

40 Spiritual Principles

or

a 40-Day Journey Towards Spiritual Growth

(Based on Iyanla Vanzant, *One Day My Soul Just Opened Up*)

Iyanla Vanzant, despite having grown up in a church, had for many years remained uncertain, fearful and confused about God – afraid that God was always there to get her and punish her for what she did wrong. One day something changed and she came to the realization that God's presence is within her heart. She has come to believe that God and Jesus are walking with her and love her, and that the Spirit is teaching and guiding her. She sees that to believe in God means learning to honour our inherent godliness. God, the Creator of the universe, the divine energy of life, wants and needs to demonstrate through those walking with him the goodness he has in store for all people. In being the light of the world through the divine in us, we are to shine in the glory of this knowledge. God believes that we can do it.

In her book, *One Day My Soul Just Opened Up*, Iyanla shares principles she had discovered for a spiritual journey to God and with God. Below is a brief summary of each of the 40 principles. They are addressed under six overall headings:

- (1) Honour the Divine,
- (2) Honour Yourself,
- (3) Honour Others,
- (4) Honour Your Feelings,
- (5) Honour Your Process,
- (6) Honour Your Life.

Phase 1: Honour the Divine with ...

1. Truth

This is the Absolute, that which reveals and is in accord with the will of the Divine as the governing principle of life. Truth is eternal and unchanging. Truth related to the Divine exists at the core of every living being. The basic principle of truth is that the mind of every individual is eternally unified with the Divine Mind. As one's awareness expands and embraces the concept of divine truth, understanding unfolds. God is Truth – Truth is divine. Truth is greater than any problem on the physical level.

2. Trust

This is reliance on the Divine for all sustenance and supply – trusting the Divine to provide needed wisdom and guidance by relying on the intuition of the heart. By trusting the Divine – the signs and signals we receive – we learn to trust ourselves. Trust in the Divine is not the same as trust in people. Trust is an instrument of divine wisdom. Trust in Self (the Divine within) is trust in the Divine.

3. Prayer

Prayer is a form of communion – the method of communication between man and the Divine. It is also an inward exploration undertaken to cleanse and perfect consciousness, and an act of reaching in to the Higher Self. Prayer is a calling forth of the Divine that results in your mind, body, and spirit being brought into alignment

with what you need in any given moment. When we pray, we are asking for the intervention of Spirit on our behalf or someone else's behalf. Spiritual intervention is always a divine win-win situation that will unfold in a divine manner according to divine will. We'll recognise the answer to our prayer when it shows up.

4. Meditation

This is a way to accomplish stillness – stilling the physical/conscious mind to all external stimuli – in order to hear the Divine presence within. When we are still, the power of the Divine is active. The act of “not doing” is an attempt to expand the awareness of “being.” Meditation is also a continuous, contemplative thought given to Truth.

5. Willingness

This is a state of mental and emotional receptivity. The will is the controlling and directive faculty of the mind that determines consciousness and character.

Willingness is a state of consciousness that allows the mental faculty to be infused with the will of the Divine.

When we are willing to give up our thoughts to the Divine Mind, we receive Divine guidance. This enables us to elevate our feelings to a divine nature – love, openness and peace. Of all the spiritual principles that take us into moments of grace, willingness teaches us that when we are willing to give up what we have, the Divine will replace it tenfold.

6. Creativity

This is the invisible force behind all things seen, the innate ability of a living element to recreate itself, and the spiritual faculty of potentiality. It is also the ability of human beings to bring forth onto the physical/visible level that which is conceived, consciously or unconsciously, at the mental level and the emotional level. We all have the ability to create. Through our consciousness (thoughts) we have the creative power to shape and change our environment. The creative process begins with thought, moves to word, and is fulfilled in action. If our thoughts are loving, peaceful, and joyful, we'll be creating a positive environment around us. We have the power to change a destructive situation by praying for love and peace and calling forth the Divine, which can transfer a situation into a corrective healing experience.

7. Peacefulness

Peace is an internal state of harmony and tranquillity derived from the awareness of peace. To create peace around us, we must first be peaceful. We can choose peace in all situations. Nothing can disturb the peace we create within.

