

BREAKING HABITS

May the peace of God be with you, now and always. We go to sleep at night and we wake up to a new day; in His mercy God gives us a continuum of new days. We get out of bed to start again, and every time we get up we decide how we are going to begin. If we are caught in a continuum of sameness, a failure to understand that an opportunity lies before us for a fresh beginning, nothing changes. But if we understand that the sun sets and the sun rises, even though it is the same sun it is a new opportunity. If we miss the available mercy, the mercy given to us, we miss an understanding that God starts the world all over again, we miss an understanding that with each breath there is a renewal in our state of being. We cannot be tied down by what happened before, we have to move away from that. Negativity ties us to the difficult; being positive is a source of renewal, being positive carries springtime around with us.

Renewal is characteristic of this world, death and renewal go on all the time. We must allow death and renewal to proceed within us, there must be a death for our base desires and a renewal for purity. Purity must be renewed continually. If we want fresh bread we have to bake every day, if we do not bake every day we cannot have fresh bread. The smell of freshness is given off because the bread was just baked. There is a vibrance when we resonate reality because we have made the effort to be there, we keep making that effort, we keep remaking that effort.

The magnetic, hypnotic pull of this world is so powerful that we need constant cleansing, we cannot just cleanse ourself once and be done with it. Just as we wake up every morning needing to wash, needing to shower to be rid of the sleep, we have to

shower internally to be rid of the world. We have to cleanse both what we walk through and what we have within us, a process which cannot stop. We should understand this as part of the burden of being human, the effort must go on, we cannot glide on automatic.

A bird must move its wings to maintain flight, it can glide awhile on air currents, but the time comes when it has to move its wings to stay aloft, something that happens more than once a day. If we want to stay aloft we have to make an effort, we have to summon that effort which is entwined with who we are, who we are to become. To change who we are to become we need great effort. God will supply the grace—we need patience waiting for the grace to come—while we stay in a mode of constant effort, we cannot be sloths, we cannot be sloppy, we cannot merely rest, we have to put out effort. To exert this effort means we have to be awake, we have to be conscious of what we have to do: we have to understand what we are trying to accomplish and how to do it.

If we do not keep our focus effort will drop away, if we do not have a certain impetus our effort will slacken. What is our impetus, how do we refocus, how do we start again through all the difficulties thrown at us? We have to summon inner strength, we have to associate with people who help us stimulate effort, who inspire us to re-create effort. And then we have to understand the results of this effort, focusing on those moments when purity enters our state, remembering what it is like.

We have an enemy in common, the dark thoughts and purposes which keep trying to divert us from our effort to be clean, to be pure. They put us in many different situations which demand effort, but this is pointless effort; we should know the difference between pointless effort and effort that bears fruit.

Our mind is always at work, we churn up thoughts from the moment we wake up to the moment we fall asleep, and even when we sleep we still have dreams. Why are we attached to our thoughts, where do they take us? Many of these thoughts, the way we think, our thought patterns, are formed when we are young, under the influence of parents or friends. If we have had negative friends and parents we might have acquired negative thought processes, and these negative thought processes are difficult to overcome. Why is this difficult? We believe this way of thinking is relevant to us, it influences us. There is a leap we need to make, a leap which understands there is a difference between ourselves and our thought process. How can we do that? We have to arrange for someone to watch us, an internal observer, we have to watch ourselves. In the way our parents watched us develop, we have to become our own parent, even though we do not have parenting skills, we still have to be that parent.

We understand what kindness is, what goodness is, we understand sloth and falling away from the path, we have those simple concepts. We have to watch ourselves as the parent watches his child to see where we are on the path, what progress we make as we are conscious of watching. By allowing ourselves a place that observes, a place that becomes our parent, we can see what is false, we can begin to eliminate all this. As long as we fail to watch ourselves, as long as we are unaware of what is going on, we fall into patterns which are like long-term spasms, doing the same thing again and again over an extended period of time, more or less as we develop a twitch. Certain twitches can last for years if we do not stop them. We need to break free of our twitches, break away from automatic responses, break these spasms holding our life for months at a time.

We need to find a way to do this, to make that leap, have the courage to make the effort, to be involved. If we're not going to be involved in our own life, who is? If we're not going to make the effort to turn towards God, who can do that for us? We are responsible for ourself, no matter the hard stories of our upbringing, the excuses we can come up with to explain why we are the way we are. In the final analysis, we are who we are. If this life is going to be something other than 'it is what it is,' we have to make the changes, otherwise we stay the same.

What keeps us from making that leap into being something else, what are we attached to, what makes us hold on, what is this thought process enveloping us in a dreamlike state for days and days even while we are awake? Some people go through the world wondering what other people think of them, and that concern prevents them from functioning. Others function exclusively to influence the way people perceive them. We seem to have a dwarfed image of ourself within the social context, the context of our peers, an image we keep trying to prop up, to work with.

