

Week Six – Purity

We are now entering into the halfway point with 5 weeks remaining of the Building Personal Power series – indeed this is a transitional point. The first five weeks we focused on qualities that work best in the external form of application. For example: the interactions we have between with others, and our own personal relationship with our own self, all occur within the frameworks of Harmlessness, Truthfulness, Non-stealing, Conservation, and Non-coveting. Now, much of our work has been focused on listening, observing, from an inner perspective. But, this is a perspective that has so far been looking out into the nature of the world – how to create harmony by using these natural qualities to our advantage with the help of introspection and understanding.

The second five weeks will focus less on the interactions and more on directionality – how to maintain our positive direction – using the next five qualities as motivators to aid us in keeping our focus, determination, and inspiration. They will keep us true to the constructive course we have set up for ourselves to live. Up until now, we have been building personal power within ourselves by learning how to liberate self-talk from harmful – by understanding our deeper needs and feelings. This understanding better equips us to recognize how accurately perceive and communicate in the world, as well as understand how others are unknowingly bound to their perceptions and expectations. We have built power by learning to respect energy and resources, including time, and learning to be more self sufficient and less envious or desirous of others or their possessions. The more we can become fully conscious and aware of constructive living tools and techniques, the more functional and free we will ultimately be.

The freedom we seek to be who we want to be, to express our most constructive desires, it already rests within us. This is the ultimate key to our personal power: to live the truth of our cosmic nature, which we have within us. As we uncover the ethical and moral truths within the program we uncover more and more of this primal, creative essence of our beings – our real personal power. So, from this moment forward, we are to practice operating from the perspective that we are, in essence, part and parcel with the whole of creation. The energy that enlivens us is the same that enlivens all that surrounds us.

CLEAN PLATES, PLEASE

Thinking about this week's theme, I recalled a time during college when I moonlighted as a waiter. The restaurant industry is very diverse and you can dine out at any level of setting from McDonald's or some thing fancy like a 4 star restaurant with dress code. I worked somewhere in the middle. I did not have to worry about rare wines or the arrangement of dishes etc. However, one main thing is standard across any restaurant: cleanliness. Regardless of where you are, a silent level of expectation that you will eat with clean wares, like forks, knives, spoons and dishes. It is not like we expect to eat each meal out of the trash like wild dogs or pigs. Even at home we prefer to eat from washed dishes and drink from clean cups. Why? At the core of our being we seek to consume food that is pleasant, desirable, that looks fresh and delicious. Supermarkets are full of produce chosen

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for its visual appeal; packaging plays with our desire through color schemes and pictures. Just think about it.

CLEANLINESS OF LIFE, RESPECT FOR OURSELVES

The clean plates and thinking about food isn't to get us hungry or plan a date night at our favorite restaurant, rather it's to call to attention how at a basic level we desire **cleanliness**. When I first learned these 10 moral and ethical qualities, I learned them in an environment that promoted a very real concept of self-worth and respect – it was my first group yoga teacher training. We were asked to keep a daily journal that was to be handed in every month. The things we tracked and wrote about were not anything profound, instead we tracked habits and had mandatory ones that counted towards our final goal of graduation. These were common habits that we reinforced or created anew: keeping our bodies clean, eating clean (minimally processed, nutrient dense and diverse), meditation and physical fitness, sleep etc. We learned how these habits promoted self-respect through self-care. We can build rituals into our days that surround these basic and essential, yet profoundly meaningful habits.

SERVING OTHERS, and OURSELVES

The quality of cleanliness, or purity, is to focus us on how to live a clean and pure life. Let's try to imagine that life is like serving a meal to a distinguished guest. We should take pride in the presentation of our cooked meal to them. We wouldn't serve rotten food, nor would we use dirtied dishes etc. We would also make the attempt to clean our home and spaces for our guest. In this respect, we can now flip the script and pretend that we, instead, are the distinguished guests. By cultivating respect for our environments, and ourselves we begin to exhibit a level of cleanliness that slowly transforms into a more noble quality, that of purity.

JOURNAL DAY 1 - 2: Creating self-respect. Take today and tomorrow to focus on tidying up your living or workspace. Put away clothes or clutter. Open a window for fresh light (if its nice out, let a fresh breeze in). If possible, make a clean sanctuary that you can rest in daily. This could be a small corner of the house with a cozy chair that you specifically sit in and relax. Spending time there daily, you charge yourself up. At work, create a spot in your office or on the desk of inspiring pictures/objects. Turn your attention there to spend a moment of silence and release.

