

Sample Chapter from

Everyday Awakening

Practical Techniques for Waking Up into Joy

by Lion Goodman

Awakening Your Will

Have you ever set out to accomplish a particular task, and found yourself distracted or sidetracked, having forgotten your original intention? For some people it happens many times each day. Is this just a memory problem, or is there something deeper going on?

How many projects have you started and not completed? Most people can make a long list of tasks that were started but then abandoned, books begun but then left unread, art projects started but left unfinished, and a large pile of objects taken out to be used but not put away. Is it just that our lives are too busy, or is something mysterious going on inside us?

Have you started a diet or made a decision to stop eating something that is bad for you, and found yourself eating the forbidden food without thinking -- only days, or merely hours after making the commitment? Did you forget? Do you lack willpower? Did your desires overwhelm your original intention?

These are common and frustrating human experiences. By understanding the nature of the *will*, we can begin to understand our seemingly irrational behaviors.

Our *willpower* seems to switch "On" for some tasks, which we accomplish easily, and "Off (or "Out to Lunch") for others. Like an unreliable friend, we can't seem to count on our own will to keep us on track. In certain areas of our lives, such as getting to work or taking care of the children, we can feel our inner fortitude kick in. We focus our attention and energy on getting things done. We do whatever it takes to get it done. We stick to a plan, keep our commitments, and make progress step-by-step. In other situations, we lose focus, and can feel like a victim of our own subconscious whims and desires.

As children, we were told by our parents and teachers that if we simply applied ourselves, and used our willpower, we could accomplish anything. Pointing to famous people, our parents and teachers admonished us with, "If you just applied yourself, and paid attention, you could get good grades, make lots of money, accomplish great things, and become famous. You could even become President of the United States."

They were partially right. A strong will allows us to continue our movement forward without being slowed, deterred, or stopped by outside forces or influences. But for most people, a strong will doesn't come naturally. Our will began to express itself in early childhood (during the "terrible twos," when the will constantly tests parents' patience), but

for most of us, it was beaten into submission until you were properly “socialized,” until you began to “behave yourself.” Your will was subjugated – made subservient to the will of your parents, teachers, religious authorities, and elders.

Some people demonstrate great willpower. Mary decides not to eat chocolate, and she simply stops eating it, with no apparent effort or struggle. Mark decides to exercise every day, and he’s off to the gym every morning. We admire these people, and we know that we are somehow not like them. Perhaps it is something we are missing – a fatal flaw that prevents us from getting things done.

Where does this mysterious force of *will* come from, and where does it reside? Can it be strengthened, like a muscle? Or are we given a limited amount of will at birth, and are thus subject to permanent limitations for the rest of our lives?

The *will* is not a part of the body that can be dissected and examined under a microscope. It is not a thing or an object. The will is a function -- a process -- of “Being” itself. It is a built-in ability that all animals possess that allows us to get what we need and want. (There are exceptions and limitations, of course – think of a person in a coma or an animal in a cage.) The *will* is the power a being has to view its options, make decisions, and control its actions. A being *will*s. It comes with the territory of life. If you have a body, you have a will.

The most important function of the will is to decide. The word “decide” comes from the Latin roots *de* + *caedere*, meaning “to cut off.” To decide means to cut off all other options but one. When you choose to turn left, you cut off the opportunity to turn right. A person (or any being) makes a decision and then engages in action by using the will: “I will move forward. I will turn toward the light. I will back away. I will smell this. I will eat

this.” If you are not *willing* to cut possibilities out of your life, you won’t be able to make decisions. You’ll be left with too many possibilities, and no ability to move forward.

All living beings have the ability to decide – at some level of consciousness. In lower animals, such as bacteria, viruses, and insects, the will appears to be an automatic or robotic process. It is machine-like, engaged in without any apparent conscious choice. A mosquito flies in the direction of something warm, lands, and injects its proboscis into your arm. Did it choose you, and your arm, and your forearm in particular? We call these basic behaviors “drives” or “instincts” because the mosquito does not seem to have any choice but to engage in its pre-programmed behaviors. An amoeba is not considered to be a conscious creature, but you can watch it move with some intention across the field under a microscope, extending its pseudopods to check out its surroundings. Is it deciding where to go or just reacting to its environment? Pavlov’s dogs didn’t “decide” to salivate when they heard the bell ring. Automatic responses are below the level of consciousness, and as part of the sub-conscious, they are not considered willful.

