

Power of Self-Government

The greatest battle of life is fought out within the silent chambers of the soul. A victory on the inside of a man's heart is worth a hundred conquests on the battlefields of life. To be master of yourself is the best guarantee that you will be master of the situation. Know thyself. The crown of character is self-control.

--author unknown

What can you really control?

We are obsessed with control these days. Every company, institution, agenda, and family member wants to have some sort of control over us, and we want it over them. We want our opinions to be heard and our needs to be met. We want the control. Why do we want this control? If we are in control we feel happy. Problem is, everyone feels the same way.

If a baby cries and her needs are met, she is happy. She learns crying is a good way to get what she wants. Maybe a child will resort to hitting a parent or sibling to gain control of a situation. As we grow it isn't much different. If we want more political control, we fight for it. If we want a more control at work, we fight for it.

The rules for battle vary from person to person. Some fighters have more power than others. Likewise, some have fewer morals than others. These two factors make the battle for control vicious and seemingly never ending. The lack of morals and obsession about power only encourages those in the fight to continue battling.

In these daily battles we all get our moments of glory. We say a phrase just right which boosts us up on the intellectual power scale. We gossip and talk about the battle to another person and thereby recruit another warrior for our cause. We feel proud and even angry at times. We know we are on the right side of the issue.

Once we realize we are right there is no backing down. If we are right, that means everyone else is wrong. We do our research. We seek out all the flaws in the other person's point of view. The issue is always with us. We live for the future victory, we feel it coming and we have control. Or do we?

What does it really mean to have control? How do I really have influence? Can controlling another person ever give me control? NO. To spell this out more plainly, I cannot ever have control by attempting to control another person. The only control I can ever have is over myself.

Leonardo DaVinci once observed:

"You will never have a greater or lesser dominion than that over yourself. The delight of a man's success is gauged by his self mastery: The depth of his failure by his self abandonment. He who cannot establish dominion over himself will have no dominion over others."

So often parents approach me and say, "I think I might need to learn self-government even more than my children do. I just lose control all the time." When I hear wise responses like these I smile. It thrills me that the parents are on the right track. You can control the settings on your computer, and control the television choices that come into your home. You can control all the things on your Family Standard and you can

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control what your family eats for dinner, but you can't control another person. Though sometimes you can force someone to behave a certain way for a time, but such seeming control will not last long, no matter how hard you try and how much power you try to look like you have. Efforts to have power over others will not result in healthy relationships nor encourage lasting changes to their heart – rather such efforts to control others can foster fear, anxiety, resentment, rebellion, and anger.

Learning Self Control

Epiphany with my brothers

Years ago I was introduced to DaVinci's philosophy by my father. My three brothers knew how to get a rise out of me in almost every situation. They were the perfect teasers. They had complete control over my emotions and I knew it. It was so hard to handle.

One day when I was tattling on my brother for teasing my father looked at me and calmly, almost like a special secret said, "You know Nicholeen they only tease you because it works." His voice got a bit lower as he said, "If you choose not to be affected by their teasing then they won't have any more fun and they will stop."

I was AMAZED! I really was. Was it that easy to get control of myself again? Could I really just make a choice to control my emotions and control a whole situation? WOW!

My father could have handled this situation very differently. He could have gone to my brothers and made them stop. He could have controlled them because they were controlling me, but he knew there was a higher principle and that I could understand it and do it. He knew that the person who controls themselves has the power to control any situation. I am so glad he shared this with me instead of bailing me out by forcing my brothers to behave differently. I never had problems with people teasing me after that. It just wasn't fun for anyone to tease me because I was completely unaffected. I had learned that I can choose my own responses.

Can people push your "buttons?"

People around the world have emailed me with the same question after my episode of The World's Strictest Parents, produced by the BBC, aired. The question usually goes something like this, "Your son said you don't have any buttons which other people can push. How is that possible? How can I get rid of my buttons too?"

DaVinci answered this question above. You can't control another person without first controlling yourself.

Once a person chooses to win the battle against their own emotions then they have won the greatest victory of all. And, once a person wins that victory they have the power of influence in any situation. Don't all adults need this power of influence?

When Benjamin Franklin was a young man he noticed thirteen things he didn't like about himself and made a list of them. Then he took his list and one by one conquered each of the flaws on the list. He practiced self control. Since he practiced self control he was powerful. He was able to have influence in many nations. There was no man in the Americas more respected than Benjamin Franklin, save maybe George Washington, who was another amazing example of self government.

