

Lesson 16

Develop Self Determination

As we develop self-acceptance, self-worth, self-esteem, and self-confidence, we will sooner or later develop what I call "self-determination." But before we discuss why and how we should develop this quality, we must address two fundamental questions:

1. Do I recognize the possibility of self-determining my consciousness?

2. Shall I take responsibility for developing my consciousness, or shall I pretend that the responsibility does not exist?

The first question has to do with awareness. Many people doubt that we can actually encourage, develop, or increase the sense of awareness with which we were born. I believe, however, that you can do so; otherwise, the situation would be hopeless to begin with. And I think I have proven this to myself in many ways. For example, in developing my own ability to use the five senses by focusing my attention upon one sense at a time, I discovered that a person can actually direct, focus, and center upon an external object and "become one" with that object. By continuing to practice this effort, you increase your awareness. Suddenly you realize that you are seeing more, hearing more, tasting and smelling more. And this can be done in a spiritual sense, as well.

The second question relating to responsibility is truly the central issue, because it has to do with choice. Shall I consider this, or choose not to consider it? Shall I choose to become self-determined or not? Shall I evade the issue or confront it? It is our choice in every case to either think, or avoid thinking; it is our choice to become more aware, or remain as we are.

The Issue of Choice and Free Will

The issue of choice obviously relates to the Biblical concept of free will. If we do not believe or accept our freedom to choose, then we are perilously close to predeterminism, or "fatalism." And we know that we truly can choose to take responsibility for our own destiny; our lives will be as we choose them to be.

Human beings differ from the animal kingdom in that most of the animal kingdom functions as the result of preconditioned responses, whereas human beings have volitional choice. It is, therefore, our responsibility to make choices. So if we set a goal of "awareness," for example, and then activate and direct the process of self-determination, our goal of "awareness" then acts as a regulator or integrator of all the mental activity that proceeds from it. We are able to see from a broader perspective; we make better judgments, instead of having "tunnel vision."

For example, in an argument, we often go our merry way, dimly aware that we are saying some pretty stupid things. But we choose not to do anything about it; we choose to continue with our self-righteous indignation. In the heat of an argument, we choose to avoid; we surrender and evade. We put off our responsibility to act as mature, spiritual beings. We become caught in the everyday current of trivia, and we fail to confront the issue.

Not everything we refuse to confront is an evasion. If, for example, I am involved in writing and I am truly concentrating, I am then fully involved in what I am doing, and if someone then interrupts me, I find it very difficult to stop and pay attention. This is not evasion. Yet if I become angry or upset, my self-determination goes "out the window." What I have learned to do in this situation is to simply stop, recognize that I must then "shift gears," and direct my attention to that person. Afterward, I can usually go right back to my work.

The reason I mention this is that it is terribly important that we learn to handle these little irritations that can keep us from "self-determining." It is easy to become discouraged; after a while, we get so tired of trying to become self-

determined that we give up. So we have to learn how to "shift gears," recognize the things that are unimportant or irrelevant, and then refocus ourselves.

This does not mean that we are "evading" if we become confused about what action to take in a particular situation. If we recognize that we are confused, we are then simply stating a truth -- the truth that we are confused; we don't know what to do.

If we choose to think and we come up against facts we cannot handle, what then? If our thinking leads us to conclusions that threaten to disrupt our routine of life, what then? If we choose to think, and all our conclusions lead us far away from the mainstream or belief of others, what then? Are we still going to be self-determined and find our own spiritual path? If we choose to think, and then we see what we do not wish to see, what then?

Obviously, there are temptations to avoid thinking, to avoid becoming self-determined. Yet no matter how frightening, it is essential that we have the courage and take the responsibility for directing our own thinking. In the long run, it will result in self-acceptance, the feeling and experience of self-worth, an increase in self-esteem, and the development of self-confidence. Finally, it will result in our own deep knowledge that we are truly in charge of our own direction in life, in charge of where our destiny will take us, and that we ourselves are responsible for our own lives.

It's also important to recognize that we are not infallible or omniscient; we are subject to error. We may feel that our inner voice is telling us to do something, yet all our reason says we should not do it. There is a churning within; what do we do? Sometimes we need to wait a bit longer until the message is clear.

Conflict is always present whenever there is a choice to be made. Choice indicates polarization. Choice requires the reconciliation of the polar opposites -- love/hate; high/low; hot/cold; go/stop; open/close; thinking/not thinking; self-acceptance/non self-acceptance; awareness/unawareness. Yet we cannot allow this kind of polarity to pull us away from our destiny of reaching for the fullness of self-determination. It can, indeed, be frightening. Yet as we grow in awareness, as we proceed on our spiritual path, as we bring ourselves to see more,

hear more, feel more inside, somehow we are guided. Somehow we make fewer mistakes and feel good about the direction of our lives. As we act in accordance with our goal of becoming more aware, we become more aware of Self/self.