8. Simplicity

This is the state of being uncomplicated, clear, direct, and free of judgment. We tend to complicate everything, but can choose simplicity. Love is not complicated, but fear complicates all matters.

Phase 2: Honour Your Self with ...

1. Awareness

This is intuitive knowledge enabling us to recognize the truth in action. It is void of emotional charge or judgment. Life, through circumstances, makes us aware of what we need to know, but we cannot change what we are unwilling to face. Awareness

opens the mind and heart to new possibilities. We can choose to be aware (focus on) the beauty of life and living including the simple pleasures in life, joy, peace, love and goodness. What we are aware of and focus on will then become the reality in which we live.

2. Acceptance

This is recognition of what is, receiving it without criticism or judgment, embracing the fullness of a situation or experience, and an inner realization that all is well in the long run, regardless of the appearance. We need to accept reality, even if unpleasant, in order to make conscious choices – otherwise we remain victims of circumstances. Only when we withdraw the emotional attachment can we see clearly to make a wise decision. We then need courage, trust and patience to deal with the situation.

3. Affirmation

This is holding steadfast in mind or speaking aloud a statement of truth. Focus on good things about yourself since it is thoughts and words that ultimately determine our actions. Self-affirming expressions are needed to counteract the unpleasant things we have heard about ourselves. Remember that we each are a divine miracle and an instrument of the Divine present here to be a light of the world. The way we treat ourselves will determine how others treat us.

4. Choice

This is the ability to recognize alternatives and possible consequences, thereby enabling the selection of that which is most desirable, admirable, and honourable, and then act in response to the recognized alternatives. Choice is our divine teacher. Conscious choice is the path to personal power, while unconscious choice wins by default. Silence is a choice not to choose. If attuned to the Divine within, our choices will be sustained by divine wisdom.

5. Conservation

This is a state of mindful relaxation as well as preservation and protection of resources. To conserve our body, mind and spirit requires the willingness to occasionally be physically, mentally and emotionally still – even at the risk of appearing lazy. We also need to conserve resources such as our time, money and knowledge – giving with discretion and only to worthy causes and people. Also keep some for a rainy day. Conservation is a form of healing that results in self-awareness, self-forgiveness and self-esteem. Through conservation we learn to heal wounds acquired through toxic and self-defeating childhood beliefs. Conservation enables us to give our best when we are giving, doing or being. Learning to relax and conserve energy is one of the greatest gifts we can offer life.

6. Freedom

This is the spiritually induced quality or state of being without restraint, bondage, limitation or repression, and a state of inner and outer well-being. Freedom is not determined by physical positive or negative circumstances but rather is a state of mind. We become free when we learn to say 'no' without feeling guilty, when we learn to ask others for help, when we follow what we feel is the right course of action no matter what others think, and when we face the things we fear. Freedom from fear, guilt, false responsibilities, and the need for approval from others opens our mind to new choices, opportunities and amazing possibilities. When we make ourselves available for service to God, the guidance will come. Knowing the truth that we are in God's will and grace shall truly set us free.

7. Fun

This is a pursuit of joy in life. Every now and then we need activities that provide amusement as well as a mental and emotional release. Playing and having fun provides a new outlook on life. It expands the mind and spirit, keeps us young and vibrant, and allows us to think about other things than chores and responsibilities. Give yourself permission to have fun, find what you love to do, and do it just for the enjoyment.

8. Surrender

This involves the ability to achieve mental and emotional release, acceptance of what is, and submission to a Higher Power and spiritual principle. Surrender allows us to face what we fear before it becomes a reality. While fear paralyzes, surrender puts us in the offensive position. We mentally go to the imagined outcome of our fear, which releases the fear thoughts from our mind. Through surrender we acknowledge that God is in control and we cannot make anything happen. Surrender makes room in the heart for divine inspiration and opens a way for a miracle to happen.

Phase 3: Honour Others with ...

1. Boundaries

They are mental, emotional or physical constructs that define or limit the area in which one is willing to live, work, or desire to be. Boundaries allow us to take care of ourselves, enable others to take care of themselves, and create the freedom of choice. By setting boundaries with others, we realize that to give, share, or support need not mean taking care of – we can say 'no' and still give love and support.

