

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESS

(Adapted from Deepak Chopra's book, The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success)¹

Javed Iqbal Shah*

Abstract

During the last two decades, several books have been written on the topics of personal change, spiritual improvement and emotional intelligence. It is interesting to note that many people across the globe are turning to understand their long-neglected self, namely their soul. Deepak Chopra's book, The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success, is such a small book with its unassuming paper-back binding that most of the readers might ignore it as an amateur attempt on such an important issue. But, when you sit down reading it, you are thrilled, amused and taken aback by its simple, practical and powerful message. I have read this book not once, but several times, not just to cherish it but to understand its message in the light of Holy Qur'an, the mother of all books and to adopt the same in my life. The seven spiritual laws of success narrated in the book are pure potentiality, giving, cause and effect, least effort, intention and desire, detachment, and purpose in life. This article is adapted from the above-mentioned book, however, I have replaced two laws, namely the law of least effort and the law of detachment with my own recommendations, namely the principles of "Amr Bil Ma'arof and Nahi-al-munker" and constant struggle. I have ventured to include these principles according to my comprehension of the message of Islam as enshrined in Holy Qur'an.

Have you ever noticed that some people always seem to be enjoying their lives, while others are seen either struggling aimlessly or merely passing their time? Some of us might think that the people, who always enjoy life, are invariably the rich people with abundance of wealth and resources at their disposal. Others may point out that happiness is an inner feeling, which comes naturally to some people, while it dodges others. A vast majority of us might contend that one

* Javed Iqbal Shah is a regular contributor to the Journal.
Email: thedialogue@qurtuba.edu.pk

cannot enjoy life if he is poor. Now the question arises: Who is rich and who is poor? Can we call a man rich, who owns millions of rupees and a lot of other resources and facilities, but does not spend them? Similarly, can we consider a man as poor if he spends whatever he has and is also contented and happy with his life? We come across a number of people, who are millionaire, but are still unhappy. On the other hand, many people always seem to be in a happy mood though they merely lead ordinary lives. Such contrasts of life perplex our minds and most of us want to know the secret of happiness and success in life.

If we contemplate about each and every phenomenon of life, we come to know that there are certain natural principles, which govern our lives. If we obey these principles and use them in our daily lives, we may also become successful and happy. Due to their wide application and authenticity, we may call these principles as spiritual principles of success. In the subsequent pages, we shall describe these principles and discuss how we can apply them in our lives.

Principle No 1: The Principle of Purpose in Life

Have we ever thought about our purpose in life? I think most of us must have given ample time to such thoughts. We might agree that our existence (in this life) is not purposeless. If so, then all of us must try to find out our mission in life. We all know that when the mission is clear, it becomes easier to align and steer our actions and behaviour. In order to arrive at a plausible mission statement, assume that you have died that your body is waiting for a burial. A large number of people have gathered to pay the last homage to you. They are talking about you. How would you like to be remembered after your death, as a selfish miser or a generous man, as a stiff-neck autocrat or a benevolent friend,

as a backbiter or as an accommodating loving man? Answers to these questions would certainly help us to find out our mission in this life.

Let's get the guidance from the Holy Qur'an about the purpose of our lives. Allah (SWT) says in the holy book: -

*Tell them: "My service and sacrifice, my life and my death, are all of them for God, the creator and Lord of the worlds."*²

*"I have not created the jinns and men but to worship Me."*³

From the above verses, it becomes clear that we should do each and every thing in this life to please Allah and his beloved messenger, Muhammad [SAW], rather than trying to gratify the people. If we pledge that we shall do each and every thing in this life just to please Allah and his Last messenger, then we will be successful in this life as well as in the hereafter. There are three elements of the Principle of Purpose in Life: -

- (a) According to the first element, we should try to find out our own self, our spiritual self.
- (b) Then we should attempt to discover our unique talents, which have been gifted to us by Allah, the talents, which give us happiness and contentment when we use them.
- (c) The third element of the Purpose in Life is service to mankind. After finding out our spiritual self, when we devote our unique talents toward serving the mankind, we in fact reach the zenith of humanity.

Method of Applying the Principle of Purpose of Life

I shall do the following three things in order to apply this Principle in my life: -

1. In order to find out the true purpose of my life, I shall try to get guidance from Holy Qur'an and discover the contentment in my heart, because I know that if I get spiritual happiness while doing a particular task, that task must be reflecting the true purpose of my life.
2. Today, I shall make a list of my unique talents. Then I will list all the things I love to do while using my unique talents.
3. I will ask myself daily, "How can I serve others?" and "How can I help my fellowmen?"

