

Living by the Heart

An Introduction to the *Guidelines for Living the Way of the Heart*

Finding practical ways to live a spiritual and holy life

The Theosophical Fellowship
& Heart Flow Worldwide

Living by the Heart – Finding practical ways to live a spiritual and holy life

The teaching in the *Guidelines for Living the Way of the Heart* provides the student who wants to walk a spiritual path with practical guidance about how to live from the heart. These guidelines are ones that the Master, Lord Maitreya has offered to those who want to begin to walk the Way of the Heart. The Way of the Heart is a universal and global path. It is not connected with an organisation or a religion, but is an organism of men, women, and children who want to live loving their fellow beings. The Way of the Heart is walked by those of humanity who seek the unity of the same goal for all: to bring about joy and peace in the hearts of all living beings.

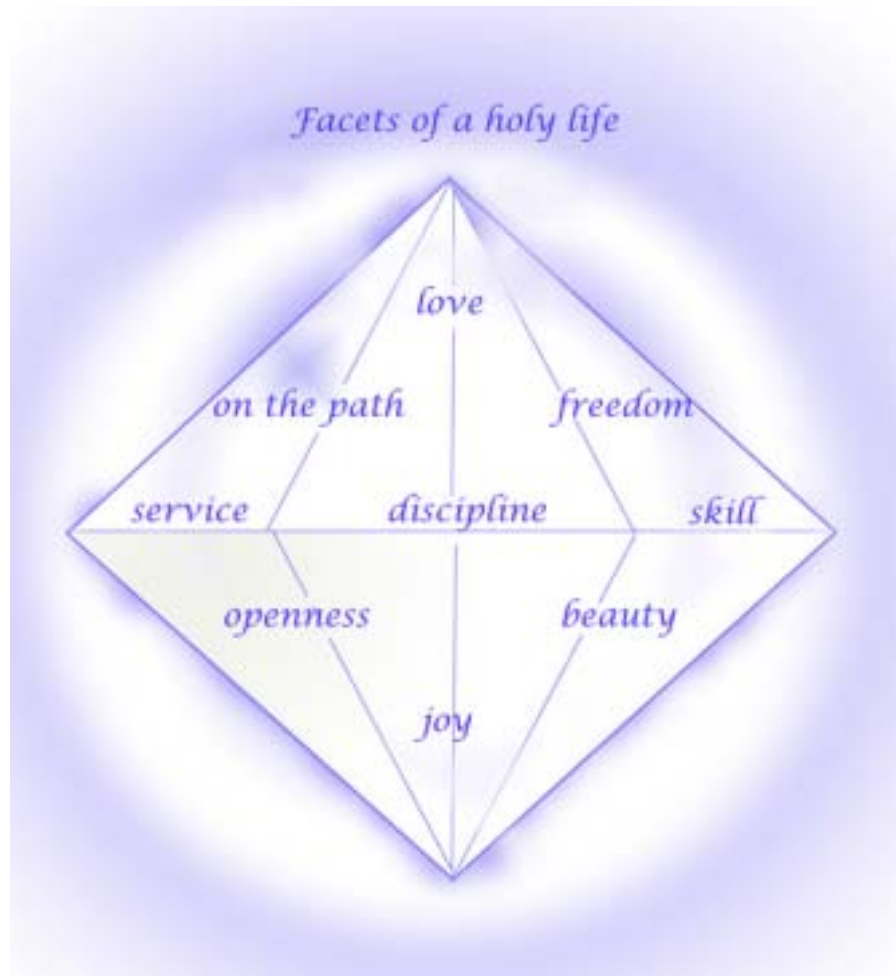
The Guidelines for Living the Way of the Heart were compiled by Ananda Tara Shan, a Theosophical teacher and mystic who strives to help those who want to walk the path to do so in a practical way, to live the divine wisdom long present in all religious traditions and still being revealed today. The full document of the Guidelines for Living the Way of the Heart is available from The Theosophical Fellowship. This small booklet, written by a lecturer in the Fellowship, provides an introduction to the Guidelines, a framework for thinking about them, and some suggestions about practicing them.



What IS a spiritual and holy life?

