

## Chapter One

# The Secret of Transformation

The secret of personal transformation is cultivation. This 90-Day Program is about cultivation. It is about tending your garden. Cultivation means maintaining an inner environment that facilitates healthy growth. The more methodical and consistent we are with our cultivation, the greater is our potential for growth and transformation.

Personal cultivation is not about “stimulating” change. It is not about trying to “whip yourself into shape.” – which typically means that you are trying to reshape yourself into some externally derived image of perfection. Inner cultivation is about allowing your inner potential to emerge and fulfill itself in its own time and season. A dormant seed needs no stimulants to bring forth new life. It needs only warmth, water, and fertile soil.

We resort to stimulants only when our basic needs are not met, or when we demand rapid change and immediate gratification which go against the natural rhythms of the body and mind. This is like using chemical fertilizers to quickly grow flowers and food in depleted soil. The result is that we weaken the plants, grow food that lacks nourishment, and impoverish the soil even more.

For us humans, the need for stimulants suggests a lack of energy. Lack of energy can show up as physical fatigue and no motivation. Lack of energy suggests that you are perhaps trying to live up to external standards or expectations which are contrary to your nature. Therefore, an important key for cultivating your garden is to be mindful that you are cultivating *your* garden, not someone else’s.

To put it simply, inner cultivation means being true to yourself. It means managing your life so you respect your own physical and emotional needs. This may seem so simple and obvious that we might wonder why we should even have to read a book about it. However, simple is not the same as easy.

We are often intimidated, tempted, or seduced into trying to make our personal garden look like someone else’s garden. When we do so, we tend to do harm to ourselves. This is why so many individuals end up injuring themselves physically or psychologically in their attempt to “better” themselves.

Most adults know what it is like to harm themselves because they were trying to live up to someone else's image of perfection. The stressors and temptations which intimidate or seduce us into abandoning our truth are numerous indeed. This is why a program of personal cultivation is useful.

As we become more well-grounded in our own personal program of self-care, we are less likely to yield to external stressors and temptations. And if we do, we are less likely to brow-beat ourselves for "caving-in." We simply allow the experience to serve as a reminder to reconnect with our hearts desire.

Personal cultivation is simply a system of self-care which helps you to remember to be true to yourself. The more closely your actions reflect your own heart's desire, the more likely that your cultivation will promote inner peace and outer success.

As long as we remain faithful to our true needs, personal development will be a simple dance of focused attention and letting go – like tending a physical garden. With diligence and care, we work the soil, water the plants, and remove the weeds. And then, we relax and let Mother Nature do the rest.

We certainly would not try to make a plant grow faster by pulling on it. Neither do we yank the plant out of the ground to see how the roots are doing. Creative passion must be balanced with patience. Discipline must be balanced with flexibility. Toughness must be balanced with kindness. The desire to change must be balanced with the willingness to let yourself be.

Inner cultivation requires both firmness and softness. An excess or deficiency of either one results in inner conflict, frustration, and eventually low energy which may show up as fatigue and lack of motivation. For most individuals who live in industrialized areas, what is generally lacking is not firmness but rather an appreciation for softness. Without softness, firmness becomes rigid and fragile. When we are not willing to bend, we break.

Inner cultivation is a journey of a thousand miles. It is not a race or a competition against anything or anyone. The master cultivator knows that moving too quickly can slow us down. Urgency causes us to stumble. If we clutch too tightly our heart's desire, we squeeze the life out of it. Or, we might become impatient and abandon our cultivation because we do not see immediate results.

This book is about cultivating the ability to know when to water the plants and when to let them dry out for a while. It is about knowing when to work the soil and when to let it be; when to dig deeply and uproot the

weeds and when to just leave them alone. Indeed, this level of mindfulness allows us to transform the weeds in our lives into useful plants – obstacles become opportunities; a perceived curse becomes a blessing.

This program includes cultivating the ability to know when to focus directly on the desired outcome and when to leave it alone. It's about sensing when we need hands-on and when we need hands-off.

Meaningful changes often happen when we aren't even looking. In fact, the deepest personal changes tend to occur slowly and below the surface, while we are tending to the activities of daily living. Plants typically grow most quickly at night. The human body grows and regenerates most effectively during deep and restful sleep. Insights and breakthroughs often show up in the early morning hours after the conscious mind has rested in the stillness and silence of the night.

The way of cultivation is the way of the farmer who knows that seasons come and go. He knows there are hot days and cold days, wet days and dry days, easy days and challenging days. Through it all, he persists, until one day he awakens to see the field ripe with the harvest.

In summary, the secret of deep personal transformation is cultivation. Cultivation is, by its very nature, a journey of a thousand miles. The first step in this journey is to simply recognize the dance which is unfolding inside you right now, as described in chapter 2.

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