EXERCISE 1

After reading the instructions all the way through, stop all of your movements and actions. Sit or stand quietly. Decide what to do next, and state it, out loud. (This exercise is best done in a private space. Otherwise people will look at you strangely.) After stating it, take that action. For example: “I am going to walk forward ten paces.” Then walk forward ten paces. Then decide what you will do next, state it out loud, then do it.

If you notice yourself doing things other than what you stated, stop doing it, and state out loud that you are going to do that. For example, if you notice yourself turning

your head and looking to the left while you are taking ten paces forward, stop and say, "I am going to look to my left on the third pace forward." Then do that. Continue this exercise for ten minutes. When you are done, take a few minutes and check to see how you feel after having exercised your will.

A) This exercise is exciting and entertaining when practiced with a friend or partner. Each person observes the other and helps to identify automatic behaviors: "Did you notice that you brushed your hair out of your face? Okay, decide to do that, speak it, then do it consciously." Have fun with this.

B) When you wake up in the morning, spend the first five minutes of your day doing this exercise. Do this for five days in a row. At the end of the day, notice whether it shifted your feelings during the day. Did it change your effectiveness? Your attitude?

We humans are complex creatures, but many of our behaviors are automatic. Breathing, blinking, swallowing, and scratching where it itches are behaviors that we do automatically, without deciding to do so in advance. (Some pundits extend this list to talking on the phone, shopping, and scanning for potential mates, which appear to be almost automatic, especially for teenagers.) These behaviors are managed by our autonomic (automatic) nervous system. Can these automatic behaviors be brought up to a conscious level? Yes.

EXERCISE 2

For five minutes, observe your movements and notice which ones appear to be automatic. Pay particular attention to your eye movements, your heartbeat, and your breathing rate. At this point, simply observe and do not attempt to change anything. When you are ready, decide to change your breathing pattern. Take control over it, expanding your inhale, or slowing your exhale. Stop breathing in or out for one second, holding your breath in briefly at the top of your inhale, and holding your breath out at the bottom of your exhale. Observe your feelings as you take control over a normally automatic function. Alternate taking control, then letting your breath be automatic, back and forth, for one minute each, for a total of ten minutes.

Expand this awareness of automaticity to other parts of your life. For example, notice what you say when someone asks, "How are you?" If your response is automatic, ("I'm fine. How are you?") decide to change your response the next five times it happens. Have some fun with this. Create a range of possible answers, such as: "You're fine, how am I?" "Do you really want to know, or are you just being polite?" "I just woke up, and I haven't figured that out yet." Notice the response you get from others.

Yogis in India have demonstrated that autonomic functions – even the heartbeat – can be brought under conscious control. The entire field of biofeedback emerged from studies that showed that if we are able to receive information back from any part of our body, we can gain some conscious control over it. In one experiment, the contraction of a single muscle unit, the smallest bit of contracting muscle tissue,

was amplified and fed back to the experimental subjects as a clicking sound. Subjects were able to very quickly bring this completely unconscious muscle movement under conscious control. We can become conscious and in control of anything – as long as we can direct our attention to it and receive information from it.

If this is true, why do we have problems with our will? At times we feel that we are at the effect of shifting winds. We run this way and that, in pursuit of many things we believe we need or want. We feel deep contradictions inside of us. We know we have something important to accomplish, but we can't seem to get it done. We keep a "to do" list, but we find ourselves doing things that bring us pleasure instead of focusing on accomplishing our goals. We get distracted by phone calls, interesting magazine articles, TV shows we have to watch, the newest emails in our inbox, or multiple websites. Our original intention is hazy at best, or lost completely. Something is moving us from activity to activity, but it is *not* conscious decision-making. We know where we should put our attention, but we get sidetracked from our goals. Why does this happen?

As discussed in Chapter #N, we are not one "Self." We have multiple "selves," And each self is attempting to express its own will.

There are five broad categories into which our agents or sub-personalities can be divided. They are called the Realms of Will:

- 1) **Physical** (Instinctual)
 - 2) **Emotional** (Pleasure/Pain)
 - 3) **Social** (Moral)
 - 4) **Self-Determined** (Rational)
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5) **Spiritual** (Transcendent)

These Realms correspond to psychologist Abraham Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs." Maslow pointed out that individuals seek to fulfill their needs at each level, starting with the physiological and survival needs for food, shelter, and sex. Once that level of need is mostly filled, the individual can then begin seeking ways of getting the next level of needs met. In practice, our wide variety of needs and desires call to us simultaneously. Each need motivates us in a different direction. Some of them we hear as clear voices, others as urges, others as goals we have set for ourselves, and others as intuitions or a deep knowing that guides us in a particular direction.