It is helpful to know where we want to go, to know what a spiritual and holy life might look like. Of course, many descriptions have been offered over the centuries, and this interpretation is simply one through my eyes. When you think of a spiritual and holy life, what are the important characteristics of that for you? Perhaps you might think of particular people you consider holy and look at what their lives are like.

It seems to me that a holy life is a life lived from the heart, which means a life lived with love and forgiveness. How that comes about in a life is through many different facets. I've represented my thinking about facets of a holy life through a model of a diamond:



Within each facet is much more than the one word written there – beyond/within each is a full constellation of qualities, related, inter-mingled, making up a whole – different for each individual, yet recognizable as a shared virtue. Within love, for example, I believe you find the direct expression of love, but you would also see friendliness, non-judgment, compassion, and forgiveness. Within the idea of being on the path, you will also find attunement to the inner life, the seeking of truth, striving to live according to divine laws, and faith.

The facet of freedom, it seems to me, involves being free to choose the path of good, free from societal pressure, free from the lure of glamour and ambition, free from the desire nature within, and free from the control of the shadow. The facet of service is just that – helping others – and it involves sacrifice and hard work.

There is a facet which I have called here “discipline”, an alternative term for this is “obedience” – though that word has somewhat of a bad name in our culture. The obedience I’m talking about is obedience to one’s conscience, following the instructions of one’s soul or of divine wisdom. A holy person has a disciplined life – the discipline might be to always be loving, or it might be to always do the dishes, or to always refrain from taking part in gossip.

Part of discipline, too, might be willingness to change when change is needed. Loyalty may also be an aspect of discipline – loyalty to the spiritual cause. The spiritual path is not without its critics, and sometimes we may be called upon to defend our beliefs, our teachings, the fact that we choose to live a spiritual life. It takes discipline to maintain the principles in the face of challenge.

I think the life of a holy person also has to do with skill – and while this might be specific helping skills like engineering or nursing, it seems to me that there are also skills of self-management: attunement to the positive, awareness of the negative, self-knowledge, trustworthiness, honesty, creativity, leadership, harmless language, and no doubt other skills.

To be holy is to be inclusive, hence a quality of openness on the diamond. This is an openness within yourself – an openness to growing; and an openness to others, tolerance of all people and all differences, an openness to ideas.

People who live a holy life radiate beauty into the world. Some also add beauty through form, but I think the beauty which comes to me as a characteristic of a holy life is the radiance of light that glows from the person.

Finally, joy is a facet of a holy life – whether an inner or an outer joy, it seems to me that a person living a holy life experiences and often shares joy. The joy in some is evident playfulness and high spirit; in others, it is more subtle, revealing itself in their faith and devotion.

The light in the diamond is love. To live a holy life is to live from the heart, from the place of love. To do this is very difficult, but it is possible, and having guidelines to live by does help.

To live a holy life may seem daunting, but even a holy life is made up of small stories, a series of moments, successes, failures, stumbling, getting up, trying again, and every once in a while, soaring. Like a diamond, a holy life comes about from dark material put under great pressure over thousands of years, until finally the crystal emerges into the light, a complex array of form and energy, brilliant with its own light and reflecting the beautiful and glorious light of the universe.

Each path to the completed diamond is unique. Your way, my way will be our own; we are sparks of God, but individual ones. Yet we may travel a particular path of teachings that can help us get to the diamond.

The Guidelines for Living the Way of the Heart

Teaching about guidelines for a spiritual life are found in all religions and philosophies, and many of them are common across the different perspectives. Buddhist teachings, for example, speak of giving up evil, doing good, cleansing your mind and heart, meditating and using mantras, and cultivating the qualities of the eightfold path, for example, right thought, which includes metta, loving kindness; karuna, com-compassion; mudita, sharing the joy of others; and upaka, equanimity. A beautiful expression of Theosophical teachings about living a spiritual life comes in the little book *At the Feet of the Master*. There, the Master told Alcyone, the author, that there are four qualifications for the path: Discrimination, Desirelessness, Good Conduct, and Love. In a book about Mother Teresa, her way is described as a simple path, with five steps: Silence, Prayer, Faith, Love, Service, and Peace. These steps are related in this way:

The fruit of silence is prayer
The fruit of prayer is faith
The fruit of faith is love
The fruit of love is service
The fruit of service is peace.

