

CHAPTER 12

Do It

DISCIPLINE NUMBER TWELVE

The noble warrior takes action.



Lesson

What often stops one from acting is the fear that taking action may be costly. What if the choice of action is a mistake? Perhaps it is the wrong time? Perhaps I will fail? These questions plague everyone who is presented with a choice of taking action or not. But let it be understood that whether we choose to act or not to act, we are still making a choice. And our choice not to act may have as costly a result (if not more costly) than the action itself. On the battlefield, inaction can end up costing generals more casualties than a swift assault. General McClellan's inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to act during the beginning of the American Civil War cost the country countless lives. Several times he was in a position to wipe out the Confederate army, but chose not to act. It would be a risk. Every battle is. It would cost many lives, especially of his own soldiers whom he loved. It may not be politically wise. He could fail. But his inaction caused the war to drag on for years, with thousands of lost lives that would have been saved from bloodshed if he had called upon his warrior spirit and drove his troops forward into action when he had the chance. President Lincoln, after paying him several personal visits on the battle field, urging him onward, finally wised up and fired him. He was an ineffective general because he could not bring himself to act.

The warrior is a change agent, within one's self and within the world. There is no change without action. Intention alone means nothing. Desire for change, married to inaction, turns to despair. Love without action dissipates and becomes hollow. Action brings about change. Sometimes we have to leap into the unknown, or climb into undiscovered territory to discover what comes next. But we will never know unless we try. I remember when I was a child reading an illustrated book my grandmother used to keep by her bed. It was a very old religious publication called Blast from the Ram's Horn with these incredible cartoon-like drawings of 19th century men and women in the most intriguing situations with captions indicating some insight or conviction as to what they should do. One illustration particularly struck me. It was a drawing of a man caught in a pit, dressed in rags, and quite dirty and gaunt. He had been in there quite awhile apparently. Dangling just above in front of him was a rope, and a little not on the rope which had one word scribbled on it -- "hope". The caption revealed his thoughts in this dire circumstance: "I better not try it. It might break." I don't know how many times in my life I have reflected on this cartoon as a challenge has arisen in which I have a choice to take action. The obvious answer is, it might break, but I will never know unless I try. I think we can all relate to times when action seems so frightening, but we fail to see that inaction, especially when it comes to our spiritual lives, will leave us trapped in our pit. We know the pits well, despair, hopelessness, anger, resentment, lethargy, fear and loneliness. Take the rope in hand, climb out of the pit.

At the heart or essence of the warrior lies the ability to take action. The trademark, as it were, of the warrior, is one of swift and appropriate action. The warrior does not stand, as Swedenborg would say, with his arms hanging down, mouth open, waiting for inspiration. The warrior knows that the only way to change one's life or circumstances is to actively work to create the necessary changes. The warrior may take time to assess any situation before taking action, but the warrior does not hesitate from fear or lack of motivation. If movement is called for, the warrior moves. If the risk needs to be taken, the warrior takes the risk. If the cliff must to be jumped, the warrior jumps the cliff. In fact, in many cases, the master warrior has already calculated what moves and risks must be taken before entering into any new situation. When the time comes, the master warrior, having been prepared, acts swiftly, with knowledge, and with confidence.

The warrior moves quickly into action, seizing upon opportunity, advancing toward perceived objectives, welcoming the chance for growth. The warrior knows that combat calls for swift action, right action, controlled action. Knowledge alone will not defeat the inward foe. But right action based on knowledge will. Love alone will not make a difference in the warrior's life, or in the world, but love in action will. If the warrior desires to grow or make any kind of contribution to the world, the warrior must learn to act.



Gems from the Masters

It is not the critic that counts
Nor the man who points out
how the strong man stumbled
Or where the doer of deeds
could have done better.
The credit belongs to the man
Who is actually in the arena;
Whose face is marred
By the dust and sweat and blood;
Who strives valiantly. . . .
Who knows the great enthusiasms,
the great devotions,
And spends himself in a worthy cause;
Who at his best,
Knows the triumph of his achievement,
And who, at his worst,
if he fails,
At least fails while daring greatly,
So that his place shall never be
With those cold and timid souls
Who know neither victory or defeat.

Theodore Roosevelt

Love and wisdom,
Apart from action,
Are only imaginary concepts.
That is,
They do not become real
Unless they are used.

Swedenborg

One hour of life,
Crowded to the full with glorious action,
And filled with noble risks,
Is worth whole years
Of mean observances of paltry decorum.

Sir Walter Scott

Even if you are on the right track,
You'll get run over if you just sit there.

Will Rogers

Heaven never helps the man
Who will not act.

Sophocles

The warrior acts. . .
And the fool only reacts.