The **Physical Will** is concerned with survival, and represents those parts of us that protect us from danger and get our survival needs fulfilled. The Physical Will expresses itself as instincts to acquire food and shelter, to reproduce, and to avoid danger and death. At this level, the motivations of Physical Will are referred to as "drives." All animals share the same instincts. The will at this level is not "awakened," that is, animals are driven by their survival needs, they are not conscious of their motivations, and cannot change them readily. Unfortunately, this is true of much of human behavior, as well. Many of our choices and behaviors are automatic, driven by needs below the level of conscious choice. Although we believe we are awake and deciding for ourselves, most of what we seek and do is a result of unconscious needs and habitual behaviors intended to fill those needs.

EXERCISE 3

For one day, observe your Physical Will at work. Notice when your behavior is being driven by physical needs. How many times do you feel the urge to go to the bathroom? Do you go immediately, or do you wait? How often do you eat? Did you experience a feeling of hunger, or did you stand up and get a snack, cup of coffee, or glass of water automatically?

If you are single, observe your hunting-for-a-mate behaviors for a week. Observe how you look at people you are attracted to, and what goes through your mind when you do so. Do you act on your impulses, asking for phone numbers or being seductive? Or do you sit back and hope that you will be noticed? Observe your thinking about people around you. Do you judge them as worthy or unworthy of your attention? Do you put them into categories, or decide whether they're right for you (even before you've met them)? Experiment by changing your automatic behavior consciously, acting instead like someone you admire.

If you are married, observe your sexual desire, and how and when you get it fulfilled. Do you ask for what you want, or just take it? Are you as seductive as before you were married, or do you assume that your partner has an obligation to satisfy you? For a week, act as if you are not yet married, but are intent on attracting your partner into your life.

The **Emotional Will** is the realm of our likes and dislikes, attractions and repulsions, and is the basis for many of our addictions. In this realm, our sub-personalities seek pleasure and avoid pain. Behaviors and choices are driven primarily by what has brought pain or pleasure in the past. Most of our core attitudes and our moods are driven

by these pleasure-seeking and pain-avoiding parts of ourselves. The emotional will also operates mostly on automatic in the background, with little conscious intervention.

We judge people who are driven primarily by this level as selfish egoists or as hedonists. Addictions to food, cigarettes, drugs, or alcohol are driven partly by induced physical and biochemical needs, but also as strategies to avoid or numb emotional pain. When we see good people stuck in bad relationships that they can't seem to get out of, it is most likely that they are being run by the needs of their Emotional Will.

The **Social Will** operates in two realms: the emotional-social mind, where we seek to meet our needs for recognition, belonging, and social status, and in the thinking-rational-moral mind, where we are indoctrinated into believing that one thing is right and another is wrong. In our distant evolutionary past, belonging to a group (or troop) meant survival. We are social creatures, so we need each other. Being cast out of the group caused suffering from aloneness and almost certain death. The Social Will accepts instructions and indoctrination easily, because we are eager to please others in order to belong and thus survive. Adults indoctrinate their children as they themselves were indoctrinated: "This is right. This is wrong. Do this. Don't do this." The reward for good behavior is love, recognition, and acceptance. The consequence of going against the social code includes punishment, isolation, and pain. These simple methods of indoctrination are used very effectively to align the Social Will with the group's or community's rules of proper (moral) behavior. The Social Will is the source of the Right/Wrong game and all manifestations of righteousness. At its best, it creates a coherent civilization and a social structure that works to benefit everyone in the society. At its worst, it is the cause of most wars, injustice, and justified killing.

The Self-Determined Will is the first level of Will that has the potential to be driven by conscious decision rather than by physiological or social needs. With a Self-Determined Will, a person can make decisions outside his or her indoctrination. A person becomes a true individual, separate from family, tribe, or culture. A self-determined person can rebel against authority, voluntarily leaving his or her parental home and community. He or she can become untraditional, creative, and truly unique.

America is a shining example of Self-Determined Will in many ways. For either good or bad, unrestricted self-directed will can accomplish almost anything. Individuals can be challenged to greatness and can overcome obstacles. A person can create their own goals, decide what is best for their life, and strike out on their own to accomplish it. On the other hand, greed, anger, and frustration can warp the Self-Determined Will into a force of destruction.

The Self-Determined Will at its best brings forth the fruits of creativity and progress. The American culture admires achievement, and our economic system supports the “rugged individual” to succeed – or fail – on their own. The downside of this complete self-determinism is that as separate individuals, we have lost much of our sense of tribe and caring community. Individuals who have less self-determinism, energy, resources or education get left behind in the dust.

