

CHAPTER 1  
*Accept the Challenge*

# DISCIPLINE NUMBER ONE

The noble warrior accepts the challenge to overcome the struggles of life.



## Lesson

At the heart of warriorship is the struggle. This struggle takes place on many different levels. The challenge of learning itself is a struggle for many. To find answers to life's questions, and to be able to assimilate those answers into one's life is not easy. The struggle of mastering one's self, elevating spiritual concerns above base desires, walking with integrity of spirit in humility and with a generous heart is not something that comes naturally to a human being. It is something that must be yearned for, fought for, attained through victory in spiritual battle. As so many wise warriors point out throughout history, this battle is a waged between two conflicting forces within one's very being. It is a battle between what is animal and what is spiritual, what is enslaving desire and what is genuine freedom and self-determination, a battle between what is selfish and what is loving, what is false and what is true, what is evil and what is good. On the deepest spiritual plane, it is the battle between heaven and hell as it takes place on the field of human consciousness for possession of the land of the soul. No matter how one chooses to view this struggle, it is certainly experienced by anyone who is trying to lead a spiritual life, and its reality is unquestioned by those who have set out on this warrior's journey.

I know that before discovering the real essence of spiritual warriorship, I used to hear the popular message that life is not so difficult, and the spiritual path can be one of ease. I was told that basically all I have to do is accept myself, relax and enjoy life. This used to drive me crazy because the battles being waged within my own consciousness over my soul told me that this life of ease was not a reality and couldn't be so. I came into doubt and confusion. Was I different because I felt this anguish, because I found it a struggle to free myself from addictive compulsive behavior, from selfishness and base want? Was I abnormal compared to others? Perhaps a monster while others were saints? For me, when I began to study the warrior philosophy, first through Swedenborg, and then through Eastern religions, Native American warrior-philosophy, and the like, to hear that spiritual combat is a reality, and even an inevitably in my spiritual development was not depressing but a comfort. Why? Because finally someone was telling me the truth about what was going on inside my soul. Someone was saying, "Yes, it's a fight for your life. And you can grow through this fight, and even win." So, these teachings from all the great revelations and spiritual masters about this inner struggle bring me comfort and security because they speak the truth about my personal life and struggles. Then I can do something about it.

Recognition of the struggle is the beginning of the end of the struggle. Once we admit to our condition, and to our need for support in this inner battlefield, we then open ourselves up to the higher powers available to us, and the higher realities surrounding us. For some, this is the power of God, poised to help us at our calling. For others, it is the power of the universe, the flow of all things that lead to goodness, happiness and love. For others, it's both. As we open up our minds, and awaken to the reality of our spiritual condition, our hearts also open to receive the confidence and commitment to defeat our spiritual enemies, to allow the force of goodness and love to flow in and through us, and to grow.

Open your mind to the deeper reality of the warrior, to higher goals and aspirations, to higher awareness, and allow yourself to understand that the drama being played out in your spirit is much more important, more interesting, and much more noble than the day to day drama in your earthly life. Though both dramas coincide with each other, being aware of the deeper meaning of your life gives every aspect of life a greater and more genuine sense of importance. Life becomes even more valuable, mystical, and enthralling. Spiritual warfare becomes a vital matter of the human condition, the plane upon which everything else is based.

## Gems from the Masters

To be a warrior is not a simple matter  
of wishing to be one.  
It is rather an endless struggle  
That will go on to the very last moment  
of our lives.  
Nobody is born a warrior,  
In exactly the same way  
that nobody is born an average man.  
We make ourselves into one or the other.

Carlos Castaneda

To straighten the crooked  
You must first do a harder thing--  
Straighten yourself.

Buddha

Let it be known  
That no one can be reborn without temptation,  
And that one suffers very many temptations,  
Following one after another.  
The reason for this is that rebirth takes place  
To the end that the life of the old person may die  
And a new, heavenly life may be introduced.  
From this one may recognize  
That combat is altogether inevitable;  
For the life of the old person stands its ground  
And refuses to be snuffed out,  
And the life of the new person cannot enter  
Except where the life of the old has been snuffed out.  
From this it is clear  
That fierce combat takes place  
Between mutually hostile sides,  
Since each is fighting for its life.

Swedenborg

Do not think that I came  
To bring peace on earth.  
I did not come to bring peace,  
But a sword.

Matthew 10:34

Let those who would exchange  
The life of this world for the hereafter,  
Fight for the cause of God;  
Whoever fights for the cause of God,  
Whether to die or triumph  
Shall be richly rewarded.  
And how should you not fight . . .  
For the helpless old men, women, and children  
Who say, "Deliver us, Lord,  
From the city of wrongdoers;  
Send forth to us a guardian  
from Your presence;  
Send to us from Your presence  
one who will help us"?

Koran 4:74-75

As for life,  
It is a battle  
And a sojourning in a strange land;  
But the fame that comes after  
Is oblivion.

Marcus Aurelius

For we do not struggle against the flesh and blood,  
But against principalities,  
Against the powers,  
Against the rulers of darkness of this age,  
Against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm.

Ephesians 6:12



## Questions for Personal Reflection and Discussion

What are you battling? Can you name the spiritual enemies to your well being?

Does seeing your life as a struggle bring you comfort or dismay? Why?

What hinders you from asking for help in your thoughts and prayers?

