



Living holy

BY RABBI JOSHUA MARTIN SIEGEL, Conference Rabbi

How can there be spiritual discipline in a secular world? This is a crucial question for anyone who seeks a truly religious-based life.

The key word in this question is "discipline." How do we teach ourselves to overcome the temptations of the secular world, which cause us to ignore the spiritual side of life?

Some thoughts that might be helpful:

1. Avoid a focus on results alone.

If all our efforts are focused on results, it is impossible to reach the spiritual elevation possible within our life's journey.

The secular world seems obsessed with results. This is not to say that results don't matter.

But the central spiritual teaching is that the journey is more important than immediate results. True success can not be measured and true results are changes in quality of being and closeness to becoming like God.

A true spiritual discipline requires a capacity to transcend requirements and judgments of the world while not ignoring them.

2. Spiritual discipline requires limitation.

We cannot do everything that one wants or is expected of us. To achieve a degree of awareness of the power of the spiritual, or a capacity to live it, requires setting time apart on a regular basis for spiritual needs. This can range from time for prayer and meditation, doing good deeds, truly caring for or listening to others, or listening to God, who is reaching out to us if we develop the capacity to receive him.

None of this will happen unless we allow it to happen. We cannot force it. We must allow ourselves to be open to let it happen to us.

God has a work and a purpose for each of us. However, we will not live it, or even discover it, unless we put away our need to control and be open to allowing God to teach us.

This openness to receiving the wisdom of God for us, which comes from study, prayer, learned teachers or living itself, including our difficulties, is a central path in any spiritual discipline.

3. Spiritual discipline is not the same as spiritual techniques.

So often we think a particular system will itself deliver us to a spiritual dimension. There are many paths to a spiritually based life. But the path itself is not the center - the center is being on the path. This is the ultimate discipleship - recognizing that the way to God is a path, the one path that truly matters; and accepting that there is a path for us if we allow ourselves to discover it.

We need to discipline ourselves to walk and remain on that path, no matter the temptations or distractions.

Joshua Martin Siegel is the rabbi of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.