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CLEANING INNERSPACE

Respectful living does not just come from living in a clean space. It also requires the proper outlook and mindset. Cultivating purity within our self is a long process that will take time, just as it takes time to clean out an old closet, basement or attic. As we begin the process of cleaning we ultimately come across objects that have very strong reminders of the past. An old baseball glove or shoes reminds us of balmy summers and team sports. Photo albums carry us through time back to childhood fantasies. Similarly, as we focus on inner transformation and creating a respectful, pure mindset, we come across old thought-patterns and habits that are hard to let go. Like the old baseball glove, the thought-patterns and habits no longer serve us and fit into our new worldview and self-image, yet surprisingly they are hard to put aside and let go of.

PLAN B ... C, D etc.

When we plan for things, be it a project at work or school, even planning for a vacation, backup plans are usually included in the preplanning stages. For a vacation, you plan for bad weather. With professional projects, you plan for resource restrictions etc. This way, no matter what happens, the risk of failure is slightly mitigated and you can get back on track. In terms of personal power, the importance of having alternative activities available should not be understated. We are working hard against some heavy neural programming that will sneak right up and, before you realize it, you have slipped back into a pattern you thought was broken. For that reason we should be wise to pick out some quick, positive habits that can be immediate go-to's when we notice a former habit lurking close by. By developing small, but productive, habits, we can quickly build up resilience and confidence. One of my go-to habits now is keeping a book close by, the room I'm in or in a bag I have when I go out. Instead of jumping on the phone to check social media I try to

JOURNAL DAY 3 – 4: Healthy Habits – Make a list of some current habits, or ones that you would like to do daily or semi-regularly. A regular habit could be reading a chapter or two of an inspiring book. A semi-regular habit could be planning for and finishing small projects or goals, like running a 10K or painting a portrait. Try to designate, and then perform, daily and semi-regular habits that can be your backup against self-defeating habits.

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CREATING SPACE, PERSPECTIVE

There is nothing wrong with mistakes along the way, so long as we pick up our feet, continue on and remember to pay attention where we step. The purity we are to live in is not this white ballroom gala event where all actions should be courteous and polite, attire to be the highest standard, and the attendees the most noble and angelic. Rather, it's to allow ourselves space to err, to make mistakes. Our mistakes are places to learn and grow. Often times we have no idea what events might be in the future, as soon as the coming moments or hours of today. We could be 5 seconds away from committing a horrible, grave error. Normally if we did something really wrong, said something hateful, or failed someone, we would feel an overwhelming sense of shame or guilt. Or, perhaps feeling like you are broken beyond redemption?

I know. Making mistakes does not feel good. However with the self-respect we create, through patience of meditation, dispassionate non-attachment and self-love, we develop a purity within that allows us space to learn, grow and develop new perspectives. This is a stainless purity that does not easily become marred and, if dirty, easily cleaned with the power of forgiveness. What we feel when mistakes happen, small or large, are also ways for us to glimpse into the feelings and perceptions that others might experience, too, when they commit errors. So as we take notice of how we make errors and work to overcome or circumvent them, working on ourselves to improve with grace and humility, we can and should extend this redemptive purity to others.

STEPPING BACK

To aid us in forgiving, of creating this purity in our lives, perhaps it would be best to also consider stepping back once in awhile to see the bigger picture. Once, with a client, to help put things in perspective, I had him imagine that there was in front of him a large timeline and asked that he consider the natural timeline for his projects and goals to manifest. At the moment, we were focused on achieving a particular goal that had hopes of fruition. By stepping back and seeing the whole picture, he was able to see that there was a rhythm and there was no need to emotionally rush to the end.

JOURNAL DAY 5 – 7: To create more purity within ourselves we can use a similar exercise as above. Spend the next three days writing, as chronologically as possible, all the huge mistakes, bad habits (when they started), as well as time when someone hurt you really bad. As you write – write what you can or did learn from your personal mistakes. As you write about others, put yourself in their shoes and extend forgiveness to them. In the same way, mentally seek forgiveness for yourself.

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Helpful Hints for the Second Half –

In building our journey personal power, we are met along the road by confused travelers who, along the way in their lives, have mistakenly settled into their belief systems without looking for more – destined to repeat situations and wander in the same circle. We also come across obstacles that seem way to big to get by and, rather than confront them, we instead search for a shortcut around which then happens to feel like a long, wrong way. Remember, in these instances, to stay true to your course. People and situations will have us doubting and even leaving us with temporary amnesia.

To get the most out of our journey is the goal – not the end. It is the richness of experience that teaches us. When hiring skilled craftsmen or workers, those with the most experience more often turns out to be the best at their trade. These 10 weeks are merely touching the surface compared to the depth of learning and experience can be had when we daily contemplate these principles, practice our meditations, and put the breadth and length of our lives into perspective. No matter where you are, there is always a moment for graceful redemption, if we can only practice sincere compassion and forgiveness while constantly seeking to understand.

Use each day, and the moments that lay in between, to be less bound by judgments and expectations and freer through the openness that grace and purity allow. Create a pure life by living with respect.