

The Inner Consciousness - William Walker Atkinson
Unity of Chicago South Sunday Conversation
Sept 6 Reading - 'Making-Over' Oneself

ONE of the most interesting phases of the science of using the Inner Consciousness, is that which may be called "making-over" oneself.

That is, the application of psychological laws in the direction of rebuilding certain of the Inner Conscious planes, or rather in replacing the mental material stored there by the more desirable material.

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This process has been aptly called "Character Building," which indeed it is, for the character is largely dependent upon what is contained in the Inner Consciousness, and whatever affects the latter affects the Character.

The word "Character" itself, is derived from a Greek word meaning "to engrave;" to "cut in"; and some of the authorities state that the Greek word was derived from some older language and was first used by the ancient makers of bricks to indicate the personal trade mark marked by each upon the bricks manufactured by himself, each maker having his own trade mark.

And the word has gradually grown in meaning until today we use it in the sense of "the peculiar quality, or sum of qualities, by which a person or thing is distinguished from others." (Webster.) This latter-day use of the term is interesting when one is able to trace it from its original usage, showing the idea that was in the minds of those who have gone before us, i.e., that this thing that we call "character" was something impressed or engraved upon a man's mental substance.

To the majority of persons character is something that belongs to a person, by some unchangeable natural law, and which cannot be altered or improved. To the experienced psychologist, however, character is a plastic thing, which is modified by the character of one's thoughts and mental attitude, and which may therefore be improved, changed or altered at will.

Psychology, taking cognizance of the planes of Inner Consciousness, and understanding the truth of the fact that character is the fabric manufactured from the material stored away on those planes, now teaches that by placing the proper materials in the storage rooms we may cause the character to be manufactured in accordance with the quality thereof. In short, that one may practically "make-over" oneself by placing the right kind of "raw material" in the mind.

This is true in the case of training children and others, but is equally true in Self Training or Character Building.

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To those who may think that in speaking of the planes of the Inner Consciousness, we are postulating a shadowy, intangible, "mind," independent of the brain, we would say that this is not correct. We regard the brain as the organ of the mind, in its Inner Conscious manifestations as well as in its outer-conscious ones.

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The brain is composed of an enormous number of cells, composed of "plasm" or elementary living matter, some authorities estimating the number of the brain-cells at about 500,000,000 to 2,000,000,000, the number depending upon the mental activity of the person. Beside the number of brain-cells in active use, there are always great reserve forces of cells awaiting a sudden call.

In addition to this, it is believed that the brain will "grow" additional cells in cases of need, so that the mind capacity of the individual is almost limitless. A class of brain-cells actively used will manifest a tendency to spring into activity almost automatically, at the slightest need, while those remaining unused will become almost atrophied, and are called into action slowly and clumsily.

It therefore follows that the cells which are constantly used will exert a more marked influence upon the character of the individual than will those become atrophied by disuse. Therefore, if one will but use a set of cells actively, they will manifest strongly in his everyday life and character.

To develop traits of character in oneself, that we consider desirable but lacking, we should endeavor to think and act as often as possible along the lines that we wish to develop. Just as we exercise the muscle that we wish to bring up to a higher degree of efficiency, so should we exercise the faculties of the mind that we wish to increase in power and strength. And at the same time, we should avoid developing the opposite set of faculties.

And if we wish to rid ourselves of, or restrain an objectionable set of faculties, we should actively use and thus develop the opposite set, so as to counteract the undesirable ones. As Halleck says: "By restraining the expression of an emotion we can frequently throttle it; by inducing an expression we can often cause its allied emotion." Prof. James says: "Refuse to express a passion, and it dies. Count ten before venting your anger, and its occasion seems ridiculous.

Whistling to keep up courage is no mere figure of speech. On the other hand, sit all day in a moping posture, sigh, and reply to everything with a dismal voice, and your melancholy lingers.