[From *Mother Teresa: A Simple Path* (1995) ,
compiled by Lucinda Vardey. London: Rider, p. 39.]

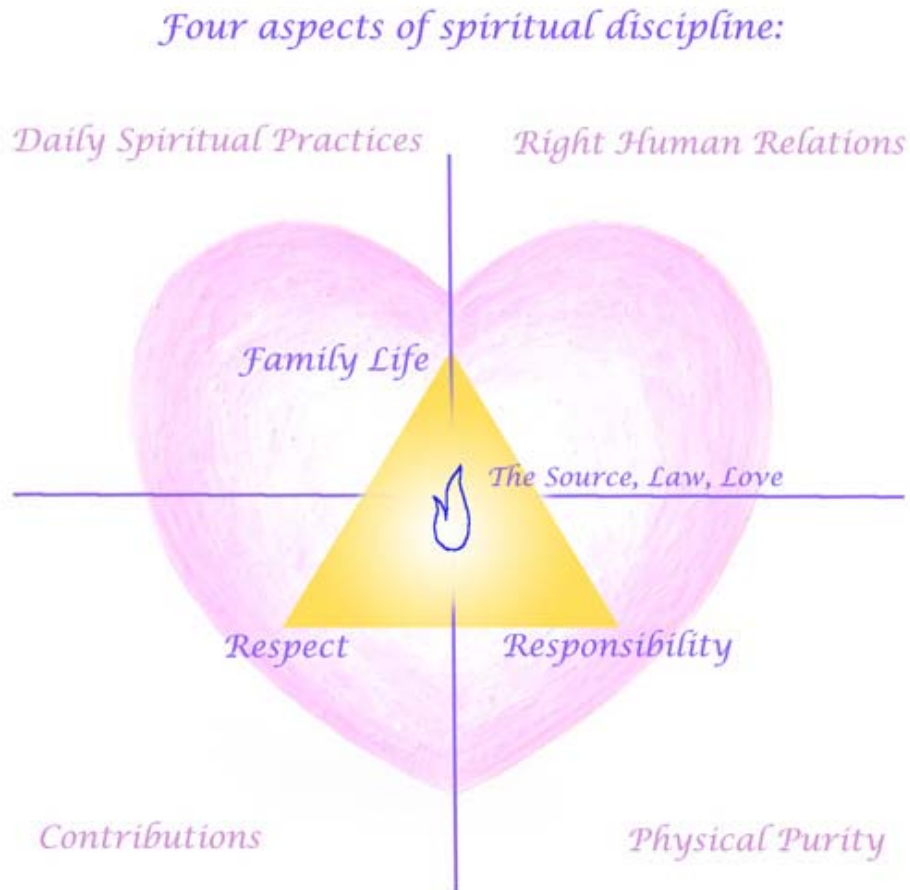
These guidelines or ideas or goals for spiritual living vary in level of abstraction – some are quite specific and tell us directly what to do (such as, obey the physical law; keep your body clean). Some, though, are broad – for example, to give up evil or to cleanse your mind, and – for me at least – I could use some help to make them more practical, more specific.

At the same time, we need to be careful not to generate a long list, almost like a shopping list, of things we must do. Aside from evoking resistance from the personality, a long list is harder to remember, and thus, it's easier to give up. I can already hear the complaint from my little self saying, “how can I possibly do all those things – I don't have time!” To help with this dilemma, I have created a structure for the set of guidelines so that it becomes somewhat simplified and more memorable. As I work with this structure, I believe it will help me to live the guidelines over time.



A framework for the Guidelines

While the Guidelines document contains a good deal of elaboration and interpretation, one can get an overview of the categories and concepts through the phrase, the One – the Four – the Three, and visually through the model shown below.



The One:

There is one task for my life: to live from the heart – to strive to live from the heart.

There is one Law, and that law has to do with love.

If I am to focus on anything, it should be on love.

I should meditate on love, contemplate love, open myself to love, experience love, give love.

To live from the heart is to live with love and forgiveness

To live from the heart requires discipline, because the personality has many desires that are not governed by love.

The One is also the Source, the Divine, manifesting as the Law, as Love. It is a reminder of our Godself, the way back to the Source for us. We must stay in touch with the Source as the way to God.