# Meditation

Imagine yourself standing on a grass covered hill gazing off into the horizon. The warm sun fills you with light, and a gentle wind caresses your face. You look out as far as the eye can see and you notice that across the valley below, filled with trees and rich flora there arises a gently sloping hill on the other side of the vale. Your eyes are drawn to this point, perhaps a few miles away. Your heart is also drawn to this point as your eyes explore this novel horizon. You can see that on the other side of this valley in front of you is a beautiful city or town. You get the sense that the people there are happy and work together in love and harmony. You don't know why you know this, but you do know. As you gaze at this scene you are instantly able to see the people there, close up. You see them laughing, playing, working together. You recognize that many of these people are your friends. Some of them are friends you know right now, and they look so contented. Others you also recognize as friends, close friends, though you don't remember ever meeting them before. But all the people there seem like kindred spirits, your kind of people, and they are all busily preparing for something. They are preparing to welcome you to this place. It is your spiritual home. As you look more closely, with this special vision, you see that you actually do have a home there, a real structure build just for you, with all the rooms, furniture, yard, even the design itself was built to match your noble character. It's your spiritual dream home. Can you see it? What does it look like? It's waiting for you. As your sight begins to fade and you now see this spiritual home at a distance once again, you regain your thoughts on that hill. You realize that the place on the other side of this valley is your spiritual home--it's the place you always wanted to live, with the people who know you, honor you, and love you. It's a place where you can be yourself, your good self, your loving self, the noble you. You know you must go there.

In order to travel to this place you must leave your grassy summit, descend into the deeply wooded valley, and cross that valley to the other side. You ask yourself if you are ready to do this. Are you ready? You take a deep breath and begin to walk down the hill and through the fields into the forest below. As you reach the forest you see a path leading downward toward the center of the valley, and perhaps to the other side. You follow the path.

As you walk the path you notice how beautiful the forest is. It feels like springtime. In fact, the flowers, plants, even the small forest animals and the way they play with one another tells you this is the beginning of something wonderful. You feel you are on the right path. You pass by magnificent trees, plants, gardens, and you cross over trickling stream on well made and ornate foot bridges. And as you continue walking you notice that the light of the day is fading, and you know it will soon be night. You also notice as you walk that the warm spring air has begun to cool, and the trees are changing from green into a variety of colors. It's as if you have wandered into the fall season. This is confirmed as you continue to walk the path, and feel the crunch of the dried leaves under your feet. The trees are now bare, and the flowers are no more to be seen. Even the animals are sparse. All grows quiet around you. As darkness descend on your path you realize that you can see the mist of your breath. The atmosphere has become quite cold, and it begins to snow. As you walk in the darkness the snow covers the ground, and the snow helps you to identify the path in front of you. The path is blanketed with an inch of snow, showing you the way. As you continue to walk you realize that you are coming to the bottom of the valley. In the stillness the snow fades. You walk out of the trees into a clearing and look down with astonishment.

Before you a huge gorge stretches before you. It is deep, with a river below. It separates you from the land on the other side, and the place you wish to go. It separates you from your spiritual home.

As you look up from the canyon you notice that a bridge is before you. It is a strong foot bridge, apparently well built, held up by a variety of ropes on either side. It stretches for several hundred yards. You know what you need to do. You begin to walk across that bridge to the other side, to the place you want to be, with the people who you wish to be with, and the life you so desire to live. But as you begin to cross over you see that there is a figure standing in the middle of the bridge, blocking your way. You hesitate but then proceed forward with caution. The figure is dressed in dark clothing with a hood covering the head. You never expected to meet someone like this before. In this person's hand is a staff, and the figure holds the rod in both hands, as if in

preparation for a confrontation. You continue to walk until you stop three or four feet in front of this mysterious hooded figure. You cannot see the person's face. You don't know what to expect. No words are spoken. Only silence. You wait. You try to speak to the person but there is no answer. You wait some more. You ask if you may go by. No answer. What will you do? After waiting some time you know that you must simply try to walk by the person blocking your way. You gather your courage and begin to walk forward.

Almost as soon as you begin to walk, the mysterious figure swiftly raises the rod, and BANG, strikes you in the face. You fall backwards onto the bridge. You are dazed, the blow stings. Your eyes are filled with water, your vision having a hard time focussing. Why did the person strike you? What do you do now? How will you cross the bridge? As you regain your senses and your sight, you see that the hooded figure is leaning over you, looking into your eyes. You can see the person now, and you recognize the person's face. The person you see is you. The person blocking your way is you. The person who hurt you is you. The person you must overcome is you, in order to cross that bridge and enter your spiritual home. How will you cross that bridge? How will you make your way home?

What was that like for you? What in you is stopping you from crossing that bridge? Perhaps if you name it, like Rumpel Stiltskin, it will disappear, and you will be able to cross over to the other side?



## Process

Get a pencil and paper. Take five minutes to reflect in silence. Make a list of five gifts you feel you have been given that you love to share with the world (Examples: You're a good listener, you love to cook, you're a behind the scenes organizer, etc.). Be honest and fair with yourself. You may be using some of these gifts to their fullest extent right now. Some may simply be gifts you wish you could use more often. Don't be afraid to put them all on paper. Next, write a list beside this list of your top five enemies to spiritual growth (Examples: laziness, stubbornness, fear, etc.). After you have completed this list. Compare the two together. How do the items on the spiritual enemies list compare to the items on your gifts list? Is there a direct correlation between one item and the other, say, does your laziness directly relate to your desire to help others? Are there direct correlations? Often the things we love the most are those which are most often attacked by our shortcomings. What insights have you gained from this exercise? Now, if in a group, take turns sharing your lists, and any discoveries you may have made in comparing them to each other.



What are your closing thoughts about the Struggle?

End this lesson with a prayer.