

CHAPTER 3
Master the Self

DISCIPLINE NUMBER THREE

The noble warrior gains mastery over the savage self.



Lesson

The human mind may be compared to a house, in which there are two people living, each of whom represents a part of you. One of those people in that house may be called the lower or animal self, and the other can be called the higher or spiritual self. The lower self is made up of our animal instincts, and also our base desires and will. The higher self is the one that loves everything good and spiritual. While the lower self wants to take what is others, to feed until there is no more food left, to serve only the self, the higher self wants to give to others, to receive only what is necessary for health and happiness, and desires to be of service to the Divine and to humanity. Contrary to what one might suppose, the lower self is not evil or destructive when it serves. Everyone needs to take care for self first, and fulfill basic desires and needs in order to survive. But the lower self becomes destructive when it rules over the higher, spiritual self. If the lower self locks the higher self in the basement, and rules the house, the house will erupt into chaos, and will eventually turn to shambles.

When the lower self rules a person, that person's acts become self-serving and destructive. The desire for self-satisfaction and pleasure are so great that the person becomes addicted to anything that will bring a sense of pleasure or fulfillment. This addiction to pleasure and fulfillment can manifest itself in many different forms. It can be seen in addiction to drugs and alcohol, sex and romance, food, work, and so on. It can be seen in the effort to climb the social ladder, in trying to achieve fame, in the thirst for financial success, in all sorts of ways. Anywhere the lower self can receive even the most temporary fulfillment or pleasure it will cling to it like an alcoholic clings to his bottle. The problem with having the lower self rule is not only that this type of lifestyle is hurtful to the self and others, but it is completely unsatisfying. As the Buddha teaches, the rain could turn to gold and your thirst would still not be quenched. The desire of the lower self is unquenchable.

To master the self is to subdue the lower self into service, and provide that the higher, spiritual self may rule. This, in itself, is a spiritual battle, where each fights for dominion. Conflicting thoughts and desires clash together. During this battle states of inward anguish and temptation reign. And this battle doesn't occur all at once, but again and again as the warrior endeavors to master the self. Through perseverance, Divine aid, and a lot of blood and guts combat, the lower self can eventually be brought under submission, and though not completely tamed, it can serve. The spiritual self can rule, and when it does, one is said to become spiritual and to have mastered the self.

To master the self, therefore, is to have control. The warrior who masters self is no longer a slave to base appetites and foolish whims of self-will run riot, but practices thoughtful self-determination. The master of self is free from impulse, free from destructive tendencies, free from the thirst that can never be quenched, free from want. The master of self experiences love for others, lives in the order of creation, and is fulfilled. As the Buddha teaches, even as the wind cannot overturn a mountain, so the person who masters the self cannot be moved by desire or temptation. The warrior who masters self is free, powerful, thoughtful, loving, and happy.

To master the self takes discipline. People don't necessarily like the word "discipline" because it carries with it a sense of limitation or confinement. To practice discipline of one sort or another seems uninteresting, and perhaps even undelightful. When one imagines the disciplined warrior one can conjure up images of a cold, heartless, and remotely controlled person, out of touch with emotions, other people, and life. But this is hardly the case with the true disciplined warrior. In fact, it is quite the opposite. But discipline is necessary. Practice does, indeed, make perfect. To practice warrior-discipline is to possess the ability to act in a controlled manner or behavior, rather than impulsively reacting to external stimulus. It is not the inability

to be in touch with one's emotions, but rather the power to exert control over emotions, wants and desires. The warrior who practices discipline is not controlled but controls. This type of discipline allows for greater individual freedom, for the warrior freely chooses direction, rather than being swayed a certain direction by emotion and impulse.

Warrior discipline may be defined as controlled behavior as a result of training. It is self control. It carries with it an ability to respond to and follow higher commands rather than reacting from lower impulses. The disciplined warrior follows the rules, but they are self imposed rules which guide toward a life of integrity, and thus a life of love and service. This, in effect, brings the warrior joy and a sense of purpose beyond any short-lived delight from impulsive acts of desire. But this way of life does not come naturally. It only comes through practice. Through training and continual self-compulsion to behave in a certain manner, a manner which is in harmony with the rest of the cosmos, the warrior is able to gain such control over the self. By practicing non-reaction the warrior learns not to act impulsively. By practicing patience the warrior learns to be patient. By practicing forgiveness and letting go the warrior learns to stay free of hatred and resentment. By practicing shunning impure thoughts and desires the warrior learns to walk the path of purity. By practicing self control the warrior gains power over the self. By practicing integrity the warrior walks in integrity. By practicing love the warrior becomes loving. There is no serenity for the undisciplined person, the Bhagavad Gita suggests to us, because nothing of good comes from such a person, and goodness and love bring happiness. True freedom is not the ability to do what one desires. This does not lead to happiness. Rather, true freedom is the ability to not do what one desires. In this way there is truly a choice. This is real freedom, which leads to happiness, the freedom of the disciplined warrior, the one who has mastered the self.



Gems from the Masters

Knowing others is intelligence;
Knowing yourself is true wisdom.
Mastering others is strength;
Mastering yourself is true power.

Lao Tzu

With single-mindedness
The master quells his thoughts.
He ends their wandering.
Seated in the cave of the heart,
He finds freedom.

Buddha

When one sets aside desires,
All that have entered the mind. . .
And is contented in self and through self,
That person is said to be one of steady wisdom.

The one whose mind stirs not in sorrows,
Who in joys longs not for joys,
The one whose passion, fear and wrath are gone,
That steady-minded one is called a sage.