The Four:

To achieve the task of living from the heart, we need to work on four aspects of spiritual discipline.

I. Daily Spiritual Practices

The Daily Spiritual Practices include daily meditation and attunement to the plan; prayer; sadhana, which is stilling the mind and going within to listen to God and to your Higher Self; contemplation; study of spiritual texts; keeping a journal; and self-surrender, which means calling the Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Buddha, the Masters into our lives to help us with our problems.

It's important and helpful to know why we should be doing these daily spiritual practices. Why meditate, for example? Why should I find time each day to meditate, to connect to my inner self? In meditation, I can contact my soul. In the quietness of meditation, light can get through. I can share light with others. So the purpose of meditation is to enable soul contact, to bring light in, and to purify the inner bodies so that we may be of service. Thus, what I am doing when I do make time to meditate is that I am working on the purification of my inner bodies and I am serving. When I miss a day of meditation, I have skipped class, I have not taken the bath which my inner bodies need. I have delayed my graduation to being able to help better, and I have neglected a volunteer commitment, an opportunity to serve by spreading light. I'm not trying to generate guilt as a motivator for anyone to meditate. I'm just trying to present some reasons why it's worth challenging the resistant part of me to get around to meditating every day.

The Guidelines for daily spiritual practices are expressed in these ways:

Daily meditation and attunement to the plan

The guideline: Meditate daily and attune yourself with Master's Plan.

Prayer

The guideline: Spend some time daily in prayer.

Sadhana

The guideline: In every second hour that you are awake throughout the day, set a few minutes aside, still your mind, and go within. Think then about God; make space to listen to God and to your Higher Self.

Contemplation

The guideline: Take time regularly to contemplate problems or matters that interest you.

Study

The guideline: Try to study Theosophical texts 30 minutes a day and write notes about what you are learning, questions that arise, insights you gain.

Journal keeping

The guideline: It is recommended that you keep a diary or journal of your personal development.

Self-surrender

The guideline: Practice self-surrender by calling the Christ, the Buddha, the Mother Christ, or the Holy Spirit into your life and into your problems.

Daily Spiritual Practices form a key part of our curriculum for spiritual development, the plan for helping us to live a holy life.

II. Right Human Relations

The second quadrant of the Guidelines has to do with what is called Right Human Relations. This is probably the area of greatest commonality across religions and philosophies – that there are some behaviours which we know to be part of a good life, a holy life, a Christian life, being a good Buddhist, and so on. There could be many, many guidelines in this area, but this expression of guidelines for spiritual living contains 13 recommendations:

Harmonious and loving interactions with others

The guideline: In all your interactions with those close to you, and with those you meet in your daily life, strive to live these principles:

- Harmlessness
- The Law of Christ:
 - Love one another in actions as well as in thought.
- Purity of heart
- Purity of motive

- Openness to the need of humanity:
- It is better to give than to take, to share rather than keep to yourself, and to distribute rather than to grasp.
- Remember, too, the Law of Justice:
What is sown must be reaped.

Right livelihood

The guideline: Strive to earn your livelihood in a way that is consistent with the principle of harmlessness and other aspects of right livelihood

Punctuality

The guideline: Be on time for all appointments, without undue rushing which may disrupt the work or your calmness.

Polite conversation

The guideline: Speak to others in a friendly, polite, and considerate manner. When you have something to say, check to see if it will pass through these four gates before you say it:

Is it true?

Is it kind?

Is it necessary?

Is it the right time?

(The Four Gates of Patanjali)

Refrain from gossip.

Courteous use of language

The guideline: Avoid swearing, stereotypic language, and undesirable humour.

Positive expectations of others

The guideline: Control negative expectations about others.

Creating community

The guidelines: Strive to learn group consciousness, to work together and transcend individual differences. Work to contribute to a sense of community within the group and in relations with the larger society.

Strive to learn to live with good community spirit in the home.

Hold house meetings on a regular basis, and include each adult in important decision-making. Where the matter is relevant to them, include children in discussions and decision-making (at a level appropriate to their development), and explain to them the reasons for decisions and actions.

Giving feedback

The guideline: Give positive feedback, and convey constructive criticism when it is honest, helpful, and given with a correct motive.