Principle No 2: The Principle of Pure Potentiality

According to this Principle, every one of us owns some pure potentiality, but in order to actualize this potentiality, we would have to understand our spirit. And to understand our spirit, we would have to look into our own selves. No matter, what other people think or talk about us, we would have to evaluate our pure potentiality. When we get the knowledge of our own potentiality, then we do not have to impress others with expensive clothes, new automobile or with an artificial talk. Then we would neither be afraid of the criticism of people nor would we have to conceal our thoughts. Many of us spend considerable amount of time and energies in pointless habits of backbiting and mudslinging. No one can deny that these are spiritual diseases, which destroy our well-being. Allah (SWT) guards us against such habits in the following verses of Holy Qur'an:-

*"O you who believe, avoid most suspicions: Some suspicions are indeed sins. So do not pry into others' secrets and do not backbite. Would any of you like to eat a dead brother's flesh? You would surely be revolted by it. Then fear God. He is certainly forgiving and kind."*⁴

“O you who believe, men should not laugh at other men, for it may be they are better than them; and women should not laugh at other women, for they may perhaps be better than them. Do not slander one another nor give one another nick names. After believing, it is bad to give (another) a bad name. Those who do not repent behave wickedly.”⁵

Method of Applying the Principle of Pure Potentiality

I shall take the following three steps in order to actualize my pure potentiality:

1. Every day, I shall devote at least fifteen minutes every morning to read Holy Qur’an with translation.
2. In order to connect myself with nature and Allah (SWT), I shall say five times prayers, and in every prayer, I shall remind myself that I worship no other god than Allah (SWT), and that He is the only one, who can write or change my fate.
3. Every day, I shall make a pledge with myself that I shall not indulge in backbiting or mudslinging. In the process, I shall keep on telling myself that backbiting and mudslinging would make me discontented and unhappy with my life. In a nutshell, I shall not adopt fault-finding attitude while interacting with other people.

Principle No 3: The Principle of Giving and Receiving

If we think about the natural phenomenon in this universe, we come to know that this universe is functioning on the basis of the principle of giving and receiving. Giving anything to anyone or receiving it from others, are two aspects of powerful movement of energy. When we give

one of our favourite possessions to others, we do not get poorer. Rather we get several other similar things or joys. This is the system of nature and this is the will of Allah and his messenger. In Holy Qur'an, the followers are induced to spend on others for the purpose of pleasing Allah (SWT). The followers are told time and again that they would not get poorer due to their act of kindness; rather Allah (SWT) would compensate them without measure. On Principle of Giving and Receiving, Holy Qur'an says: -

*"The semblance of those who expend their wealth in the way of God is that of a grain of corn from which grow seven ears, each ear containing a hundred grains. Truly God increases for whomsoever He will, for God is infinite and all-wise."*⁶

*"Those who spend in the way of God, and having spent do not boast or give pain (by word or deed), will get their reward from their Lord, and will neither have fear nor regret. Saying a word that is kind, and forgiving is better than charity that hurts."*⁷

*"...Whatever you spend you will do so for yourself, for you will do so to seek the way that leads to God; and what you spend in charity you will get back in full, and no wrong will be done to you."*⁸

Most of us find it relatively difficult to spend our hard-earned money on others. We usually think that whatever we spend is taken away from our life. But in real sense, whatever we spend becomes the income of somebody else. Therefore, when we hold ourselves from spending, it results into three types of effects: -

1. We tend to stop the system of nature, which functions on the basis of give and take.
2. The income of some people gets reduced due to our reluctance to spend.
3. We deprive ourselves of the joys of spending the wealth. Ultimately, we get poorer ourselves, not due to non-availability of wealth, but due to the fact that we could not spend it despite possessing it in abundance.

The Principle of Give and Take is not limited to money matters only; it concerns all types of transactions. In this regard, a thinker says: -

“If you want to be happy in your life, give happiness to others. If you want love, give love; if you need attention, learn to give others attention; and if you want to be rich, help others in becoming rich.”

Method of Applying the Principle of Giving and Receiving

I shall take the following three steps in order to act on this Principle: -

1. Wherever I shall go or whosoever I meet, I shall give a present. This present may be in the form of a book, some fruit, a flower, a prayer or merely an appreciative gesture.
2. I shall accept all the presents, which would be given to me by other people or by the nature itself.
3. I pledge that I shall not hold back the movement of wealth in my life or in the lives of other people. Further, whosoever I meet, I shall give him the gift of my love, attention and affection.

