

Chapter 5

Keys to Taking Command of Your Life

What is the value of being in command of our own life? Is it that people applaud us for our strength of character? Or that we've won the approval of our peers, who think of us as being a "rock"?

When we are in command of our life, conflicts of one nature or another may appear, but we can no longer be tricked into compromising ourselves by mistaking, for instance, resentment or anger for real strength, or brash arrogance for quiet confidence.

When we're in command of ourselves, we don't say cruel things to others. We won't rush. Fear can't make a home in us. Painful regrets over days gone by become a thing of the past; dark days lose their power to bring us down because we now know the difference between passing clouds and the skies through which they sail. That is true self-command.

Perhaps you're wondering if it's possible to know whether or not this effortless state of self-command actually exists. As you're about to see, the answer is yes. In fact, there's only one reason why we ever get dragged around by negative thoughts and feelings, and it isn't because they're too powerful to be put in their proper place!

The real reason we lose the command we long for may surprise you! It's due to a certain kind of spiritual "forgetfulness" that we'll define as follows:

In our moment of need, we can't remember the part of us that can't be made to serve anything not of its own choosing.

As simple as it sounds, we regain real command whenever we can remember this truth. Stirring ourselves out of the spiritual slumber into which we have fallen is the same as awakening from whatever dark dream may have been dominating our mind the moment before. Let's study this new and unusual idea, and find out why it works when all other approaches to self-command come up short.

Even though we all know the harm it does to lash out at others, to launch an angry attack or act with cruel intent, we still tend to do these things anyway. The following insights help make clear why this happens to us and how we are made, in effect, to act against ourselves and those we love without really knowing why.

Whenever we are threatened in some way, our tendency is to go into an "auto-respond" mode of behavior; certain habitual reactions rise up and effectively "take over" our thoughts and feelings. So, in a manner of speaking, it isn't really our true Self that meets these unwanted events. If we take a step back and quietly observe ourselves through impartial eyes, here's what we'll see is actually happening within us: We are being told how we feel, what to do, even who we should be *by what we're being given to remember in these moments*. Let's look at an example to help clarify this important discovery:

Whenever we act cruelly toward another, it's because something cruel "takes over and handles" the moment for us by doing what *it* remembers to do. In a manner of speaking, a state of cruelty imposes its rules on us, and makes of us what it will in the next moment. Much to our regret, we don't remember that any better solution exists until we have to deal with the grief that follows from having forfeited our freedom.

What's the solution to this kind of forgetfulness? First, without judging ourselves, we must acknowledge the truth of our present (psychological) situation; facts never lie. We are reacting to life's challenges from unconscious parts of ourselves that literally hand us a script and then direct us to play out a painful role. We are not meant to live like this—as real-time prisoners of our own pasts, captives of conditioning that serves nothing but its own continuity. Within us, awaiting our awakening to it, lives a level of Self that cannot forget what is right, bright, and true, any more than the sun can forget to shine each day. Let's prove the truth of this invaluable idea.

Who among us hasn't known times when we saw the truth of something and, in the light of that moment, thought, "Aha! I always knew that was the truth, but I forgot it." And it is right to say, "I forgot it," because we can see in those same moments that our "new" understanding isn't really new at all! We see that we always knew that truth, and that now—due to fortunate circumstances—we recognize it again! Let's summarize briefly:

Living within us dwells an order of being that knows, without thinking about it, what is authentically good for us and others. The problem isn't that this higher level of being—with its natural, calm command—is actually missing just when we need it most. The real problem is that we forget it! We forget that it's our right to remember what we want to remember, instead of what we are being given to remember!

Here are three spiritual principles designed to help you remember and restore your natural self-command. Allow them to remind you of what you already know is true and see how much easier it becomes to do what is true in the face of difficult moments. In no time at all, your anxious search for self-command will fade away as surely as shadows flee the midday sun.

There is no intelligence in any fearful or worried thought or feeling.

What happens when we allow worried thoughts or feelings to tell us what to do about our problems? More worried thoughts and feelings follow! Why? Because we're listening to negative thoughts and feelings that tell us what to do about the darkness that's all around us. This is like trying to get out of a cave and back into the sunlight by following a bat! We must remember that there is no intelligence in any worry, anger, or fear, and then have the courage to act on our understanding. Let's take an example.

Perhaps you get some unwanted news at work, or your wife mentions some concern at home. All of a sudden, a flood of anxious thoughts washes through you. What if, in that moment, you could remember what you want to remember, what you know is true? What if you could remember that there is nothing good, no saving grace in the embrace of any worry or fear? Wouldn't your timely ability to remember this truth help you dismiss any of the fears that want to steal your self-command? Of course! By the grace of this same remembrance, the painful need to chase after a way to regain command of yourself disappears, because you didn't give it away in the first place!

No negative state has the right to rule over your life.

When things don't go the way we want them to, our tendency is to turn negative on the spot. It's as if something in us throws a switch and, the next moment—like being caught in the surge of a tidal wave—resistance carries us away. But this unconscious resistance to reality never shows itself for what it is; it can't, or the show would be over! After all, *who sides with something that is perpetually against life?*

Resistance is the unseen father of all lingering negative states. It derives its power to trick us into embracing its painful presence by a kind of misdirection. It hides behind a host of associated images that always appear with it—certain thoughts and feelings that promise either to protect us or to provide us with plans to escape our

situation. But we must learn to see that the true nature of anything—whether a newly opened leaf or a fearful thought or feeling—is inseparable from what it serves. So, regardless of how it may appear, any disquieting state in us that “says” it wants to lead us away from a fear is leading us *toward* one instead.

Here’s the main idea: *Resistance is negative attraction!* We bind ourselves to what we don’t want! You can demonstrate this unwanted result for yourself by trying to push one hand away with the other. This action only forces them closer together, increasing the pressure between them. This means that the first step in releasing ourselves from the strain of this self-wrecking relationship is to see that we have unknowingly attached ourselves to it! The key is to have the courage not to resist, and to remember that what you want is release.

Pain is neither a natural nor necessary part of making a mistake.

There is a very surprising reason why we tend to suffer over our mistakes as we do. The real source of our pain in these moments—whether we’re alone or with others—is the fear of being seen as less than we’ve imagined ourselves to be. We all know how it feels to try and save face, to scramble for scraps of lost dignity. But fearfully trying to cover up a misstep is not the same as knowing where we’re going. In fact, whenever we feel compelled to cover our tracks, something is in command of us, isn’t it? But here’s the real question: What part of us wants us to believe that a good “cover-up” is the same as being right? The answer is surprising: It’s our “unoriginal” self . . . a level of being that only knows itself through a slew of acquired social images, including the false belief that they must be protected at all costs.

Though we have yet to see it, beating ourselves up after making a blunder doesn’t mean that we actually knew better than what we just did—nor does this kind of suffering lead to greater command or better decisions the next time around. Self-punishing acts prove only one thing: Something in us would rather suffer over what happened in the past than be present to those parts of us that erred in the first place. Real self-command dawns within us as we realize that *reliving the past is powerless to change a present misunderstanding*; it comes from the light of our new knowledge that having the courage to drop the level of Self that keeps wronging us and others is far more important than being seen as right. This same realization also grants us the courage to start life over—again and again.