Understanding Cause and Effect

I believe that each person can effectively learn how to govern their own thoughts, behaviors, and emotions. Self-government is "being able to determine the cause and effect of any given situation, and possessing a

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knowledge of your own behaviors so that you can control them.” (Parenting A House United by: Nicholeen Peck)

“Only by much searching and mining are gold and diamonds obtained, and man can find every truth connected with his being if he will dig deep into the mine of his soul. And that he is the maker of his character, the molder of his life, and the builder of his destiny, he may unerringly prove: if he will watch, control, and alter his thoughts, tracing their effects upon himself, upon others, and upon his life and circumstances; if he will link cause and effect by patient practice and investigation, utilizing his every experience, even to the most trivial, as a means of obtaining that knowledge of himself.

Cause and effect is as absolute and undeviating in the hidden realm of thought as it is in the world of visible and material things. A noble and God-like character is not a thing of favor or chance but is the natural result of continuous effort and right thinking.

They themselves are makers of themselves by virtue of the thoughts which they choose and encourage; that mind is the master weaver, both of the inner garment of character and the outer garment of circumstance, and that, as they may have hitherto woven in ignorance and pain they may now weave in enlightenment and happiness.”

“As A Man Thinketh” by James Allen

In order to assess your own behaviors and emotions and change them for the better it is essential to understand cause and effect. I am sure you have noticed grown adults who don't understand cause and effect well. These adults are the ones who yell to get their way, and ignore people to get their points across. They don't understand the long-term effect of their aggressive or passive aggressive communication style. They believe that their happiness is extrinsic. If they only had more they would be happy. If they were only more liked they would be happy. If they only had everything go their way they could be happy.

One time while shopping late at night I found myself sitting on a bench by a set of doors which was getting locked up for the night. The store was really large and had multiple entrances. The entrance I was seated by was now locked and shopping baskets were placed in front of the locked doors to show customers they needed to go out of another exit this late at night. I had promised my husband I would wait for him at this door, so even though I wouldn't be able to leave through the doors I sat by, I stayed for a while. While sitting on this bench in front of this huge supermarket I was able to observe many people problem solve and decide how their problem would affect them. One by one people came with their shopping baskets hoping to exit out of the same doors they went in at and parked by, and one by one they realized they would not be able to exit as they had planned.

The first man who came around the corner and saw the baskets blocking the exit didn't even flinch. He looked, smiled and walked right passed to go to another door. He wasn't ruffled. He was most likely thinking, “Oh, that's right it's after 11:00 pm. They close the doors so some workers can go home. I better go around to the other doors. It's nice some of the workers get to go home for the night.”

The next person who encountered the problem of the locked doors stopped dead in her tracks when she

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saw the shopping baskets. She stood there for a minute and thought. Then she took a deep breath and walked toward the other door. The customer was put out, but chose not to let it get her down. She made a decision to remain calm and positive.

A few more customers behaved in similar fashions. At this point I had completely forgotten there was another way to choose to be.

Two women walked around the corner with their basket and saw the problem. The women looked and immediately turned into angry monsters. Of course they didn't really turn into genuine monsters, but the closest to real monsters I have seen in a long time. They rolled their eyes, pursed their lips, and folded their arms across their chests. One woman turned to the other and said, "This is ridiculous! Why would they have a door here if you can't go through it? I will NOT walk all the way around to the other door and go through the cold to my car which is on this side of the store. How inconvenient! What horrible customer service!" The other woman echoed similar sentiments as they walked away to complain.

These two women would undoubtedly say the locked doors caused their anger. But if they could see their own behaviors clearly – step back and watch themselves react, they would realize that it was a choice to respond in anger and complain. If it was the circumstances, the locked door, that dictated people's feelings then everyone would have responded in the same way – they didn't. They chose how they responded to the situation they encountered, and so can we – in every situation. Each day we make choices. We choose how we will relate to the world around us. Some people say other people offend them. Some people say someone else put them in a bad mood. But, it just can't be done that way. Each person can control their responses – we can choose happiness each day.

Control is a gift

Being able to control our own thoughts, actions and emotions is a gift everyone is blessed with. It is called agency. We get to choose our own emotions in every situation. We can't always choose every situation, but can always choose how we will respond to each situation we are in. This kind of control is the greatest gift we have. With the ability to control our own thoughts, emotions, and actions we are able make progress in our personal lives. Control is a gift.