Principle No 4: The Principle of Cause and Effect

Whatever is happening in this world and in our lives is the result of some causes, which were activated by us in our individual or collective

capacity in the past. For instance, if the law and order situation has been deteriorating in our society, it is probably due to some of our individual or collective acts. In most of the cases, we are free to choose any course of action according to our likes or dislikes, but we cannot determine the consequences of our actions. Further, though there are often several courses of action, from which we can pick up one, we usually make our choices in a pre-determined way in most of the situations. In other words, we usually behave or act according to our past habits. If we have developed the habit of reacting instantly to any stimulus in our lives, we are most likely to adopt the same reactionary behaviour in most of the situations. But, if we have trained our minds to give sufficient time to think about the pros and cons of our actions, we would probably adopt a much wiser, responsible and proactive behaviour.

Whenever we have to choose a response to a particular situation, we must ask two fundamental questions from ourselves: -

1. What will be the result of the particular behaviour of mine?
2. Will my behaviour give happiness to me and to people near and dear to me?

If we get an affirmative answer to question No 2, we should adopt that particular behaviour, otherwise we must think about other options. The nature has made it very easy to decide about choosing the most appropriate response in any situation. Our body produces two major types of emotions while deciding about anything in any situation; one is of comfort and happiness, while the other is of sorrow and pain. If we perceive the feelings of comfort and happiness in taking a certain course of action, it indicates that we are making the right choice. But, if we feel sorrow and pain in following a particular behaviour or action, we should try to refrain from choosing that behaviour.

Method of Applying the Principle of Cause and Effect

I make a pledge that I shall try to act upon the principle of cause and effect by adopting the following methods: -

1. I shall remain vigilant of all those choices, which I shall make at different occasions. In this way, I would bring these choices from my unconscious mind to my conscious mind. Further, I would always be mindful of the fact that the best way to prepare for any moment in the future is to be fully conscious in the present.
2. Whenever I would have to make a decision or choice, I would ask two basic questions from myself: -
 - What would be the result of this behaviour of mine?
 - Will my behaviour bring comfort and happiness in my life and in the lives of people near and dear to me?
3. I shall ask my heart for guidance in making choices. And through the messages of happiness or sorrow, I shall understand whether I should do a particular act or not. In this way, I would be able to make better decisions in all spheres of my life.

Principle No 5: The Principle of “Amr Bil Ma’aruf and Nahi-al-munkar”

When we study human history, we come to know that the struggle between good and evil, virtue and vice and ultimately between Man and Satan is going on since time immemorial. Even if one dares to study his own self, we see the same struggle raging in our minds. It is, therefore, utmost important that each one of us, in our individual capacity, strives to act for the good causes and make efforts to shun the evil. Although

these are not easy tasks, yet peace and prosperity of a society depends on such efforts. It is easy to be complacent with the status quo and play safe, but how a civilised world would function, if most of us do not bid the good and stop the evil. In Holy Qur'an, Allah (SWT) promises success for those, who enjoin good deeds and forbid what is detestable in the following verses:-

“So let there be a body among you who may call to the good, enjoin what is esteemed and forbid what is odious. They are those who will be successful.”⁹

“Of all the communities raised among men you are the best, enjoining the good, forbidding the wrong, and believing in God.”¹⁰

In every society, struggle between the good and the wicked continues unabatedly. Only those societies can claim to be civilised and humane, which endeavour to favour virtue over vice, good over evil and right over might. The societies, which allow “might” to prevail over “right”, are the ones, which are doomed to destruction in the long run.

There are three elements of the Principle of “Amr Bil Ma’aruf and Nahi-al-munker”:-

1. First element requires that we should accept or reject each and every happening according to the commandments of Allah (SWT) and the teachings of the holy Prophet, Muhammad (SAW) as enshrined in Hadith and Sunnah.
2. The second element of this principle is “responsibility”. Responsibility does not mean that we feel ourselves responsible for adverse situations or for unbecoming conduct of other people. Rather, it means that being a “*response-able*” person;

we would adopt proactive approach to handle difficult situations and people.

