

Physical Well-Being & The Force

Part Two: Cultivating & Acquiring Discipline

Welcome back, Jedi. How fares the flame of desire for improving your physical well-being? Have you stoked it with your determination and kept it fed with the fuel of knowledge? I hope so. In this lecture I will discuss the most important aspect of this journey that will serve you well going forward, not only in the quest for improved physical fitness but, in all endeavors of life and especially in Jedi training: Discipline. This is the next step, or rather hurdle, that will take that flame you created and sustain it throughout goal realization and for the remainder of your life.

What does this word, “discipline,” mean? Many things come to mind; some with negative connotations, like “punishment.” However, the spirit and definition of the word that best suits what I am trying to convey can be found in the Meriram-Webster Dictionary as, “training that corrects, molds, or perfects mental faculties or moral character.” Let’s focus on the first word, “training.” This is an action that a Jedi continually does to better him/herself to serve others, themselves and the Force. Training is the repetitive performance of a task in an effort for it to become second nature and imprinted in one’s very soul and being. This goal of this training to perfect mental faculties and moral character is to essentially alter one’s behavior from that of a poor lifestyle (activity and diet) that negatively impacts one’s connection to the Force to one that nurtures and propagates it. I’ve mentioned loving oneself in previous installments however, love oftentimes must be firm, tough and exacting instead of spoiling. One must tread the harder path toward happiness and through behavior improvement instead of the “easier, more seductive” way as Yoda proclaimed about the dark side.

Behavior is something we actively seek to control in others and, sadly, not too often in ourselves. For instance; you may have had a dog which you’ve tried to house train so that the animal did not relieve itself inside the house but, instead, outdoors. This can be an exhausting process that often makes one feel that all efforts border on futility. We seek to impose our will on the creature through repetitive actions of the “right way” to do things in hopes that it becomes ingrained in the consciousness and eventually becomes second nature, resulting in successful and productive outcomes (i.e. a clean home and a pet that can be enjoyed in it without consequence). However, how often do we try to impose our will on ourselves in such a manner to generate desired end-states? One must look inward, find the faults through acknowledgement (see Part One), take responsibility and take action through a carefully crafted plan. Just as you are the pet’s master, you must master yourself and demand perfection of behavior via carefully planned repetition of healthy actions. (Remember- perfection is not possible but the pursuit of perfection is a noble and worthy quest).

How long does one need to temper their behavior through training and repetition you might ask? All of your life. Discipline is not something one acquires or cultivates in days, weeks, months or even years. It requires constant devotion, trial and error and intermittent self-course correction. You must first acquire and cultivate discipline through beginning and then repeating healthy and beneficial steps as outlined in a feasible plan. One may want to seek out the advice of a doctor, a book and/or a physical trainer and then begin executing their guidance as soon as one feels ready. Some may need to wade gently into change, others may wish to dive in headfirst and leave their hedonistic and unhealthy behaviors behind in the dust and never look back. Whichever way you choose, you must take action in accordance with the plan you set or else that fire of desire will flicker and die from negligence.

A crucial part of acquiring and cultivating discipline is to remove all distractions and temptations from your life that may derail you from your plan. This may mean clearing your cupboards of unhealthy foods, setting ground rules for the use of electronic devices and social media, and even removing people from your life that do not have your best interest or health in mind. These all may sound like drastic measures but, drastic change is what is required. You must be stern with yourself as you are with the creature that you are trying to house train. You are seeking to change behavior; nothing is off the table. This purging of bad influences will provide mixed feelings. Fear, enjoyment but most of all, empowerment. By denying yourself these harmful things and throwing them away you start to master yourself. You are in control of your destiny and it feels amazing through the Force. This feeling of power over the self is what you are searching for with respect to discipline. It is what will carry you on through goal realization. However, it must be checked as it can become addictive. Many people can go from one extreme to another by not eating enough food and over-exercising, resulting in health issues on the other end of the spectrum. However, if you trust and listen to the Force you will not go awry.

