



A Morning Ritual

By Michelle Valentino



Since the last retreat, Swamiji has been saying that we need to lift our spirits, to take responsibility for our inner state and how we respond to our environment. Our tendency is to be weighed down by the chaos and confusion we encounter; our practice should help us to live above it.

I recently found (on Instagram!) an approach that encourages us to do that from the very first moments of the day. The post was called “Five Things to Do Before You Get Out of Bed.” I was intrigued because all of them are uplifting AND completely aligned with our practice. I decided to work with the list as a first-thing-in-the-morning ritual. It’s become a great way to open the day on a positive note and prepare for any other morning practice you might be doing.

The Five Things to Do Before You Get Out of Bed are:

1. **Express Gratitude.** Waking up grateful is a beautiful way to begin your day. You might be grateful for something as simple as being in a warm bed, catching a glimpse of the sun (if you’re in Portland!), or a sweet dream you’ve had. That can lead to more profound thoughts like being grateful for having a connection with our teachers and the support of our community, the chance to live a life of unfolding awareness, or being able to engage in an authentic practice with incredible potential.
2. **Set Your Intention for the Day.** Here is an opportunity to feel into the wish to grow, the foundation for our spiritual practice. Begin to connect to that feeling, your deepest inner longing. Taking the wish to grow into your heart sets the tone for the whole course of your day and will let any more specific intention you have emerge from a deeper place.

3. **Take Five Long Deep Breaths.** Consciously connecting body and breath are essential to all aspects of our practice. Breathing is a sacred act, the very basis of all life. When we breathe with the awareness that we are taking in nourishment for our whole being, our breath becomes much more powerful.
4. **Smile for No Reason.** Smiles are magic. They can trick us into feeling happy even when we're not. Studies have shown that the smile-producing muscles around the mouth and eyes are directly connected to the parts of the brain that produce neurotransmitters like serotonin, endorphins and dopamine. These substances can relax your body as well as lower your heart rate and blood pressure. In other words, each time you smile, it's like throwing a feel-good party in your brain.

Smiles are also contagious. The part of your brain that is responsible for smiling is an automatic response. So when someone flashes you a smile, you are likely to mimic them by smiling back. You can do the same for others.

As Swamiji told us at the retreat, happiness that is not shared tends to evaporate very quickly. Starting the day with a smile is a reminder that this is an effective way to share your happiness.

5. **Forgive Yourself for Yesterday's Mistakes.** Letting go of tension about the past is a big part of creating flow in the present. We can't be fully open to the circumstances of our day if we are holding onto anger, resentment or disappointment. You can use the forgiveness exercise outlined in [Sadhvi Parananda's article](#) or the [Tension Release Exercise](#) to clear yourself. It's also a time when you can think of creative ways to avoid making the same mistakes again.

Namaste