3. The third element concerns avoiding unnecessary discussion. Most of us spend our valuable time in convincing people and trying to prove our point of view. In this way, we tend to waste our energies on aimless and endless discussions and criticism because in return, we get nothing, but more discussion. But if we pledge that we would not indulge in unnecessary discussion, and that, we would speak only on matters of “Amr Bil Ma’aruf and Nahi-al-munker”, we would experience “that present”, which is a gift from Allah (SWT). On methods of convincing others, Holy Qur’an says: -

“Call them to the path of your Lord with wisdom and words of good advice: and reason with them in the best way possible...”¹¹

“Good and evil are not alike. Repel evil with what is good. Then you will find your erstwhile enemy like a close, affectionate friend. Only they attain it who forebear, and a man of great good fortune can achieve it.”¹²

Method of Applying the Principle of “Amr Bil Ma’aruf and Nahi-al-munker”

I shall apply this principle by using the following methods:-

1. I will accept or reject situations, circumstances and events on the basis of the Principle of “Amr Bil Ma’aruf and Nahi-al-munker”, and not on the basis of my personal likes and dislikes.

2. I will accept responsibility for my situation and for all those events I see as problems. I also know that every problem is an opportunity in disguise, and this alertness to opportunities allows me to take this moment and transform it into a greater benefit.
3. I will relinquish the need to defend my point of view. I will feel no need to convince or persuade others to accept my point of view, but at the same time, I shall humbly try to show what “maroof” is and what “munker” is. At the same time, I will listen emphatically to other people and will remain open to all points of view.

Principle No 6: The Principle of Intention and Desire

In this universe, two things are very important, namely energy and knowledge. If we consider the composition of human being and tree, we come to know that both have common elements, for e.g., carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, etc. However, they are present in different proportions in human being and a tree. Second difference between man and tree is the possession of knowledge. While man is not only capable of acquiring, arranging and using knowledge, but can also change the information and knowledge at his conscious level. By the act of changing energy and knowledge, man can influence his environment. This conscious change occurs due to two characteristics of man, i.e., due to attention and intention.

When we focus our attention on a particular issue, energy is generated. Then, due to our intention about that issue, the newly generated energy changes its form. In the process, we become able to get the thing, which we desire. But, here are two pre-requisites. First, our desire should not base on greed or lust; rather it should be for the

benefit of mankind. Second, we ought to be living the life according to the natural principles.

We can fulfill our desires by applying the following methods:-

1. Meditation: I shall meditate to remain silent for some time every day.
2. Releasing Intentions and Desires: I shall write down my important goals in life and focus my intention on them. This is necessary so that when I am thinking silently, these goals and desires would be planted in my pure potentiality.
3. Self-awareness: In order to fulfill my goals, desires and intentions, I shall remain aware of my true self, my spiritual being and my pure potentiality. Further, I shall not judge myself with the eyes of others.
4. Detachment: I shall not attach myself with the outcome and learn to live in the wisdom of uncertainty.
5. Belief in Allah: I shall firmly believe that Allah (SWT) would best decide the details and methods of fulfilling my goals and desires. In fact, when I had released my desires and intentions after coming out of meditation, the nature had already started organising my actions. Afterwards, when being aware of self and my pure potentiality, I had detached myself from the outcome; I had consolidated my belief in Allah (SWT) and His organising powers.

Method of Applying the Principle of Intention and Desire

I will put this principle into action by making a commitment to take the following steps: -

1. I will write a list of my desires. Wherever I go, I will take this list with me. Every day, before starting silent meditation, I will look at this list.
2. After coming out of meditation, I will consciously release this list of desires so that the nature would organise my actions accordingly. But when the outcome would not be according to my desires, I would instantly trust that Allah (SWT) would have arranged much grander designs for me.
3. I will remind myself time and again that I will always work in the present moment. Further I would not let the obstacles to consume and decrease my energies, and manifest the future through my intentions and desires.

Principle No 7: The Principle of Constant Struggle

It is one of the most important principles of an ideal society. Instead of sitting idle like a maroon, constant struggle against the lust of the contemporary life and against the evil doers leads a man to success. Allah (SWT) promises measureless reward for those, who strive in His way. Let's peruse the following verses of the Holy Book to get guidance: -

“You tell them: If your fathers and sons, your brothers and wives and families and wealth, or the business you fear may fail, and the mansions that you love, are dearer to you than God, His Apostle, and struggling in His cause, then wait until God's command arrives, for God does not show transgressors the way.”¹³