Dan Millman

Let each of your acts
Be your last battle on earth.
Only under those conditions
Will your acts have their rightful power.
Otherwise they will be,
For as long as you live,
The acts of a timid man.

Carlos Castaneda

Those who awaken
Never rest in one place.
Like swans, they rise
And leave the lake.

Buddha



Questions for Personal Reflection and Discussion

What stops you from taking the actions you need to take?

What has been your experience when you have taken calculated risks?

Is there an area in your life right now where action is being called for?

Meditation

Sit quietly. Let yourself be still. Pay attention to your body. Find the tension and release it. Give yourself permission to take a journey. Count backwards very slowly beginning with the number five. As you count, feel yourself gently floating downward into the soft darkness. Five, four, three, two, one. You find yourself on the landing of some steps. There are five steps downward leading to a door. Walk down those five steps. Five, four, three, two, one. You are standing in front of a strong wooden door. Open the door. You see that it leads you outside to a deserted place. Walk through the doorway. Close the door. It disappears behind you. You are now alone in a desert. It is daylight and the blue sky stretches out above you. You do not know exactly where you should go from here but you sense that you must move forward quickly. You begin to walk, at first quite casually, but then you start to pick up your pace. You have this strong impression that you are being followed and that you must get away. You realize that the enemies of your inner life are in hot pursuit of you. Your inner demons, the fear, anger, resentment, and all the others have taken physical form and they are hunting for you to bring you under their control. As you move quickly through the desert you can hear something in the distance behind you. You look back and see nothing but a cloud of dust off in the distance. But you hear some sort of tumult, like a massive army on the move. And it is coming for you. You pick up speed and start to run. The ground below you becomes a blur as you sprint as fast as you can. Even as your feet pound the hardened desert floor you hear the tumult behind you getting louder. You slow a bit and turn your head to look back. The cloud of dust is much closer now. The demons are catching up to you. You face forward again and try to pick up speed but your body is tiring. You are out of breath. You can only jog. You know that your enemy will soon be upon you. You are terrified. You run a few more yards through the desert but notice that something is changing in front of you. The desert floor seems to disappear up ahead, and all you can see are some purple mountains in the distance on the horizon. You slow as you approach this awesome site and immediately recognize that you have come upon a huge gorge, as vast as the grand canyon. You stop in your tracks, catch your breath. You hear the enemy fast approaching behind you. The canyon is too steep to enter, too vast to cross. You realize you are trapped. What can you do? The sound of the enemy behind you grows louder. You are afraid to look back, knowing they will shortly be upon you. You are powerless to do anything at all. You stand before this canyon and look to the purple mountains in the distance. If only you were in those mountains you know you would be safe. But this thought gives you no hope, for you see no way to escape. You stand there for a moment and then glance down on the ground in front of you. You see something very odd. An old book is lying on a flat rock in front of you, dusty and worn by the sun. You bend over and grab the book. You open it. All the pages are torn and the print worn away, except for one page. On this page you make out the faded word in bold print. It begins with a salutation. You see your name written there, as if directed specifically to you. Under your name you see one sentence. It says, "If only you believe, all things are possible." You wonder what that means, but only for a second, because you hear the enemy only a few yards away from you. You look over the edge of the canyon wall, and then up toward the mountains. "If only you believe" you repeat to yourself. You can feel arms reaching out to grab you from behind. Do you believe? Do you have a choice not to believe? You raise your hands, look over the edge of the cliff, and jump. . . . What happens next? It's up to you. Do you fall to the ground below, or do you fly to those mountains? The sound of the enemy fades off in the distance and you are free.



Process

For individuals: find your notes from the process in Chapter Eleven, about your dreams, the blocks to achieving them, and actions you can take to remove each block. If you haven't completed the process in Chapter Eleven, take time and complete this process. Taking a look at the action items, list them in sequence of priority. Which can be accomplished more easily, or very quickly, or which do you want to tackle first? Prioritize the list. Once you have the list, look over action item numbers one through three. Write down a time today, or tomorrow, or this week, when you will perform that action. Then, do it! Proceed through the list until you have performed those tasks on the list.

In a group: pair off. The process you are about to do is based on a martial arts exercise. Pairs face each other and then place their open hands together (e.g. as if to play Pattycake). Looking into each other's eyes. You will take turns playing different roles. While your hands are touching, one person tries, at first slowly, but then gains speed, to touch the other persons body (on either the knees, shoulders, top of head), the other person reacts by blocking that person with the hands. The person who is trying to touch the other may not draw the hand back from the other person's hand, but rather move the hand horizontally in such a way that the other person loses contact and a tag is made. After two minutes, switch roles. Switch several times, and see what happens. What do you learn from this experience?



What are your closing thoughts about Action?

End this lesson with a prayer.