The Self-Determined Will begins to express itself during the Terrible Twos – when we first say “No!” to our parents. It grows as we grow, reaching its zenith in adolescence when we rebel against all authority. As we grow into adulthood, we train this will to serve all of our needs. We work hard at a job in order to live a good life. We accumulate things as evidence of our will to wealth and power. We can be richer than the Kings and Queens

of old, yet in some fundamental way, this turns out to be less than completely fulfilling. And thus emerges the Spiritual Will.

The **Spiritual (Transcendent) Will** awakens when a person realizes that there is more to life than the accumulation of wealth and power. A new chapter of the Will is opened with the realization that we are all intimately connected, and that others around us are suffering. This realization may come early in life, or late. In some, it never awakens. With compassion for others, and the desire to make a difference in the world, an individual becomes motivated by something higher than the intellect or emotions or ego-based goals and achievements. The Spiritual Will comes from what some call the Higher Self. This is the realm of life purpose, of the philanthropic urge we feel to help others, or to solve social ills. It is the realm where impossible promises are made: "I am committed to ending world hunger... to the ending of homelessness in my city... to peace in the Middle East... to healing the earth... to saving the children." When the Spiritual Will awakens, a new life begins where our motivations seem to come from Pure Being, or from Spirit. In Maslow's terms, this is the realm of self-actualization. In Buddhism, it is the realm of compassionate action for the benefit of all living things.

Another aspect of Spiritual Will is surrender. This does not refer to giving up, giving in, or succumbing in face of force, but a transcendent act of will that goes beyond the will itself. This comes from the recognition that God or Spirit may have something in mind for us that is much larger and more glorious than we could imagine for ourselves, and certainly more powerful than anything the ego could generate. Some people feel a pull or a drawing forward from that transcendent force. This is the source of the saying "Thy Will, not my will, be done." In Islam, the statement "InshAllah" means "If Allah wills

it..." This statement, primarily used to refer to situations in the future, is an acknowledgement that our personal will is not the only force in the Universe. It is a magical act that throws open the ego's bounds and transports us to a larger whole that we are merely part of.

Mastery of one's will is the most important element of success in any endeavor. Unfortunately, the exercise of the will is rarely taught, except in certain mystery schools which have as their intention the awakening of the "True Self." In the public school system, individuals are socialized and controlled so they do not exercise "willfulness," which is equated with obstinacy. From lack of exercise, the will becomes flaccid and easily controlled by others. We end up preferring to rely on rules, customs, and directions from others to guide our behavior, rather than performing the hard work of conscientiously analyzing choices and making decisions. Our attention is pulled this way and that way by the parts of ourselves, like a plastic bag carried by the wind. With exercise, the will can once again awaken, and take its rightful place as a resource for you to achieve your goals.

THE EXERCISES

In order to be successful at anything, a person must be able to control his or her attention and will. The will is the faculty of Self which decides where to place attention, and then when and where to move and remove attention. We live in a world full of distractions, so only those people who can focus and hold their attention on a goal are able to achieve it. If you are not able to stick to a plan, or you lose sight of your goals, or you

have difficulty staying with one thing, your will could use some exercise and training. The will is like a muscle – it needs regular exercise to stay healthy. As in any gym, your muscles get stronger only when you actually lift the weights. Do you want results? Do the exercises. As in a gym, start with smaller weights, and work your way up to bigger and bigger challenges. Take a gradient approach. Eventually, your will can operate at peak efficiency. Do these exercises again and again until you've achieved mastery of your will.

For five minutes, observe your movements and continue to ask, "What is moving me?" Notice whether or not you can tell what your motivation is. At this point, simply observe, and do not attempt to change your behavior. After doing this exercise a few times, make a list of your motivations. Then, use a chart like the one below that identifies each realm of your will, and how often each realm and each motivation is in control of your decisions and your behavior. [Sample Chart]

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1. For five minutes, decide and declare what you are going to do before you do it. Example: Start by sitting in your chair. Decide what you are going to do next, then speak your intention out loud: "I am going to stand up." Then stand up. Decide what you are going to do next, and say it out loud: "I am going to turn and face the kitchen." Then do it. Repeat, deciding and speaking before making each move. If you notice something happening that you didn't decide to do (such as scratching your nose), stop. Then, consciously decide to do that action and speak it out loud before doing it. "I am going to scratch my nose. (Scratches.) I am going to stop scratching my nose." Continue with the exercise for five minutes.

This exercise is both exciting and entertaining to practice with a friend or partner. Each person observes the other and helps to identify automatic behaviors: "Did you notice that you brushed your hair out of your face?"