“Strive in the way of God with a service worthy of Him. He has chosen you and laid no hardship on you in the way of

faith, the faith of your father Abraham. He named you Muslim earlier, and in this (Qur'an), in order that the Prophet be witness over you, and you be witness over mankind. So be firm in devotion, pay the zakat, and hold on firmly to God. He is your friend: How excellent a friend is He, how excellent a helper!”¹⁴

“He who strives does so for himself. Verily God is independent of the creatures of the world. We shall pardon the sinful deeds of those who believe and do the right, and give them a reward better than their deeds.”¹⁵

The principle of constant struggle in fact includes the summary of all the previously stated principles of success, since the Principle of Constant Struggle entails application of all these principles throughout our lives. Sitting idle or waiting for the miracles to save us from our present predicament tantamounts to negation of the natural laws. All of us ought to make constant struggle according to the natural principles of success, however, when results of our deeds will not be apparently in our favour, we shall not lose heart and instead would recite, *“Inna Lilla Hey Wa Inna Ele Hey Raje’oon.”*

Method of Applying the Principle of Constant Struggle

I will put this principle into action by making a commitment to take the following steps: -

1. Everyday, I shall renew my pledge that I shall not waste my time either by sitting idle or by involving myself in gossiping or negative talk.

2. Whatever I do in my life, I shall keep on reminding myself:
“That, you shall be judged by your actions, not only by the people around you, but also by Allah (SWT) on the Day of Judgment.”
3. I shall keep on asking myself: “How can I help other people? How can I make the lives of other people easier? How can I bring physical as well as spiritual improvement in my life and in the lives of other people? And last of all, but not the least, how can I please Allah (SWT)?”

Summary

To summarise, I will try to apply the seven natural principles of success in my life in the following manner: -

- In order to find out the true purpose of my life, I shall try to get guidance from Holy Qur’an and discover the contentment in my heart, because I know that if I feel spiritually happy while doing a particular task, that task must be reflecting the true purpose of my life.
- Every day, I shall devote at least 15 minutes for recitation of Holy Qur’an with translation, offer my prayers and refrain myself from backbiting and mudslinging.
- Wherever I shall go or whosoever I meet, I shall give a present and I shall accept all the presents, which would be given to me. In this way, I shall try to circulate the wealth in my life and in the lives of others.
- I will learn to live in the present, rather than in the past or future. Before making a decision about an important matter, I would ask two questions: First, what would be the consequences of my

action? Second, will my behaviour bring comfort and happiness in my life and in the lives of people near and dear to me?

- I will accept or reject situations, circumstances and events on the basis of the Principle of “Amr Bil Ma’aruf and Nahi-al-munker”, and not on the basis of my personal likes and dislikes. I will accept responsibility for my situation and for all those events I see as problems. I will not impose my point of view over others, and will remain open to new ideas.
- I will always keep the list of my desires with me. Every day, before starting silent meditation, I will look at this list. But when the outcome would not be according to my desires, I would instantly trust that Allah (SWT) would have arranged much grander designs for me. Further, I will remind myself time and again that I will always work in the present moment.
- I would not waste my time by sitting idle and daydreaming. Whatever I do, I would keep on reminding myself that I would have to answer before the Lord about my deeds on the Day of Judgment. Everyday, I shall ask: “How can I help others? How can I make the lives of other people easier?”

End Notes

¹ Chopra, Deepak, *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success – A Practical Guide to the Fulfillment of Your Dreams* [New Delhi: Excel Books, 1996]

² Ali, Ahmed, [162 – 6, Al-An’ am], *Al-Qur’an – A Contemporary Translation* Karachi: Akrash Publishing, (1995) p. 132

³ Ibid, [56 – 51, Adh-Dharyat]

- ⁴ Ibid, [12 – 49, Al-Hujurat]
- ⁵ Ibid, [11 – 49, Al-Hujurat]
- ⁶ Ibid, [261 – 2, Al-Baqarah]
- ⁷ Ibid, [262-263 – 2, Al-Baqarah]
- ⁸ Ibid, [272 – 2, Al-Baqarah]
- ⁹ Ibid, [104 – 3, Al-Imra'n]
- ¹⁰ Ibid, [110 – 3, Al-Imra'n]
- ¹¹ Ibid, [125 – 16, An-Nahl]
- ¹² [34-35 – 41, Ha Mim As-Sajdah]
- ¹³ Ibid, [24 – 9, At-Taubah]
- ¹⁴ Ibid, [78 – 22, Al-Hajj]
- ¹⁵ Ibid, [6-7 – 29, Al-Ankabut]