

Seven Paths of Spiritual Practice

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1. Coming into presence

The Means: conscious breath

The Result: owning time, “seeing”

The Quality Attained: being

The Positive Ideals : *huzur*, spontaneity, *ibn al waqt*, *taqwa*, self-awareness

Presence is the activation of an inclusive awareness that is simultaneously receptive on all levels, in all directions, witnessing time rather than being coerced by it. Presence is the soul in command. Presence is the realization of the context of life, the capacity to simultaneously observe thought, feeling, sense impressions, and behavior. Presence is fulfilled in an extraordinary capacity for “seeing”. It becomes obvious how much of contemporary human life is robotic, how people function mechanically, even doing harm to each other they would never do if they could “see.” Practice: *Become aware of your breath, your physical body, your thoughts at this actual moment, and your emotional state. Add to this the divine name “Hu.”*

2. Awakening intention

The Means: reason

The Result: overcoming distraction, sustaining intent and purpose

The Quality Attained: commitment

The Positive Ideals: *niyyah*, sincerity, intention, *himma*

Few people live an intentional life; fewer still live a life of intentional selfless service. Most people live a life based on attraction and avoidance. An intentional life can accelerate the path to truth and freedom, but only if our intention is based on wisdom, i.e. objective spiritual laws. After sufficient observation of the self’s behaviors, after learning from experience, *awakened reason* (informed by the heart) draws certain conclusions, derives certain principles, and decides upon a course of action. The power of reason under the guidance of the heart mobilizes itself through language—a few well-chosen words, a crafted phrase. Energy follows thought. Intention is constructed on a higher plane and shapes manifestation. Each month Threshold offers a theme that could be held as an intention and reminder. Practice: *Compose an intention for yourself, write it out, and place it somewhere where it can be seen by you. Each morning, as you wake up. Recall this intention; and, likewise, each night as you lie down in bed, remind yourself of your intention and how much you remembered or acted on it.*

3. Sustaining awareness

The Means: moment by moment concentrated attention

The Result: reducing inner talking, daydreaming, etc.

The Quality Attained: sustained, patient attention

The Positive Ideals: *sabr* (patience), *tawakkul* (trust), moment by moment equanimity and openness

When awareness can be sustained, our quality of life changes. Instead of jumping from thought to thought, from one emotional state to another, from one object of attention to another, the awakened soul can move beyond superficialities and experience the spiritual nature of reality. Less dominated by inner talking, conflicting desires, and imaginary fears, the essential self begins to perceive the meaning and grace within events. Practice 1: *Using prayer beads, invoke a divine name, being sure that you are conscious with each repetition; when you notice that you have slipped into forgetfulness, start again from the beginning. Choose a number of repetitions within your capacity (33, 66, 99) and intend to sustain your conscious awareness for that number.* Practice 2: *While taking a walk, breathe the name “Hu” eleven exhalations; gradually increase your capacity to 33. Always remember these are not mere sounds, but names of the Divine.*

4. **Transcending self-interest**

The Means grounding in sensation

The Result: freedom from the lies & traps of the false self

The Quality Attained: humility

The Positive Ideals: *fana* (disappearance of the false self), dervishhood, modesty

Imagine a spectrum of the self: at one end is complete self-centeredness, and at the other end—selflessness. At one end of the spectrum a person thinks continually and obsessively about themselves, and perceives everything only as it relates to the image they hold of themselves. At the other end is a state much more difficult to describe, a state of awareness that is open and free, and yet can make conscious choices and act decisively. If we find ourselves too close to that state of the obsessive self-centeredness, always thinking about ourselves and our desires, we can free ourselves from this complex of desires by grounding ourselves in sensation (including an awareness of the breath). With sensation and conscious breath we come more and more into a state of balance. Sensation is a remedy for acute states of emotional or mental imbalance. Performing ablutions (*wudu*) can also help to restore balance, cleansing of the preoccupations of habitual self. Finally, observing and knowing ourselves in light of an authentic spiritual teaching will increasingly guide us toward humility, sincerity, and freedom from self-centeredness. Practice: *breathe in a feeling of “I-ness without I”, breathe out while experiencing sensation in a particular part of your body — for example, the palms of your hands, your feet, your chest.*

5. **Deepening in Remembrance**

The Means: immersing in stillness

The Result: overcoming heedlessness

The Quality Attained: love of God

The Positive Ideals: *ishk*, intimacy, faith

Remembrance is the ultimate spiritual practice. Through *deep remembrance* we find the still point within

ourselves, the state where we are closest to God. Mevlana says, “Come to the root of the root of yourself.” By seeing ourselves from the perspective of that still point we may realize what we are like when we are in a state of heedlessness, when we forget what is truly of importance and value. When we can view ourselves from that still point we see how the concerns of the ego dominate us and distort reality. But most importantly, when we are in that still point we experience an inward beauty and serenity. It is in this stillness that the love of God is found. We then begin to understand that the Truth is that we are integral to God, and that falsehood is whatever separates or distances us from God. *Practice: prolonged meditation in which we orient ourselves to the “dimensionless point” within.*

6. Expressing Gratitude & Wonder

The Means: holy sound

The Result: overcoming fear & complacency

The Quality Attained: creativity, freedom of Spirit

The Positive Ideals: *baqa*, wonder, glorification, creativity

Gratitude is the active expression of what is found through remembrance of God. It is also another way to develop remembrance. But we can only truly glorify God when we have “tasted” (dhawq) the center. Glorification is not a state of emotional excitement, even if it may sometimes appear to be an ecstatic exuberance. Glorification flows out of an empty center. The kind of music that is born in the Tekke (Sufi Lodge) becomes a template for the expression of glorification. Through the culture of the Tekke, we follow invisibly in the footsteps of those who have gone before. Eventually, that creative expression becomes a natural way of being. *Practice: It can be as simple as repeating any divine name sincerely, consciously, for example — “Alhamdulillah, Alhamdulillah, Alhamdulillah.”*

7. Radiating Blessing

The Means unconditional love

The Result: freedom from prejudice & negativity

The Quality Attained: purity

The Positive Ideals: *rahmah*, generosity, purity

After journeying through the states described above, after observing how mixed we are inside, sometimes feeling love, peace, or nearness to God, and sometimes being overcome by doubt, judgment, or resentment, we will come to appreciate the beauty and pleasure of simply radiating blessing. Negativity need not enter even at the level of thought. What higher state is there for a human being? We always have this choice in front of us, if we can be conscious, if we can remember. The one who radiates blessing is "empty in God" and is free of the false self and its concerns. *Practice: Breathe in light from above, down into your heart, and let that light reflect from the heart as blessing.*

Reminders:

Step through the door of presence.

Awaken the power of intention.

Overcome distraction and sustain attention.

Escape the prison of the false self.

Enter the ocean of remembrance.

Express gratitude and awe.

Radiate blessing.

This Means:

Conscious Breath

Intentional Reason

Sustained Attention

Grounding in Sensation

Deepening into Stillness

Holy Sound

Unconditional Love