However, we can give our control or agency away. Control cannot be taken. It has to be given. I know this is true.

I remember hearing a story years ago about a United States soldier who was captive in a Vietnam War camp. He was tortured and neglected. He experienced the most humble and humiliating situations but he was joyful. He related that his captors could control his surroundings and how he was treated but he knew they could never control him. He knew he controlled his own thoughts. They could never take that away from him. He could remain happy and positive if he chose to. Nothing was bad enough to lose his self control over. A person can physically control a person by force, but still emotional and spiritual control cannot be touched. It has to be given away. The soldier mentioned above could have given his happiness to his captors, but he chose not to.

My fifth grade teacher taught me the same lesson the soldier learned above about self discipline by running with us. We would run one and a half miles each day; rain or shine. It was hard and we didn't like it most of the time, but my teacher would do it with us in his dress clothes even. He would run past us and gently say, "Mind over matter, mind over matter." Thank you Mr. Whiting! I was listening. Not only did I learn I could run any distance I set my mind to and think myself though any problem or pain, like childbirth and chronic back pains, I learned that my mind could win any physical situation I found myself in.

In the situation above about my brothers teasing me I had given them control over my emotions and even some of my actions because I didn't know the control was mine to begin with. To realize I had the control

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the whole time and could take it back when I wanted to was completely liberating. I never forgot that lesson.

Fruits of Self-Government

When you understand that you have the control over your own responses you are free. Free from emotional bondage, by learning to govern yourself you can choose happiness. You can also choose to be the kind of person who is always calm. You can destroy your “buttons,” as my son put it, forever.

“For what it lies in our power to do, it lies in our power not to do.”

Aristotle

Self Government generates confidence. The world tells us that as parents we need to give our children confidence – but that’s impossible; it is a myth that you can make someone else confident. Really the only way to develop that feeling of calm confidence is to conquer oneself. Once a person has gone to the effort of changing their heart and controlling their impulses and cravings, they literally transform the way they see themselves. They are Ok with who they are. They begin to see their abilities and what they are capable of doing, seeing their potential in a very tangible way. Even just a taste of that, conquering one aspect of our lives, we feel more powerful and free. We begin to see ourselves as a person who has purpose, capable of doing even more things because we have a growing sense of control over who we are and who we are supposed to become. We feel more connected with others, more patient and understanding, having experienced what it takes to learn self-government ourselves. When we have conquered ourselves we earn the reward of confidence.

Furthermore, if we can control ourselves then we have no need to try to control another person, because our self control will come across as a feeling of confidence and power. When a person has the confidence which comes from self government that person is respected and looked up to. Then control isn't really necessary. If we want to inspire our children to have more self control then we need to be the example. The more self control we have the more our children will want to respect us and want to be around us.

Every time I am with a group of young people I am one of the most strict, or principled, adults the youth have met. Most adults would think this is not a good impression to a group of young people, but I have found the result on the young people to be just the opposite. Young people respect me and flock to me. They see I am a fun person, but also a very controlled, principled person as well. They often times respect me more than they respect other adults who are just there for a laugh, going along for the ride, because they feel that I stand for something and that I really believe in doing something about what I stand for.

Self control makes an honest person. The youth know what they will get with me and they know what the expectations are. And, my expectations are high. They like that too. People like to be around honest people. They feel safe and inspired.

Oliver DeMille, author of *A Thomas Jefferson Education* and president of George Wythe University in Cedar City, Utah, teaches a principle called “you not them.” He says that if a parent wants their child to love reading or learning the parent must set the example. I have found this principle to be true not only in inspiring my children academically, but spiritually and emotionally too. Teaching your children self-government is about “you not them.” When you govern yourself, you will have the power of calm which gives you the power of influence in any situation.

The children are fighting, crying, pouting, or whining. No matter. You are calm. Since you have taken the time to learn how to control yourself you can show your children how to control themselves. You can speak from experience - share the secrets of self-control you've learned so that they are not captive by the

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emotional control of others either.

Will it be easy? No way. Learning self control is never easy. But will it be worth it? Oh yes! Imagine yourself in a room with an out of control person and you are staying calm, and being able to transfer that calm feeling to their heart from yours. Being calm shows love and commitment to a relationship too. Your children will see that your family relationships are about more than power or control. They will see the family relationships are about peace, love, trust, respect and good communication.