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There is no more valuable precept in moral education than this, as all of us who have experienced it know: If we wish to conquer undesirable emotional tendencies in ourselves we must assiduously, and in the first instance cold-bloodedly, go through the outward movements of those contrary dispositions which we wish to cultivate.

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Smooth the brow, brighten the eye, contract the dorsal rather than the ventral aspect of the frame, and speak in a major key, pass the genial compliment and your heart must indeed be frigid if it does not gradually thaw.”

To sum up the matter of “Making-over” Oneself, we may say that the whole secret consists in filling up the particular storage-room having to do with the desired faculty, and its opposite, with thoughts, actions, desires, manifestations, etc., of the desired thing. Think of the thing; act it out so far as possible; desire it ardently; picture it out to yourself as much as possible—in short, keep its mental image before you as clearly and as persistently as possible.

It is an old occult maxim that “we grow to be like the thing that we keep constantly in our mind”—and if you will but keep that axiom in your mind, you will work out the problem for yourself. The secret underlying much of the phenomena called “occult” is the creation of what is known as a “Mental Image,” and which is really a mental pattern or mold from which we wish to materialize character in ourself or others.

This Mental Pattern or Mold serves as a “model” around which is built the actual mental manifestation. And the clearer and stronger we build this Mental Image, the better and stronger results do we materialize. Keep in mind constantly the idea of the thing you wish to be, and you will unconsciously grow toward being just that thing. This is a well-established psychological law, and is not a mere airy fancy of some writer’s imagination.

You can see it evidenced in the life of yourself and those around you. Everyone unconsciously inclines toward the shape and form of the Mental Image that they carry around with them.

And, this being so—that we grow to resemble our Ideals—should we not be careful to use the right kind of mental patterns or molds? Our manifested character depends upon the mental patterns created by ourselves, either by our own will and according to our own judgment, or else, unconsciously, from the suggestions or will of others.

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Aristotle wrote that of every object of thought there must be in the mind some form, phantasm, or species; that things sensible are perceived and remembered by means of sensible phantasms, and things intelligible by intelligible phantasms; and that these phantasms have the form of the object without the matter, as the impression of a seal upon wax has the form of a seal without its matter.

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The student of modern psychology may see, at a glance, just what Aristotle meant—the Mental Image which molded or served as a pattern for the thought which would spring from the Inner Consciousness. Kay says: “It is as serving to guide and direct our various activities that mental images derive their chief value and importance.

In anything that we purpose or intend to do we must first of all have an idea or image of it in the mind, and the more clear and correct the image, the more accurately and efficiently will the purpose be carried out. We cannot exert an act of volition without having in mind an idea or image of what we will to effect.” The same writer also says: “Clearness and accuracy of image is only to be obtained by repeatedly having it in mind or by repeated action of the faculty.

Each repeated act of any of the faculties renders the mental images of it more clear and accurate than the preceding, and in proportion to the clearness and accuracy of the image will the act itself be performed easily, readily, skillfully.”

And, now, all this that we have said on the subject means simply that you CAN “make over” yourself, to be that which you desire to be, by means of determined and persistent desire and will. By filling up the storage-rooms of the proper plane of the Inner Consciousness with the “Ideals” and “Ideas” which you desire to materialize in your own character and self, you will find that you will gradually begin to grow like the Mental Image that you have placed there.

Your thoughts, actions, feelings and emotions will gradually be found to be reshaping themselves to fit in to the pattern or mold which you have set before them.

The material which has been placed in the storage-rooms will be brought forth by the silent mental workers and, being placed into the mental machinery will be manufactured into thoughts, moods, feelings, emotions, actions and outward manifestations of the grade and quality indicated by the materials which you have supplied.

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You cannot make silk from cotton, nor broadcloth from shoddy. Unless you furnish the proper materials you cannot expect the finished product to be as you desire. You are making character and "self" every day—but it depends upon the material furnished just what that character or self shall be. An understanding of the Inner Conscious workings of the mind gives you the only key to the mystery of character and self—then why not act upon it?