2. Compassion

It is the ability to be one with others and sacrifice your needs for their needs without feeling depleted. It involves support, comfort and nourishment without doing for the other person what they need to do for themselves in order to grow. Helping another person out of obligation or fear will end up in the feeling of being used. True compassion strengthens and heals the giver and helps the receiver to heal themselves.

3. Closure

This is a state of being complete through mental and emotional detachment. It is a form of release achieved by an action to bring to a close a relationship or situation. Closure begins with truthfully expressing one's feelings. Every situation that no longer serves a divine purpose should be brought to a close. This enables a new beginning with new opportunities.

4. Non-judgment

It is a state of mental and emotional openness and receptivity to new experiences and new interpretations of past experiences. It involves observing people or circumstances without the imposing of personal will, perceptions, or criticisms. We don't ever fully understand any given situation, so we shouldn't judge based on appearances. We tend to judge others by the judgments we have made of ourselves. Judgment closes the mind and heart to new levels of understanding.

5. Forgiveness

This involves release or letting go – release of wrong thoughts or emotions in order to facilitate a change and achieve harmony. Forgiving someone does more for us than for the other person. We must give up pain, anger, resentment, and fear in order to experience goodness, joy, peace, and love. We also need to forgive ourselves for our mistakes – be it thoughts or actions. Forgiveness sets us free, but if we withhold it from others, we'll remain hostage to our hurts and anger.

6. Service

This is the ability to give of one's time, knowledge and resources without expecting reward or recognition. Service supersedes work which is done for reward or recognition, not for the love of it. Service is the divine multiplier. Giving as an act of love will bring unexpected rewards. Love sparks passion, which in turn leads to spontaneity and creativity. When we trust ourselves and the Divine enough to surrender to the passion of what we love, we will be serving both God and humanity. Service provides rewards money cannot buy, gives purpose and focus, and will have lasting results on oneself and others – it is our divine gift to the world.

Phase 4: Honour What You Feel ...

1. Anger

It is the response to built-up frustration and the ego's response to the belief that it is being attacked. It is one of the most powerful human emotions, often driven by passion. Anger reflects something inside calling out for healing. We have the right to feel what we feel – we can also choose what we feel about any experience. To deal with anger, take several deep breaths, give up the need to be right, forgive yourself and the person who has evoked the anger, and pray that your mind, heart, and words can be tempered with love.

2. Confusion

It is the result of not admitting what we want or need in a given situation, not doing what we know we should, and a response to fear that we'll not succeed. It is an experience of having the brain shut down as a result of overwhelming barrage of information or a self-defeating mental chatter that we are not good enough to do what we need to. To move out of confusion, identify clearly what you want, admit it to yourself, let those involved know what you want, identify the key issues, make a plan to deal with each issue one at a time, write the plan down, and put the plan into action.

3. Disappointment

It is failure to realize a desired or expected outcome. We can only have what is in the divine plan for us to have. We also need to be ready to receive blessings and opportunities intended for us when they come our way. On the other hand, we won't succeed in trying to get something for nothing or at the cost of harming another person. Being out of alignment with basic universal laws of love will lead to disappointment.

4. Doubt

This is a state of conflict regarding the acceptance of truth and is the absence of trust. Doubt signals the onset of mental, emotional and spiritual weakness. Doubt and belief are mutually exclusive. Doubt enters when we forget the truth about our

identity and fail to trust in the omnipresence of divine law. Fear and worry are aspects of doubt and spring up when we try to control situations, which is often impossible. Constant prayer and affirmation are the strongest defences against doubt. Praying for guidance and believing that we have received it will bring our actions into alignment with Divine Will. Affirming the truth about ourselves and life will set into motion the spiritual principles of divine order and divine timing. Learning to live without having to evaluate every appearance, while remaining focused on our desire, knowing that it is the outcome of a good intent, leaves no room for doubt to grow in our mind.

5. Fear

Fear can be seen as an acronym for False Expectations Appearing Real. It wears many masks including procrastination, feeling inadequate, need to control, and various excuses. Fear is a tool of the ego and is opposite of love, a divine activity. To deal with fear, one needs to avoid denying it, but rather recognize it, acknowledge it, and befriend it. Then dismantle it with faith. Affirm the truth of God's presence with you, and in the light of truth, fear will scatter.