Beginning steps...Analysis & Belief

Our own personal self-government is hardest part of any relationship we are in. We want things to change, and so we immediately start forcing change instead of analyzing and controlling ourselves to create the right environment for change. If our homes, and our very persons feel calm, assertive, loving, trusting, and safe then our interactions and teachings with our children, spouses, and others will be effective and feeling. The tone in your home is what allows the self-government to happen and be taught. If your home feels volatile and fearful, then your home will only cause reactions instead of promoting good decision making and healthy discussions about cause and effect. Trying to control anyone else will always be a power struggle. We are meant to lead (not control) our children to goodness and self-government.

As you consider how you might begin to become a self-governing person you might be unsure of where to start. While believing change is possible for others, your past track record or the current state of your relationships may feel so discouraging that you may not believe change is possible for you. Feeling that you have failed attempts in the past to govern yourself, may tempt you to stop before you have even begun. Take heart, you can change. It is possible and you will grow in your confidence and ability to govern yourself each time you recommit to the process.

Perhaps you are trying to implement self-government principles in your home but feel that you are the problem most of the time in your own level of self-governance. Maybe you are the kind of person that all of a sudden just snaps! You begin yelling or raising your voice or becoming stressed and anxious. Perhaps you begin saying things without thinking very much, or saying things with the wrong tone just because you are letting out whatever emotion you happen to be carrying at the moment. Others around you don't feel valued and that you often dump on them.

There was a moment just recently when I had lots of things to do. And I was thinking, "I've got to do this and got to do this! I don't have much time." On this occasion, we were in the middle of making dinner, we were tidying up, and people were coming over. I was going along, giving instructions and being Little Miss Speedy, but the whole following through process wasn't happening. So I began saying to them, "You guys aren't following my instructions." But I didn't do a proper correction, I'm getting more short about it, and my tone changed - I wasn't really angry yet but I wasn't calm either. Instead of stopping and assess what was actually happening, I just kept going. Eventually my daughter commented that I didn't seem very calm – that I seemed stressed. Because of her analysis and her description of the situation, I realized then that if I had just stopped and done a proper correction regarding the necessity to check back, that we could be more efficient and our environment more calm.

We've all been there. Maybe it's a time when you are running out the door, when people are coming over or maybe it's a time when you have to get dinner finished before you can go to the next place. Whatever it happens to be, these kinds of things can happen, so we've got to learn to catch ourselves. This experience was a great reminder of what happens when we allow ourselves to get really emotionally attached to the moment, trapping all our energies there and becoming caught up in a scarcity mentality. "I don't have enough time, I'm not going to get done", all of these negative thoughts start pouring into our head which

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takes us to this place of disconnection. But we might never know that we are doing this to ourselves, why this happens every time, unless we take a little time to analyze.

Analyzing is the number one key to change. You need to develop the skill and get yourself in the habit of analyzing. If you don't, you won't be able to stop before it is too late. It is easy to analyze someone else's behaviors, but taking an honest look at your own behaviors is difficult. Sometimes we try to make excuses or justify our behavior – blame others around us. Sometimes we live this lie because we want to be seen a certain way by others. But more often, we try to fool ourselves because we don't want to face the real truth. If we don't take the time to see our own problems, we then don't feel obligated to fix them. That's a pretty sad state, to stunt our progress by choosing to believe it will take too much time or too much pain to honestly face the problem. We might lie to ourselves by refusing to believe we have what it takes to change. Living a lie will lead you away from self-government.

So, step number one is to make a habit of analyzing yourself. Start a notebook or journal where you track your progress. Make little notes each night about how you are doing, situations you faced, your plans and results of following through, or not.

Such a journal entry might look something like:

“Generally we are always stressed getting out the door to piano lessons. But this morning, I made a conscious choice not to worry about the time and to begin the ‘getting ready process’ a little earlier. I planned to give instructions and trust that those instructions would be followed, letting the children follow through all the way. I decided to trust that we would get out the door on time. And we did!”

There are really 4 keys to Self-Government, 1. Analysis 2. Plan 3. Act deliberately 4. Communicate effectively. While these other steps require some action – the most significant action is that very first key of analysis where you train yourself to STOP and take a good look at what is happening. Because if you keep barreling ahead, even when it feels wrong, then you are stopping yourself from being able to have self-government.