Five Steps for Developing Self-Determination

1. **BE YOURSELF.** Easy to say, but it takes work. Assume the responsibility for your own life. Work on self-acceptance, self-worth, self-esteem, because that will lead to self-confidence and result in self-determination. They are all integrated, intertwined. You can't just let one fall through the cracks.

2. **WAKE UP.** It is so characteristic of many of us that we walk right into our own problems because we are avoiding, or "surrendering to blankness." We can see the handwriting on the wall, yet we walk right past it because we refuse to look at it with understanding. We dimly know this, do we not? We dimly know that we can approach a problem if we are courageous and take the responsibility.

3. **SEE YOUR OWN POSSIBILITIES.** How few of us truly understand how much we are capable of achieving! Visualize, imagine, daydream...see yourself, as you'd like to be. Listen more to your inner voice, and mold it with your sense of reason. Integrate yourself into a whole force.

4. **BE A PLAYER -- NOT MERELY A PASSIVE OBSERVER.** Participate actively, practice what you preach, take action. When you have drawn some conclusions, do something -- even if you make a mistake. Remember, you can always change the situation and correct it. But if you never take any action, there will never be anything to correct. Express yourself as a player!

5. **ENJOY WHAT YOU ALREADY HAVE.** You cannot reach all your goals immediately. But be aware that you have the possibilities for developing and reaching your goals, and **enjoy the trip!** Don't get so serious that you can't shift gears, let go, and enjoy yourself. Concentrate on one thing at a time, become a master, then give it up and do something else. And between here and there, enjoy the trip. If you are in a constant state of irritation because you are not doing this or that, you are setting up your own conflict, and you have self-determined your own failure.

The important thing in spiritual growth, and the way you can always measure yourself, is that if you are not enjoying life, then you are not growing spiritually. You are going downhill. Even in a situation of suffering, you can enjoy the spiritual dimension of what you are! And remember -- everything has a spiritual dimension. So it is a matter of how you look at a situation, how you see it, how you feel it. In spiritual awareness everything is spiritual. It is your determination, however, that controls how you will apprehend it. Don't miss the birds, the bees, the blue sky, the trees and flowers, the wonderful feeling of love, the beauty of a feeling of togetherness -- all the wonderful feelings and experiences we have as human beings. And do not abandon your goal of becoming more aware and growing in a spiritual sense. Spiritual self-transformation is only a dream without the development of self-determination.

MEDITATION: There are many references in the Bible to support the idea of free will. One of them, in Matthew 20:14 and 15, describes Jesus' parable involving the man who went to find workers for the vineyard. Some men were in line, eager and ready to go to work, and they were selected. Yet there were still not enough workers, so throughout the day, the man kept seeking and finding more workers. At the end of the day, all of the workers were paid the same, and the man was questioned about this. So he said to the workers, "Take what

belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge generosity?"

On our spiritual path, we dare not turn away from the generosity, which is the Lord's. We may feel that we are awakening too late in life to our spiritual nature...yet we know that it matters not; the Lord of the vineyard will grace us with plenty. It is the right and proper time for the journey we are taking. And so we choose now to reinforce our faith in the One Presence and the One Power in the universe and in our lives...God, the Good Omnipotent. Now is the time to choose to be expectant, to choose good. Now is the time to choose wisdom and good judgment so that true fulfillment is ours.

Is there a need for healing -- for yourself or for another? Decisions related to a healing need can be made; by prayer we can call on the inner faculty of judgment to produce health, life-producing health. Is there a need for harmony, supply, order? We call forth any good by choosing love motivated by wisdom, faith stimulated by imagination, will tempered by understanding. By power and strength, we renounce negative thinking to choose the good that life has to offer. We are aware of a feeling of zeal, a sense of joy, bubbling within us. This readies us for whatever is to be our next experience.

As we are silent, these faculties of mind percolate and permeate the body temple.

We recognize our self-determining power.

We activate this power by becoming always increasingly aware.

We realize that we can choose to take control.

We can focus, concentrate, center, or expand -- at will.

We can visualize and imagine new ways of living.

We can be ourselves.

We can wake up and be responsible to ourselves.

We can see the possibilities awaiting us.

And so we shall be active participants in our own lives, and we resolve to enjoy the fruits of our lives, without reservation.

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