6. Guilt

Guilt is related to shame, and both are toxic emotions. Shame is the belief that something is wrong with us, and guilt is the judgment or belief that we have done something wrong. Feeling bad about and focusing on the undesirable things we do is counterproductive. This is because what we focus on grows and we thus remain in the guilt. Avoid denying feeling guilty as this leads to blaming others for our mistakes and a resultant victim mentality which renders us powerless. The remedy for guilt is to admit and confess our faults (also to others if they have been harmed by our behaviour), forgive ourselves and ask forgiveness, and then to choose a new plan of action.

7. Loneliness

This is an experience of isolation resulting from the belief in separation. It has the elements of anxiety which creates unsatisfiable lustful cravings, and urgency which brings about fear that the object of the lust is being denied or withheld. To be lonely is to be shut down to what we want, believing we cannot have it. Our heart needs to become open to receive what we desire. Often, however, we are unaware of being shut down or afraid. When we open ourselves to the experience of Divine love, our other desires will be satisfied and loneliness will disappear.

8. Lack of Appreciation

Our self-value is diminished when we feel unappreciated. Often people fail to acknowledge what we have done for them. Instead of feeling upset about it, realise that if we appreciate what we have done for others, their response should be of little or no consequence to us. In other words, what we give to others, we give to ourselves. This is because we are all connected to the One Life through the omnipresent divine Spirit. People are not indebted to us for what we do for them because all that we have given, we have received from a higher Source. We serve the Divine by serving another human being. In serving others, we share the bounty of grace given to us. Craving recognition is a sign of dysfunction. When we stop expecting rewards and recognition, they will come automatically.

Phase 5: Honour Your Process with ...

1. Authenticity

We are all imperfect and fallible. However, we tend to play all kinds of games to cover our mistakes and imperfections. We deny, make excuses, pretend ignorance and more. In order to be authentic, we need to be willing to acknowledge and accept the natural outgrowths of everything we think, say, and do in this life. These can manifest through how others act toward us because people around us are mirrors of the various aspects of ourselves.

Authenticity also requires that we stay in touch with our feelings – not denying how we feel or holding feelings back. Learn to identify and acknowledge how we feel as feelings are what makes us unique and authentic. Own our hurts, fears and pain – don't blame others for them.

Another aspect of authenticity is not comparing with others, but acknowledge our uniqueness as a true and original part of the Master. Lastly, do what you do in your own way and allow others the same courtesy. It is only through our authenticity that God in us can be recognised and glorified.

2. Patience

Patience is a mental attitude of calm and poise, a demonstration of steadfastness and assurance. It is the willingness to totally surrender to the wisdom of God, and the ability to discern the unfolding of a divine plan in the midst of a storm. Without patience, we worry, complain, and even give up hope – all this because we lack trust and assume that delay is a denial. Patience enables us to retreat to our core when we are being challenged and remember that we are in the process of spiritual unfolding – that spirit will give us experiences to ensure that our development is on spiritual schedule. We are ultimately not in control of our lives, but by patiently waiting and trusting, we will glorify the presence of the Divine in our being.

3. Faith

True faith is an inner knowing that brings spiritual and emotional assurance. Faith of and by itself is not something to acquire or develop, but rather it is a part of being alive. The key is to place our faith in the appropriate things. If we understand, apply, and focus on the love-based spiritual laws of the universe, we can rest in confidence rather than worrying. Those who have mastered true faith place their thoughts on the goodness and all-sufficiency of the Divine, understanding that the power of their minds will attract the exact reflection of their most dominant thought. Surrendering our will to the will of the Holy Spirit and applying the laws of love and good intention toward ourselves and those around us, there will be a knowing that the laws of the universe will work on our behalf. This knowing is faith. Fear, doubt and worry work against faith while embracing the truth of our identity as a child of God and our worthiness of God's good promote trust and awareness of the ever-present grace of the Divine and therefore faith.

4. Discipline

This is an orderly or prescribed conduct or pattern of behaviour that contributes to our character and well-being. It means attending to life's issues as needed without avoidance or procrastination. When we honour ourselves and our lives, we become disciplined about how we care for and attend to our needs. When we accept and acknowledge that we and our life are part of a loving divine process, we'll want to actively participate in the process. We'll understand that what we do and how we do it will determine how far we go and how quickly we'll make progress. Discipline is not

easy, but it is a necessary step to develop, the only real demonstration of the value we place on ourselves.

