We are given everything we need, the minute we ask. God’s grace is in infinite supply. So pray for courage, for wisdom or whatever you need. Pray for your cat and dog, for your computer, for world peace and for your fitness program, for easy traffic on your commute, for fun on your birthday. God is ready, waiting, and eager to help with *all* of it.

5. SERVICE

Understanding the Skill:

The spiritual practice of service serves you. It reminds you of your oneness with others. It cultivates the quality of commitment. It creates the reciprocal response of service to you. It assures you always have more to give; as you create the metaphysical vacuum more good is called forth to fill it with matching energy. Expend yourself in service, and watch the universe expend itself for you.

Applying to Your Life:

The most important guideline to remember about the spiritual skill of service is to serve only as you are motivated in your heart. Otherwise nobody wins. When an opportunity arises to be on a committee or participate in a volunteer project here is how to decide. Get out of your logical mind, and check in with your inner guidance. That is where your truest choices are made. Please promise me and yourself you will never say “yes” out of obligation or because something is a good cause or just because it needs doing. Serve only from love—what you love doing. Then everybody wins.

6. TITHING

Understanding the Skill:

Tithing is a spiritual practice when performed as a conscious connection to Spirit. It comes from your awareness that God is your only source; you are one with It, and of universal laws of attraction to the energy of gratitude and generosity. It is an ancient practice proven to enrich your life and move you to greater spiritual maturity.

Applying to Your Life:

Tithe a specific percentage—traditionally ten percent or more—of your gross income. Tithe to *where you are spiritually nourished*. Like the practice of service (see # 5), *never* tithe from obligation, guilt, or pressure. Tithing is between you and God, not you and a church or a good cause organization. The purpose of tithing is to nourish financially where you are nourished spiritually. You support what supports you. I have tithed to my church, and I have tithed to some unlikely recipients—a basketball coach, a book publisher, one of my children, a client, my hairdresser. In each case, these people or organizations inspired and uplifted me, and strengthened me spiritually. When you tithe thoughtfully and fearlessly, you'll find it has greater meaning in your life, and brings you greater prosperity as well.

7. VISIONING

Understanding the Skill:

Visioning is a sibling of prayer and meditation. As you seek greater clarity, the visioning process asks questions of the Infinite, then awaits answers in stillness and faith.

Applying to Your Life:

Use this skill when you want greater clarity about the purpose and the form for something in your life. Let's say you desire an intimate partnership. Get into a meditative "space" in your mind, but instead of just being open to Spirit's message, ask for specific clarity about what your ideal is for that partnership, what the experience would be, and what you might need to see, be, or set free in order for it to come into form. Take notes after your visioning session, and expect that more knowledge will come to you over time. Remember two things. Be open to whatever you learn, and be in gratitude. Once you get the hang of it, you'll use visioning for your career, health, finances, and every aspect of your life. It's another example of God having a better idea!

Go to www.reverendmargaret.com to subscribe to Margaret's free workweek inspiration "T.G.I.M.–Thank God It's Monday!" and the "Weekly Power Principle." While you're there, check out her other writings, audios, and seminars. You may also reach her at (800) 264-9690.



Reverend Margaret Shepherd, MBA is a minister of Religious Science, a former management consultant and business owner. She is dedicated to your spiritual and material fulfillment. She offers VisionBuilding seminars, retreats, and mastermind teams in the Los Angeles area and teaches and speaks internationally. Her articles have been published in several national magazines, and her books, tapes and CDs are published by Crowheart Media PO Box 1661 Glendale, CA 91209. She is a popular speaker at conferences, international association meetings, and churches. Visit her website for a press kit and booking information.