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It is a very old saying that he who masters self is greater than he who conquers thousands in battle. And the meaning of this statement, as well as the necessity for applying it in our daily lives, is becoming more and more apparent to intelligent people. Display of temper and ill feeling toward others are no longer tolerantly attributed to "temperament," but are recognized for what they actually are: lack of self-control.

The well-known admonitions in Proverbs (16:32), "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city," and (25:28) "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like

a city that is broken down, and without walls," are becoming basic principles in modern therapeutics, which attempts to deal with man as the complex being he is. The Spirit, or Ego—the real man—must conquer the the "lower self" and learn to live according to God's immutable laws.

Most spiritual aspirants have had enough experience in the effort to gain self-mastery to realize the magnitude of the task, and to agree with an authority who says, "The process of self-purification is not the work of a moment, nor of a few months, but of years—nay, extending over a series of lives." The later a man begins the living of the higher life, the longer his period of probation is likely to be, for he has to undo habits of thinking and acting which are diametrically opposed to his new way of living. However, no effort is ever lost, and no one should be discouraged by the immensity of the task. There is actually no struggle so difficult as the endeavor to gain mastery over one's lower self, but "If one's aspiration is genuine, a settled conviction, and not the mere sentimental flash of a moment, he transfers from one body to another (from life to life) the determination which finally leads him to the attainment of his desires."

The first and central requisite which must be possessed by the aspirant is an unswerving desire to attain. The intensity of his desire will measure the extent of his accomplishment. A prominent occultist has pointed out that " The trouble with most of us is that we allow our desire force to be scattered and diffused, thereby lessening its attractive power. It is only when we learn the secret of concentration and focusing the desire force by the will that we are able to get results above the average."

In a remarkable book by Napoleon Hill entitled Think and Grow Rich, the author lists thirteen steps to achievement. first among them is desire, "the starting-point of all achievement," as he puts it. Forty-eight highly successful men are listed as notable in having applied what is called the "Carnegie secret." Although this book was written primarily with material riches in mind, the principles advocated apply in equal measure to spiritual riches, which are synonymous with self-mastery.

Two other qualities of high importance to the aspirant are a strong will and a perseverance that never admits defeat. If we do not already possess these qualities in some measure, then it will be necessary, first of all, to build them into our characters. A modern teacher

pertinently states that "The will acts as the arouser, director, restrainer, concentrator, and manager of the great occult force of desire. What is generally known as will power is often in reality merely desire force strongly concentrated and directed to a focus by the power of the will."

Actually, will is an attribute of the Spirit in man, who is a microcosmic replica of the macrocosmic God, Whose first aspect is will. However, "desire arouses will, and will may stimulate desire." Thus "the two should work in unison, and

the trained individual has both under control and pulling well together, like a well-trained team."

A well-known bit of verse expresses the value of perseverance:

"`Tis a lesson you should heed; try again.

If at first you don't succeed, try again. Let your courage then appear,

For, if you will persevere,

You will conquer, never fear. Try again."

The lesson is, of course, that no matter if we fail ten thousand times, by persevering we shall eventually conquer. Dr. Frederick B. Robinson, Dean of the School of Civic and Business Administration of the College of the City of New York, says:

"I believe that the intense purpose, the moral integrity, the self-loyalty, that makes a man carry through whatever he undertakes, is the biggest single factor in fitting his mind for great accomplishments." Application and work were emphasized by a former president of the U.S., Calvin Coolidge, who said: "Any reward that is worth having comes only to the industrious. The success that is made in any walk of life is measured almost exactly by the amount of hard work that is put into it. It is a very old saying that you can never tell what you can do until you try. The more I see of life, the more I am convinced of the wisdom of that observation. Surprisingly few men are lacking in capacity, but they fail because they are lacking in application. Either they never learned how to work, or, having learned, they are too indolent to apply themselves with the steadfastness and attention that are necessary to solve important problems."

The late Henry Ford was also a firm advocate of work and perseverance. He stated that "There isn't any luck

about it. Work is the thing, good, earnest, hard work. Work in the right direction, continuously work. If it required no brains, no energy, no work, there would be no glory in achievement. Reinforce yourself with steel-hooped, copper-riveted, well-directed energy and intelligence, and, knowing what you want to do, do it. Work always wins."

These statements bring to mind Max Heindel's admonition: "There is no failure save in ceasing to try." To help keep this encouraging thought before us, we may start the day with the statement, "Today I will strive to make every moment count."

Most of us have habits we have ignorantly formed which interfere directly with our newly adopted purpose. What about these and how can we overcome them?

To correct an unwise or destructive habit, be it mental or physical, the wisest thing to do is to create its opposite. After recognizing the fault, then think as little about it as possible, and concentrate on its opposite. The indefatigable Saint Paul left us a profound occult truth when he admonished, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Persisting in the right, while ignoring the wrong as much as possible, overcomes the evil much more effectively and quickly

than by "fighting" the evil. Applying this principle to the habit of destructive criticism can bring enormous soul growth. If we start to think or say something unkind or destructive, and then switch to something constructive, such as "I see the Christ in you. The Christ in you is present and all-powerful," we lay the foundation for the expression of the Christ in the other person, as well as in ourselves. With a little determined repetition, this attitude will become habitual,

and we will no longer be tempted to add to the evil in the world by destructive criticism.

As spiritual aspirants, we should never forget that whatever we give our thoughts and attention to grows. Obviously, if we wish to contribute to the good in the world, or to establish the good in ourselves, we must direct our time and efforts to that which we wish to become established and strengthened. Indifference withers, and interest intensifies. Knowing this, we should realize the enormity of the offense of fault-finding and stressing the undesirable in the people and conditions about us. Unless we are honest with ourselves—and watchful—we may lend our powers to the strengthening of the very thing we profess to wish to eradicate. As Max Heindel pointed out, "Harsh thoughts should be avoided for they form arrow-like

thought forms, and as they pass outward from us they pierce and obstruct the inflow of good thoughts constantly radiated by the Elder Brothers and attracted by all good men."

Then there is always the channel of prayer to assist us in conquering the qualities of the lower self. Certainly there is no more effective means of gaining spiritual light and strength than true prayer. When we lift ourselves on the wings of love and aspiration, and pour forth our praise and adoration—which should be the burden of prayer—we put ourselves in "a favorable position to the law of attraction, a receptive state where we may receive a new downpouring of the Spirit of Love and Light." Thus are we strengthened for meeting the sorrows of life and given wisdom for meeting the problems that come to us.

Becoming imbued in some measure with divine light and love, we gain a truer perspective of ourselves and all about us. We see the pettiness of much that occupies our time and thoughts and become re-dedicated to the worthwhile things of life. Today, in the midst of the confusion of passing from one age to another, there is urgent need for men and women who are sincerely endeavoring to conquer the lower self and live spiritually. Only they can be proper channels for

the Higher Ones who are guiding humanity to a higher rung on the ladder of evolution.

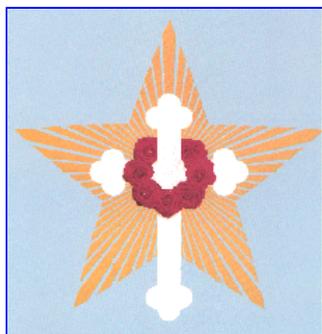
It is the great privilege and good fortune of some of us to have received an understanding of the laws of life, as given in occult philosophy, so that we know how to live the constructive life. It should be an ever-increasing joy to those so blessed to apply these principles in daily living, and thus hasten the day of Universal Peace and Brotherhood.

—O.R.

—*Rays from the Rose Cross Magazine, September/October, 1995*

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