Phase 6: Honour Life with ...

1. Balance

This is a state of being in proportion, one thing to another. Our activities should include work and play, rest and relaxation, giving and receiving, learning and teaching, as well as time alone, with God, and with others.

2. Expansion

This involves growth – a natural evolutionary process. We tend to limit ourselves because of our fear or expectations of others. However, we should try to expand our vision of who we are. If we don't grow, we tend to make excuses or blame others. We can ask God to show us ourselves as we really are – and may be amazed at the new vision for our life which will enable us to expand into our divine identity. Ask the Holy Spirit for the necessary guidance to expand your vision into the realization of all the divine good that life has in store for you.

3. Gratitude

This is the recognition and expression of appreciation for what is, an attitude of acknowledgement and thankfulness. Life is a fantastic gift. It is easy to get so wrapped up in doing that we forget to be grateful for the ability *to do*. To walk, breathe, think, see, hear and feel are all invaluable gifts. They are each an inherent element of the life we have done nothing to receive. We tend to take our gifts for granted and are ungrateful.

Learn to experience gratitude as an experience of being alive. When we become grateful to this degree, we begin to notice the small things – blinking of the eye, beating of the heart, growth of the fingernails. We acknowledge everything we have and, more importantly recognize who we are – a living expression of the Creator of the Universe and something truly marvellous. Gratitude is a state of consciousness, an experience of living in a state of joy. It is like a magnet that attracts more of it to itself – the more grateful we are, the more life will bring to be grateful for.

4. Order

There is a natural order to everything in life – life unfolds and develops in an orderly manner, even though it may not always look like it when it is happening. Our steps are ordered by our choices which in turn are ordered by our experiences which are ordered by the divine purpose for our lives. The purpose for each of us is to remember to trust the divine process of life. Order is the grace of God that brings to us what we need, when we need it.

The order of our physical environment is a reflection of the order or state of mind – it demonstrates what we have learned, what we are thinking, and what we are ready to receive.

We can put our mind in order by focusing on one thing at a time, doing it well and seeing it as an opportunity for the next step in our development. We can put our spirit in order by replacing fearful, doubtful, angry thoughts with thoughts about the grace of God, and by accepting that God's purpose, plan and will for us is the orderly development of our soul's destiny. We are where we need to be in order to learn or remember.

5. Joy

While happiness depends on external circumstances, joy is an internal process and state of being – an emotional stimulation in response to spiritual inspiration. Happiness can come and go moment to moment, whereas joy, grounded in the spirit, has a far-reaching and lasting impact. It is knowing that everything is OK right now because the universe operates on unconditional love. Joy leads to happiness, but happiness doesn't lead to joy.

Joy is the ability to stand in the knowledge of spiritual truth no matter what the physical experiences. We will still experience negative emotions, but when it happens, joy will provide an inner strength and resourcefulness to keep going regardless of the circumstances.

6. Unconditional love

God has an unconditional love for each person and for all that exists. This love is the energy in which we live, move and have our being, and the power that permeates every atom, cell, and molecule. It is the reality through which each person's life is unfolding. As we accept, acknowledge and embrace God's unconditional love, it becomes the guiding force of our life.

The only challenge we face in recognizing and receiving God's love is the demand of the ego. This dark, shadowy side of us wants us to believe we are not capable of being loved by anyone, particularly not by God. It keeps us in shame, guilt and confusion about our true identity. The ego also keeps us resistant to telling the truth and then uses our dishonesty to breed fear in our hearts. Unconditional love of self and others is the only way to dismantle our ego. This love is the understanding that no matter what we do or how we behave, God loves us and is waiting for us to embody and demonstrate love at all times and under all circumstances.

We'll still sometimes fall into the traps of our ego and become aware of attitudes and behaviours that are fear-based, judgmental, controlling, and unloving. When this happens, admit them and call forth the presence and energy of the divine unconditional love. Simply be willing to change and the change will unfold naturally.

Reference: Iyanla Vanzant, *One Day My Soul Just Opened Up* (Fireside, New York, 1998)