We should finish with this image of ourself and become the person who judges that self, not allowing others to judge us. We need to fall into the protection which is the truth of God's laws, His way, the right conduct and right action He has given us. We should administer this to ourself instead of using the judgment of others. Who knows what their truth is? When we meet someone who does know the truth, we can look to that person for advice, but if we let the ordinary, everyday world become our judge we are judged by the ordinary, everyday standards of whatever culture we accidentally happen to fall into. We need to graduate from culture, from language, from an understanding which

is finite. All these cultural, these local understandings are only relevant to a passing moment.

Popular culture is called popular culture because it is the understanding of the moment, it changes from moment to moment, fashion changes from moment to moment, style changes from moment to moment. We should move away from things which change and identify ourselves with the eternal, align ourselves with it. As we move away we learn to love for the sake of love, not for the sake of what others think but for the sake of God in others, not for the sake of who they think they are—they do not really know who they are—and not for the sake of who we think we might become, since we do not really know who we are.

We have to know God, we have to know Him in a profound way, we have to long to know Him more than we long for rewards from this world. We need to make priorities for our own state, priorities for our life and experience. The mind tells us we want certain experiences, we want to hear music, we want to go to a concert, go to a casino, to be entertained, we want to see a comedy, we want to see a drama, we want thrills, we want to ski, we want to do something exciting, thrilling, we want to be taken outside ourselves by some wonderful experience. We want food that takes us beyond what we think is usual, we want something from the world permitting an experience outside the ordinary.

The world however, can give us only ordinary experiences, there is no experience here outside the ordinary. Being caught up by the fascination of some not-ordinary experience is what drives people; once they have had it, the disappointment of not still having it can be overwhelming. This is the moment when alcohol comes in, when all the painkilling agents of the world come in. Some who are successful, when they acquire

what they have wanted for so long and find it disappointing, find that it does not do what they thought it would do; when they realize there is still a need for something else, some people deaden themselves to make that need disappear.

The need exists, but what are we doing to satisfy the need we feel, the cry pouring from our throat begging for a change from this ordinary existence to something profound? What are we doing to step into the profound, what do we do to remove ourselves from the mundane, to become part of the profound? Are we merely talking about it? Talking about it is something, yet only in a minimal way. Understand the wonder of silence, the enormity of quietude, the abundance available within the open space which is not involved in the world. We can wave our hand and change the air around us, with a wave of our hand we can also move the world aside. We can do this, we must believe we can do this because if we do not believe it, if we do not have that faith we cannot take the necessary steps.

We must put ourselves in a position to let this happen, we have to dive right in, not just stand on the diving board. If we watch high divers we notice something, they do not have much on them or with them, only a little bathing suit, that is about all. They do not have their house on their back, they do not have anything strapped to their legs, they do not have any weights, they stand there ready to dive. We have to put ourselves in the same situation because we cannot enter the quietude, we cannot dive into reality when we are packed with illusion. If we are pack rats of illusion, if we insist on taking our illusions with us wherever we go, we cannot enter a new space, there will not be room to get in, the opening is too small, we will not be able to climb up the ladder to the diving board.

Illusions keep us from doing certain things, then once we are rid of this baggage, we need to put ourselves in a place which is actually quiet. Meditation should be a part of our life, should be something we do in a purposeful way, again and again, this is the cleansing. Why do we have to offer prayers so many times a day? The power of the world is strong, the magnetism, the hypnotism, the illusion of the world is so strong it takes constant repetition of prayer, a concerted effort to distance ourselves from it, to detach ourselves from it. Without that repeated effort we fall back into the spasms of illusion, the spasms of daily life, thinking my God, if only I could! As we do that we collect more illusion which we have to get rid of again.

We need to form habits which move us towards reality, we need to believe there is a connection between the worlds that we can enter with a wave of our hand, with the grace of God. We should believe it is God's will that this can happen for us and for everyone, we should believe it even when things become difficult sometimes, we have to believe that the burdens we carry will be lifted, that this is His will.

Illusion is like foam on the ocean. It is not the ocean, it is just foam, yet we treat the foam as if it had substance. If we play with the foam on a cup of coffee we never get to the coffee. We have to dive right in, not skim the surface, not merely examine the foam of our life. If fluff is the nature of our existence we should do away with it. We need substance, we need reality, we need to long for it, yearn for it, cry for it. Crying is a spasm, but this cry is a spasm induced by a connection to reality. This is a hunger, a yearning, a feeling for something we have lost. We have lost our way, we have lost reality. We need to cry for this reality.

We have heard of the gift of tears, tears which can be a pathway because that yearning is so overwhelming it provokes a response. If we experience the pain of all the unreality in our life, the pain of knowing how far away we are, by facing that pain we will be allowed to pass through it. If we cannot face it, if we cannot go through it, we cannot get to the other side.

May God help each of us gather the inner strength for that effort, may this reality open up for us and become our path.