Okay, decide to do that, speak it, then do it consciously.” Have fun with this. When you wake up each morning, spend the first five minutes of your day doing this exercise. Notice how it changes your feelings during the day. Does the exercise change your effectiveness during the day?

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2. Pick an inanimate object and focus all your attention on it for one minute. Use your will to keep your attention on the object. If you notice your attention wandering, bring it back to the object. Start the count of time over from zero until you are able to hold your attention on the object for the full minute. It is handy to have a watch or clock within visual range, or have another person keep track of the time.

 - a. Increase the time for your focus of attention by half-minute intervals. Practice this each day, preferably as the first thing you do when you begin your workday. Repeat this exercise whenever you are feeling scattered or out of control.

 3. Pick something unimportant that you do often and automatically, such as reading while you eat, or putting on the TV when you are getting ready for bed. Choose to not do that activity for a 24 hour period. Taking a gradient approach, working your way up on more important automatic actions. Your aim is to do this exercise with any addictions you may have – such as to sugar, alcohol, coffee, chocolate, or your favorite food that you “have to have” every day.

 - a. Commit to “one day at a time” without that substance or activity, and take notice of your feelings, cravings, reactions, and irritations which occur in the absence of that substance. Note them in your journal. When you’ve accomplished one day without it, decide to go without it

for two days, then three. If you are having trouble with even one day, go back to one hour. If you are successful, build up hour-by-hour until you can achieve one full day.

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4. Pick something that you have to make a decision about. Start with relatively unimportant decisions. Example: "Should I go out to dinner or stay home and cook?" Make your decision, then state, out loud, what you have decided in this form: "Shall I stay home and cook tonight? Yes. Level One." This is conviction at the 10% level. Then repeat, with more conviction, saying: "Shall I stay home and cook tonight? Yes! Level Two." Repeat again, eight more times, each time with more conviction, until Level Ten, where you are completely certain and have 100% conviction. After doing the exercise, sit and feel how it feels to be 100% certain and completely committed to the task. Taking a gradient approach, use this technique with more and more important decisions.
 5. When you wake up in the morning, before you start your day, decide to accomplish one particular thing by noon. Let it be your top priority that pushes all of your other priorities aside. Let nothing get in the way of accomplishing that task first. After you've accomplished it, take a moment and feel the feelings you have. Can you bask in that feeling for awhile? Does your mind immediately let you know what the next thing to accomplish is? If this occurs, tell that part of yourself to stand by, and return to basking in the delicious feeling of accomplishment. Feel proud of yourself. Give yourself positive feedback. Give yourself a reward that is good for you.
 6. When you notice that you desire something, instead of going to get it, ask yourself, "Where is that desire coming from?" Often our desires are created by other unfulfilled desires. If you notice that there is a deeper desire underneath, ask the same question, "Where is that desire coming from?"

Keep following the answers backward until you reach the core desire (you'll recognize it by its not having another desire underneath it). Sit with the core desire and feel its strength, its pull, its need, and notice how you feel in its presence.

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- a. Ask yourself, "What is it that I really need?" Often, we will get an immediate answer. See if you can get that need filled in a positive way by taking a walk in nature, taking good care of your body, visiting with a loved one, getting touched or massaged, etc.
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Additional Resources for Awakening the Will

The best training for development of the Will is The Avatar® Course, created by Harry Palmer. This nine-day course for self-development is taught by a worldwide network of teachers. Visit the Avatar website: www.avatarEPC.com. You can download the "Basic Will Course" for free at <http://avatarepc.com/html/mini-eng.html>. It contains many exercises which strengthen and awaken the will. Highly recommended.

"The Proper use of will power is not conquest and subjugation, but the disciplined control of one's own attention."

~ Harry Palmer, *ReSurfacing: Techniques for Exploring Consciousness*.

Another school of spiritual development that includes training of the will is that of G.I. Gurdjieff (1877–1949), who's training is referred to as simply "The Work". The website www.gurdjieff.org is a good place to start.

E.J. Gold is a teacher whose school in Grass Valley, California (www.idhnb.com) trains the will through a wide variety of practices, including the making of art. He has been called a "modern day Gurdjieff" by some.

A more accessible school is the Diamond Approach of the Ridwhan Foundation in California. Founded by teacher A.H. Almaas, it combines ancient and modern techniques for awakening the will and achieving self-realization. www.ridhwan.org.

Rudolph Steiner's Waldorf Schools have a deep understanding of the development of will in children. www.awsna.org.

"The point is never to pervert the willing by false means into the wrong direction, but to secure the strengthening of the will by artistic means."

~ Rudolf Steiner

