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THE MASTERY OF SELF



A TOLTEC GUIDE TO PERSONAL FREEDOM

same situation? Can you see how the other person's belief is true for them?

- ♦ How do you want to act the next time a conflict like this arises? Is there a way you can engage with the other person, be true to yourself, and not try to change or subjugate the other person?

As a Master of Self, you know avoiding all conflict is impossible, so when conflicts arise, your job is to look within, see what is true for you in the moment, and find a way to honor your own beliefs while simultaneously respecting the choices and beliefs of others. Return to this exercise whenever you experience a conflict with another person.



The Transformative Power of Listening

The following exercise will help you stay grounded and in touch with your emotions. The focus is on listening to the people in your life who have different beliefs and values than you.

Find someone you are close to and ask them a question on a topic you know you disagree on. Then

listen. This is not the place for you to share your own opinions. Just listen. Ask the person to expand on their opinion without challenging or belittling it, and as they speak be sure to do the following:

Look at the person's body language as they speak. Notice how their facial expressions and mannerisms change when they are simply trying to share their opinion versus persuade or convert you. How do you feel as they move between sharing knowledge and persuading? Can you feel the difference within yourself? This is where your reactions to the topic stem from—not their words, but from within.

Try to understand where they are coming from. As you listen, keep in mind that they likely have an experience or domestication that colors their worldview. Instead of seeing their view as wrong, try to see where it comes from, and understand their attachments. After all, it does not matter if you are right.

Listen without planning your reply. Try to hear what the person is saying without

thinking of a reply. If you put your attention on your reply as they are talking, then you are not really listening. By not formulating a response, you are better able to listen without your projection getting in the way.

Express your opinion only after the person has finished talking, and only if they ask. First let the person know that you value their point of view. Next, identify and summarize any points that you may agree on. Doing so is a sign of respect and lets the other know they were heard, and may set the stage for them to show you respect in return. Last, offer your perspective with respect.

Notice your own attachments. Finally, use this exercise as a way to listen and perceive the world from a different point of view, whether you agree with it or not, and notice if your own attachments are clouding your view. In other words, could this person be right about any of their points?

Feel your emotions. Notice any negative emotions that come up for you while you

are listening. For instance, do you experience fear? Anger? Sadness? What is the source of these emotions? If these emotions arise for you, finding their origin is where you will find your gift.

If you practice this exercise with your family and friends, it will help you engage others with respect and maintain awareness of your emotions as you do so. If family is too much, then practice with your outer circle of friends and work your way toward your inner circle. Not only will this help you foster respect for others, but you will become more aware of the beliefs and attachments that guide your Personal Dream. You may also become more open to those who are different than you or who share a different worldview, moving toward acceptance of all others without biases or conditions.



Controlling Your Will

When an emotional reaction starts inside you, not taking the bait and falling into the trap may require all the willpower you have. This Toltec

exercise is designed to not only strengthen your will but also calm your mind in the process.

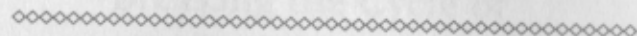
Find a chair with a straight back where you can sit with your knees at a ninety-degree angle. Choose a safe place where you will not be disturbed, and set a timer for five minutes.

Close your eyes. Focus on your breath. Do not move for those five minutes—not even to scratch your nose or to shift into a more comfortable position. If you move, restart the timer. Do not give in to the temptation to say yes to moving any part of your body.

The point of this exercise is to see how strong your will is by keeping your body still. As you are able to reach that time, increase that time if you would like, working your way up to fifteen or even thirty minutes. But before increasing the time, consider adding this element to the exercise.

Repeat all of the previous steps, but as you sit, imagine yourself alone on a beach, with nothing but the sand, the water, and the sun. Now it's time to run. Imagine yourself running, feeling the sand, the water, and the cool beach air. As your mind fills with this image, you may find yourself wanting to also move your body. Choose to keep it still without pulling yourself out of your exercise. If you get hooked by a chain of thought that

takes you away from the beach, or if you move any part of your body, restart the timer and begin again, and again until you can go the full five or fifteen minutes continuously. As you will likely find, strengthening the will of your mind is more difficult than the will of your body.



Both of these exercises can help strengthen your will so you can make a conscious choice in situations where you would previously have reacted emotionally. In the next chapter we will take a closer look at all the choices you make, so you can determine if they are a result of your free will or a habit formed by your domestication and attachments.



Developing Your Awareness Skills

There are many things happening in and around you all the time, but you aren't aware of a lot of them because, like many people, you are lost in the stories your narrators are spinning rather than being present in the moment. This is nothing to beat yourself up about; it's simply the pre-dominate condition that currently exists in the Dream of the Planet.

In this exercise, you'll begin to develop your awareness skills by observation. You will need a timer or stopwatch for this exercise, as you will want to do this exercise for two to three minutes at first, gradually working your way up to fifteen to twenty minutes.

Read the steps outlined in the paragraphs below one or two times, start the timer, and then perform the steps in the exercise from memory, based on what you read. Don't worry if you can't remember all the steps, you will get better each time you do the exercise.

1. To begin, sit comfortably in a quiet room. Turn off the TV, radio, or any other

device designed to hook your attention. Start your timer, and close your eyes.

2. Next, consciously bring your attention to the present moment. You do this first of all by acknowledging to yourself that for the next couple of minutes you don't need to think about the future or the past. The mind is often resistant to this idea initially, as it loves to spend its time in the past and future.

3. As you sit quietly in the present moment, bring your awareness to your ears and what is happening outside of you. Notice what sounds you hear, such as the hum of the refrigerator, the ticking of a clock, birds chirping in the distance, and the sound of your own breath. These are the sounds that the mind usually misses, as the narrators of the mind deem them "unimportant." If you listen deeply, you can also hear the silence that exists right behind these sounds.

4. Sitting quietly in the present moment, listening to what is going on around you, now turn your attention to within. Feel your body in all areas, moving outside

of your head where attention normally resides, and scanning your body all the way down to your toes. You are so much more than just your mind. Notice any areas of tightness, heaviness, or discomfort. Bring your attention to your breath. As humans, we take over twenty thousand breaths a day, but on many days we don't notice even one of them. Next, as you breathe in, direct your breath to any areas of tightness, heaviness, or discomfort in your body, and imagine that as you breathe out the breath washes away those negative feelings. Sit in this present awareness, eyes closed, surrendering the past and future, listening to your outer world and feeling your body in its entirety.

5. Throughout this process, notice what thoughts arise while you sit. Don't try to fight or control any thoughts, but when you notice you have gotten caught up in a thought chain, simply bring your attention back to the present moment, listen to the external world, and feel the entirety of your body and breath. When the timer beeps,

open your eyes and carry this experience of present moment awareness into the world.



After the exercise is over, make a mental list of the thoughts that arose. What was the predominate category? The thoughts that were most common are indicators of the things that are important to you as a person, and likely include areas in which you wear masks as you engage the world. We will explore the concept of masks, and the proper way to use them, in the next chapter.