Silence and confidentiality

The guideline: Cultivate silence, and respect confidentiality.

Appropriate criticism

The guideline: Give criticism carefully, making sure that it is truthful, constructive, and directed to the appropriate persons or office within the organisation. [Remember again the four gates of polite conversation.]

Right thought

The guideline: Work to think positively, avoiding negative thoughts and dwelling on fears or worries. Try to let your Higher Self think through you.

Honesty

The guideline: Be truthful at all times.

Regard for the physical law

The guideline: Obey the physical law.

III. Contributions

Another area of the guidelines has to do with Contributions, and it's quite a clear, and perhaps even easy area to understand and follow. The purpose of these contributions is to help others, and the two guidelines are tithing and service.

The advice about tithing is:

The guideline: Tithe to where your heart is or to what your heart believes in.

Tithing means paying one-tenth of one's after tax income to a good cause.

The advice regarding service is:

The guideline: Give regular (weekly) voluntary to an organisation or cause which works for spiritual or humanitarian purposes.

IV. Physical Purity

The fourth quadrant is physical purity, and it refers to physical purity of ourselves and our surroundings. The purpose of being clean and living in clean surroundings is to cleanse, heal and uplift our inner bodies, and to enable the light to come through us, into the world. The Basic Exercise meditation, the first practice in the Shan Theosophical Meditation System, has been described as a daily spiritual shower; to go with that, we need an equally clean physical body. The body is the temple of the soul; a clean body respects the soul's temple. Physical purity also has to do with our health; we strive towards good health in order to be fit to serve.

So the guidelines for physical purity are these:

Healthy and wholesome food

The guideline: Healthy food should be prepared with love and attentiveness to the task, and served with consideration for beauty, in order to nurture your spirit as well your body. Organic food should be chosen where possible. The food should be blessed before it is eaten.

Daily physical exercise

The guideline: Exercise daily

Personal cleanliness

The guideline: Maintain personal cleanliness, including the body and clothes

Healthy sleeping conditions

The guideline: Sleep on a clean mattress, kept off the floor, with clean sheets, changed at least weekly.

Creating a pure environment

The guideline: Maintain a clean and pure environment in your house, your car, and your work space through a routine of regular cleaning and attention to order and beauty.



The Three:

There are three other guidelines, which I've represented as an inner triangle. Having a loving family life is a key point. Families, partnerships, children are places where we get lots of opportunity to practice living a spiritual and holy life. The purpose of the guidelines is really to create a nurturing environment for spiritual growth, a place to model right human relations and love.

The guidelines are these:

Family life

The guideline: The close relationship between partners in a spiritually-minded couple should become a spiritually beautifying experience that will benefit the unity within the couple and will benefit the children, should there be children in the family.

Attention to the home and family roles

The guideline: Both partners should work to create a harmonious and spiritual home, giving attention to cleanliness, order, healthy and carefully planned food, attractive surroundings, and a warm and cosy atmosphere.

Care for children

The guideline: Give great attention and care to the upbringing of children, particularly to their education. Attend to your dharma as a parent first before other duties. Follow the guidelines in White Tara's Care for Children.

The second point of the triangle is respect. We are asked to show respect for the spiritual work, for the teachings and the teachers in order to allow the work to continue in harmony, to acknowledge the sacredness in the teachings, to demonstrate one's love for the divine law, and to nurture purity, humility, and right desire. Such respect will assist in bringing the light through us to the world. Imagine if we expected the teachings to come through a disrespectful channel, a person who did not respect the teachings. Better to focus on the beauty of coming through a truly respectful vessel. Respect is when we stand when the Teacher comes into the room; when we change our shoes at the door of the Sanctuary; when we remain loyal to the teachings.

The guidelines concerning respect are these:

Showing respect for the spiritual work

The guideline: Show respect to the teachings, the spiritual work, the teacher, the minister, the spiritual organisation.

Respect via harmony

The advice: If you are visiting a retreat of the Master, it is wise to recognise that this is a very special place, requiring a harmonious, peaceful, loving environment. In a retreat, it is especially important that you focus on living in the spirit of right human relations, particularly maintaining polite conversation.

Respect via clothing

The guideline: Wear white clothing during church services and at special spiritual events such as festivals in order to nurture purity and right desire within the body.

