

PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM

William Keepin © Satyana Institute

1. Transformation of motivation from anger/fear/despair to compassion/love/purpose. This is a vital challenge for today's social change movement. This is not to deny the noble emotion of appropriate anger or outrage in the face of social injustice. Rather, this entails a crucial shift from fighting against evil to working for love, and the long-term results are very different, even if the outer activities appear virtually identical. Action follows Being, as the Sufi saying goes. Thus "a positive future cannot emerge from the mind of anger and despair" (Dalai Lama).

2. Non-attachment to outcome. This is difficult to put into practice, yet to the extent that we are attached to the results of our work, we rise and fall with our successes and failures - a sure path to burnout. Hold a clear intention, and let go of the outcome, recognizing that a larger wisdom is always operating. As Gandhi said, "the victory is in the doing," not the results. Also, remain flexible in the face of changing circumstances: "Planning is invaluable, but plans are useless."(Churchill)

3. Integrity is your protection. If your work has integrity, this will tend to protect you from negative energy and circumstances. You can often sidestep negative energy from others by becoming "transparent" to it, allowing it to pass through you with no adverse effect upon you. This is a consciousness practice that might be called "psychic aikido."

4. Integrity in means and ends. Integrity in means cultivates integrity in the fruit of one's work. A noble goal cannot be achieved utilizing ignoble means.

5. Don't demonize your adversaries. It makes them more defensive and less receptive to your views. People respond to arrogance with their own arrogance, creating rigid polarization. Be a perpetual learner, and constantly challenge your own views.

6. You are unique. Find and fulfill your true calling. "It is better to tread your own path, however humbly, than that of another, however successfully." (Bhagavad Gita)

7. Love thy enemy. Or at least, have compassion for them. This is a vital challenge for our times. This does not mean indulging falsehood or corruption. It means moving from "us/them" thinking to "we" consciousness, from separation to cooperation, recognizing that we human beings are ultimately far more alike than we are different. This is challenging in situations with people whose views are radically opposed to yours. Be hard on the issues, soft on the people.

8. Your work is for the world, not for you. In doing service work, you are working for others. The full harvest of your work may not take place in your lifetime, yet your efforts now are making possible a better life for future generations. Let your fulfillment come in gratitude for being called to do this work, and from doing it with as much compassion, authenticity, fortitude, and forgiveness as you can muster.

9. Selfless service is a myth. In serving others, we serve our true selves. "It is in giving that we receive." We are sustained by those we serve, just as we are blessed when we forgive others. As Gandhi says, the practice of satyagraha ("clinging to truth") confers a "matchless and universal power" upon those who practice it. Service work is enlightened self-interest, because it cultivates an expanded sense of self that includes all others.

10. Do not insulate yourself from the pain of the world. Shielding yourself from heartbreak prevents transformation. Let your heart break open, and learn to move in the world with a broken heart. As Gibran says, "Your pain is the medicine by which the physician within heals thyself." When we open ourselves to the pain of the world, we become the medicine that heals the world. This is what Gandhi understood so deeply in his principles of ahimsa and satyagraha. A broken heart becomes an open heart, and thereby flows with the lifeblood of the world healing itself.

11. What you attend to, you become. Your essence is pliable, and ultimately you become that which you most deeply focus your attention upon. You reap what you sow, so choose your actions carefully. If you constantly engage in battles, you become embattled yourself. If you constantly give love, you become love itself.

12. Rely on faith, and let go of having to figure it all out. There are larger 'divine' forces at work that we can trust completely without knowing their precise workings or agendas. Faith means trusting the unknown, and offering yourself as a vehicle for the intrinsic benevolence of the cosmos. "The first step to wisdom is silence. The second is listening." The third is following the silent whispers of the heart. If you genuinely ask inwardly and listen for guidance, and then follow it carefully, you are working in accord with these larger forces, and you become the instrument for their wisdom and music.

13. Love creates the form. Not the other way around. The heart crosses the abyss that the mind creates, and operates at depths unknown to the mind. Don't get trapped by "pessimism concerning human nature that is not balanced by an optimism concerning divine nature, or you will overlook the cure of grace." (Martin Luther King) Let your heart's love infuse your work and you cannot fail, though your dreams will most likely come true in ways far different from what you ever imagined.