Remember, repetition of good habits in accordance with a plan with little to no deviation and mitigating bad influences is the key to acquiring and cultivating discipline and ultimately, success. I will share with you my plan for nutrition and exercise as an example but I acknowledge that it may not work for everyone:

Diet: I eat 80% to 90% of the time in accordance with the "Paleo Diet." However, I despise the term "diet" and would rather prefer "lifestyle." This way of eating focuses on consuming food items that were available to and easily prepared by ancient peoples during the Paleolithic Era that are characterized by being moderate in protein, high in (good) fat, and low to moderate in carbohydrates. Essentially, meats, vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds and healthy sources of saturated fat (for energy). Also, this way of eating focuses on consuming only fresh, whole foods (ideally organic, grass-fed, and ethically sourced), when available and affordable, and most usually one ingredient. Shop on the outer isles of the grocery store such as the produce and butcher's section. Avoid foods that are pre-packaged, filled with processed sugars and carbohydrates. These convenient foods are poison. If you look at the nutrition label under "ingredients" and you can't pronounce what some of the ingredients are then it's most assuredly not good for you. Also, grains, legumes (such as beans, soy and peanuts), dairy and industrial oils (i.e. vegetable oil) are off limits as they tend to be highly processed and/or insulin spiking in nature. I believe that if you eat fresh and healthy like this then you will be imbued with the "Living Force," as there are little-to-no processes and steps between the food source when it was living and one's consumption of it. I understand that some may have an aversion to meat for ethical reasons and may wish to prescribe to a vegetarian way of eating. All well and fine and there are merits to that, of course. However, this is me as an example. The other 10% to 20% of the time I indulge in all the less healthy foods. For every thirty healthy meals or so, I enjoy pizza, burgers, fries, shakes, candy, cakes, etc. Life is too short and one can easily go mad from too much discipline plus, sometimes going temporarily off track will spike one's metabolism. However, one must be careful and be secure in their discipline so as not to slide back into bad habits if they do decide to do this. A "cheat meal" or a "cheat day" should be reserved for those that have reached their fitness goals and are in a maintenance status. Also, it is good practice to engage in physical activity on a "cheat day" to offset the deviation as much as possible. On calorie counting- I use to count calories and it became a tedious process and a negative side effect of acquiring and cultivating too much discipline. I use to weigh my food to ensure I met my calorie goals. However, while eating Paleo, I eat when I'm hungry until I'm full. There is no need for portion control if it is good food. One caveat if you decide to follow this dietary program: the first two weeks are rough as your body will come down with "flu" like symptoms as it begrudgingly moves away from burning carbohydrates for fuel and switches to using fat. However, once the transition is complete you begin to feel better and experience more energy than you ever had before.

Exercise: I recommend working out 3-5 times a week for 30 to 45 minutes with moderate to high intensity to meet fat-burning requirements for those that are trying to lose weight. However, I love to exercise and I usually devote 45 minutes to an hour a day, everyday to physical training. I am an officer in the army so my physical fitness is required of me and I see it as a contract between myself and fellow Soldiers that I am able to complete any given mission and help any fallen comrade by moving them to safety and fighting for their survival as well as mine if and when it becomes necessary. Also, due to my occupation, I choose to follow a functional fitness program designed for special operations personnel. Some may look at it and derisively call it "Crossfit," but I do not belong to a gym or club and perform daily workouts from a website designed to challenge my aerobic and anaerobic capacities with functional movements based on tasks that may be expected of me in the performance of my duties (i.e. lifting heavy items from ground to shoulder, to overhead, carrying heavy items, sprinting, and other natural movements). I believe the best types of workouts incorporate complex movements like those found in olympic-style weight lifting such as deadlifts, squats and cleans that engage the entire body and activate the metabolism. While these exercises may seem intimidating, unsafe and hard to perform, many resources are available on and offline on how to properly perform them with no risk of injury and with maximum benefit. It is also important to engage in physical activity that raises your heart rate and burns fat such as cardio-based circuits with simple implements or just one's own body weight (i.e. kettlebell swings, tire flips, burpees, sprinting, etc.). I also run 3 to 5 miles one or twice a week at a slow to moderate pace for a lower-intensity type of cardio. For those that are older and experience joint pain and are limited in their ability to perform the before-mentioned exercise, a simple walk or hike amongst nature will do wonders for your health, re-connect you with the Force and quiet your mind.

If one does something similar to myself, I see no way that he or she can regress or fail in achieving physical well-being and ultimately a greater connection to the Force. It all starts with acquiring and cultivating discipline so that behavior is altered for the better. Before I part ways with you again, I want to leave you with a quote from Buddha that may best be able to sum up everything discussed in this lecture: "To enjoy good health, to bring true happiness to one's family, to bring peace to all, one must first discipline and control one's own mind. If a man can control his mind he can find the way to Enlightenment, and all wisdom and virtue will naturally come to him." Until next time when I discuss Action & Fruition, look to the Force to seek mastery over yourself in order to achieve good, healthy ends. May the Force be with you.

-Skystriker