Devotion and loyalty

The guideline: Develop the feeling of true devotion and loyalty toward the Cause, the teacher, and the Master.

The final point of the triangle has to do with taking responsibility for one's spiritual development. The purpose of these guidelines is again to nurture spiritual development and to assist people in preventing and solving the inevitable problems that arise along the path.

The guidelines are these:

Seeking help

The guideline: It is good and responsible to seek help to deal with your problems and concerns through prayer, meditation, contemplation, healing, and counselling. To consult with a minister or counsellor within the spiritual organisation from time to time about your concerns is a good practice.

A person committed to spiritual development will benefit substantially from regular spiritual healings and spiritual therapy; the general recommendation for frequency is to have a healing at a minimum of once every three to four weeks. It is advisable to seek healers who are

recommended by one's spiritual organisation, as other healers may interfere with the delicate work of building the Light of the Master into the chakras. It is advisable not to mix healing systems.

Discrimination

The guideline: Practise discrimination in all interactions. Learn to distinguish between the real and the unreal, as well as between "the right and the wrong, the important and the unimportant, the useful and the useless, the true and the false, the selfish and the unselfish" (*At the Feet of the Master*).

Be especially alert to discriminate when dealing with clairvoyants, channels, and spiritual and esoteric messengers and publications.

Balance between self-concern and selflessness

The guideline: Work to maintain a good balance between concern with self and selflessness.

A Theosophical attitude

The guideline: Strive to learn and practise a Theosophical attitude in daily situations. Accept the perfect as well as the imperfect.



In conclusion

Thus we have a more detailed picture of the whole represented as One – Four - Three:

One task: to strive to live from the heart

One Law, the Law of Love

One Source, the Divine, manifesting as Love

Four areas of spiritual discipline:

Daily Spiritual Practices

Right Human Relations

Contributions

Physical Purity

Three areas that nurture spiritual development:

A loving family life

Respect for the work

Responsibility for one's growth

Within each of these areas, there is of course lots to learn, lots to do, much study and much self-discipline to be worked out. Exploring even a part of these ideas goes beyond this booklet. I would like, however, to offer a few points that might be of help as you contemplate how to live the spiritual discipline represented in the Guidelines.

Finding practical ways to live the guidelines, to live the discipline

- Understand, explore and focus on the purpose of each guideline.
 - For example, vacuuming is not simply for cleanliness in itself or even purity - vacuuming makes a clean space for the angels to be able to work with you, to foster your spiritual development and the development of your family.

- Have positive thoughts about the guidelines.
- Set priorities – if you can't do everything today, what is most important?
- Limit your expectations (especially of perfection).
- Minimise barriers – whatever your particular barriers are, see if you can shrink them.
- Start: “getting started is half done.”
- Find your own way, the way that works for you.
 - Think about what support is needed.
 - Talk with others and find what helps them.
- Take small steps – add one per week.
- Set up conditions for success:
 - Meditation, healing, study, starting over, mantras, prayer, humour, simplify, sacred time – whatever it takes!

- Start over – forgive yourself and begin again.

In these spiritual teachings, as in others, we have a well laid out curriculum for our spiritual development, which if we follow, will enable us to serve better.

We experience, at least in glimpses, the joy, love, and beauty of a holy life, the diamond of a holy life, the emerging diamond of our lives. We are under pressure, some people great pressure, and are being transformed. By striving to live from the heart, by applying our will and our love to this task, we can heal others and ourselves.

The conclusion to the Guidelines document offers these final thoughts:

Do your best to walk the Path. Share with others. Nurture community. Learn to be a balanced human being who puts the right effort into walking the Path. We are not perfect, yet, but we are on the path. By living according to these guidelines for a Theosophical life, your path will be a beautiful and loving one, and the path for humanity and the Earth will be made better.

May the ideal of that better life for humanity and the Earth inspire you and uplift you and give you strength to live from the heart, with love and forgiveness of self and others.



Mary Faeth Chenery has written the text in this booklet that surrounds the content taken from the Guidelines for Living the Way of the Heart. Mary Faeth is General Secretary of Heart Flow Worldwide. She holds a Ph.D. in psychology, and studies and lives the question of what it takes to help people change.

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