Bhagavad-Gita 2:55-56

If anyone desires to come after Me,
Let him deny himself,
And take up his cross,
And follow Me.
For whoever desires to save his life
Will lose it,
And whoever desires to lose his life
for My sake
Will find it.
For what is a man profited
If he gains the whole world,
And loses his own soul?

Matthew 16:24

A spiritual warrior
Stalks,
Confronts,
And finally integrates
All the parts of himself
That would separate him
From his wholeness.

Dawn Callan

Have you considered the man
Who has made a god
of his own appetite?
Would you be a guardian
over him?
Do you think most of them can hear
and understand?
They are like cattle;
Indeed, even more misguided.

Koran 25:42, 43

Questions for Personal Reflection and Discussion

What does the concept of mastering yourself mean to you personally?

Where do you find you lack self discipline?

What do you think are the major keys to mastering the self?



Meditation

Imagine you are standing in front of a house. This house is your mind. What does the house look like on the outside? Is it strong? Beautiful? Does it need work? Walk to the door and enter that house. Can you see the interior? The furniture? The decorations on the walls? What are they like? Imagine that this house is occupied by two different people. Since this house represents your mind, imagine that the two people who live there are two parts of yourself. One person is very quiet, considerate, gentle and loving. The other person is a real animal, rude, selfish, destructive, craving. Go to the room where the lower, more savage self lives. Is it in the basement? A bedroom? Upper floor? Attic? Where is the lower self residing? Find the room and walk there. You will be safe. See a door leading into this room of the lower self. There is a sign on the door. Can you see it? What does the sign say? Open the door and look in. Can you see your lower self residing in that room? What does that self look like? How old is this lower self? What is this lower self doing right now as you stand and observe? Now, look around the room. What is in this room? What occupies the space here? What treasures does this lower self hide here? What games occupy this self's time here? What is hanging on the walls? Is there some conclusion you can draw from what you see? Now look at the lower self, and that self now looks at you. Does this self have something to say to you? If so, what? Do you have something to say to it? Say it now... Turn and exit the room, and close the door. Take a deep breath. Now concentrate on the entire house again. Remember that there is another in this house--the higher, more noble self. Sense where this self is dwelling in the house. Can you picture where that may be? Go to that room now. When you come to that room, see the door. There is a sign on the door. Can you see it? What does the sign say? Open that door and look in. Can you see your higher self in that room? What does this self look like? How old is this higher self? What is the higher self doing right now as you observe? Now, look around the room. What does this room look like? What occupies this space here? What are the treasures that are kept here? What hobbies or crafts occupies the higher self here in this room? How is this room decorated? Is there some conclusion you can draw from what you see? Now look at the higher self, and that self now looks at you. Does this self have something to say to you? If so, what? Do you have something to say to your higher self? Say it now... Now, turn and exit the room and close the door. Walk to the front door and exit the house. Step away from the house and look back. This is your house. This is you. Do you have a wish for this house? A blessing? Say it now. And when you are ready, take a deep breath, open your eyes. The meditation is over. What was that like for you? What did you see and hear? What have you learned?



Process

As an individual, you will set up an empty chair in front of you to do this exercise. In a group, you will select a person from the group to represent the other “you” that you will be talking to. In this process, you will have an opportunity to talk to yourself, both selves. You will talk from the higher more noble self to the lower, more animalistic self, and vice versa. Each person takes a turn with this. Select a person from the group that you feel comfortable representing yourself. Sit back to back in the middle of the room, with the group seated around you as observers. They can keep you focussed on the task. Make sure you and your partner’s backs are touching, by either sitting on the floor, or arranging the chairs in such a way that you actually feel contact with the person behind you. At first, you will be the higher self talking to the lower self at your back. Tell that person (your lower self being represented by the person back to back with you) the facts about his/her behavior which concerns you. Just talk the facts. (Eg. “You’re always late. You eat too much. You take revenge.” etc..) After you have explained all the facts, tell the person how this makes you feel. (Eg. “I feel embarrassed when you’re late. I feel sick and ashamed when you eat too much. I feel fear when you take revenge.” etc..) After expressing your feelings, express your judgments about that person. (Eg. “My judgment is that you are lazy. My judgment is that you are never satisfied. My judgment is that you are vindictive and self-serving.” etc..) Finally, tell the person what you want them to do. (Eg. “I want you to take responsibility. I want you to control your appetite. I want you to be forgiving.” etc..) The person playing the lower self simply listens. Occasionally the person playing the lower self can say, “Tell me more.” But the person should not enter into a dialogue with the one doing the exercise. After this process is completed, switch seats with your partner. Now, speaking from your lower self, respond to the higher self. In this case, let the lower self say whatever it wants to the higher self. Here is where you may learn something new about yourself when you let the response simply flow. When you feel completed, switch seats one more time. The higher self gets the last word in response. Sometimes this will be a simple, “I understand.” Sometimes it might be a pledge, “You will not rule me!” Let your higher self speak spontaneously. When finished, another volunteer takes the center of the circle, chooses a partner, and begins the process. (If in a large group, you can spread out and have several teams do the process at the same time. Make sure each team has at least one observer to keep the person on track.) Note: The purpose of this exercise is to become aware of the different and conflicting set of wants, needs, expectations, and outlooks each individual carries within the self. Participants may feel a certain resolution after completing this process, but one shouldn’t expect that this process will lead to an instant integration of the higher and lower selves. It is an exercise in learning more about yourself. People often make important discoveries about themselves while working this process. Talk over what you have learned with the group. Share insights.



What are your closing thoughts about Self-Mastery?

End this lesson with a prayer.