The hardest part of learning self-government is teaching yourself to choose calmness and deliberate action over habitual reaction. So many of us have trained ourselves to worry, fear, stress, and emote - make an emotional display. Now we have to train ourselves to trust, have faith, and be okay. This means living according to a plan. If you are a ‘live in the moment’ kind of person you may not feel super comfortable with this idea at first. Understand this is not a plan that governs your time, but rather a plan of how you will relate to others. Allow yourself to try living by this kind of plan, and you will find that everything becomes easier. This means that there is no time away from principles. The self-government principles aren't a medicine to be taken for 10 days and you are cured, nor a light switch to flip on or off as needed. They are a way of living that will take constant effort, but they lead to freedom.

The reality of making the necessary changes is that for a day or two you will stay focused. Then you will fall back to what you used to do. Maybe you feel guilty, and then you will have to recommit again. It does take courage to start a new way of living, but when you mess up and have to center your focus on the principles again – that is ultra-brave! Set-backs, the necessity to repent – that might happen multiple times. But if you are tracking your progress in a journal you will notice your progress and resist the impulse to beat yourself up when things don't go the way you want them to every time. You will occasionally fall back to old habits when you are not calm, but that doesn't mean that you aren't still on the journey to self-government, it just means that you got an opportunity to refine yourself a little further. Such mistakes can serve as a humbling reminder that you still need to concentrate on these keys and try to use them. It will become easier to

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quickly stop, practice it the right way and move on.

There is a story that my grandfather tells of when his grandmother would become really overwhelmed when she was babysitting all the grandchildren. She would disappear. And one day they went to see where she disappeared to. They tip-toed down the hall and peeked into Grandma's room. She was sitting there in her rocking chair and was saying, "Mercy. Mercy. Mercy." I always felt that this was not a sign of her weakness but a sign of her strength. Because a strong woman knows that she can't influence the heart of another person until she gets herself ready. She believed that she could become calm so she went and did it. Begin with believing that you can become self-governing. Start self-analyzing, and the more deliberate steps you take, the more that you will believe that you can become calm, because surely you can. I know this because I have done it, I have conquered myself. I am ashamed of some of the things that I have said and done – things that I wish wasn't part of my history. But the up-side is that I am living proof that a very passionate person, a very not calm person, can chose that calmness. You can do it, you can track your progress, you can work on it. You can use that energy to push toward letting your heart lead instead of the emotions in your body.

Next time you encounter a hard day or a disappointment remember you get to choose if you want to feel that ball of anger fill your soul or if you want to choose peace and comfort for your soul by choosing to be happy. When you feel that ball of anger rise within you, use the feeling as a cue to take control of yourself and by so doing, your environment. Not only do our attitude choices have the ability to change our own hearts and inspire our families, they really can change our whole communities.

You are just beginning an exciting journey to your own self mastery. Embrace this moment and commit to analyzing your thoughts, to dig deeply into your soul - understand the truth about yourself that will help you see your behaviors clearly and the cause and effect of your thoughts and actions. Personal change takes time and focused effort, the process is really never ending but the rewards are so great. No more excuses. We all need to recognize that we are the key to our own happiness and the success of our families. You can and will inspire change in others through your personal journey towards greater self-government. It is your source of power!

RESOURCES:

- Parenting: A House United by Nicholeen Peck. This book is intended to help parents and children learn self-government skills, and focuses heavily on the language a parent who wants self-control, can use to teach themselves self-control while they are teaching the other members of their family too. Sometimes learning self-control means learning a new language for communication. The way I speak in parenting or confrontation situations is always the same. I have planned it and practiced it. At first it was difficult to teach myself a new language but I would never change now.
- Family Standard: Click <https://teachingselfgovernment.com/peck-family-standard-228> to read the Peck Family Standard or read more about Family Standards in the book, “Parenting: A House United,” by Nicholeen Peck.
- <https://teachingselfgovernment.com/sites/default/files/media/Circles/ArbingerParentingPyramid.pdf> Parents weren’t meant to spend most of their time correcting their children. How do we help things go right, instead of react when things go wrong? We usually ask, “What do we do when things go wrong?” The more important question is, “How do we help things go right?” If I’ve tried many things and my children just aren’t responding the solution is not to try still more methods of correction. The solution is to do a better job of teaching. However, no matter how much time I spend teaching my children, they are unlikely to learn much from me if they don’t like me, so the quality of my teaching will depend on the quality of our relationship. The roots of effective parenthood lie deeper than anything we DO; the roots of effective parenthood lie in how we ARE.
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyhOT3jCcR4> (20 minutes long) Resolving the Heart of Conflict – the role self-justification and our view of others and how we invite problems. How do we analyze what is below the surface of our feelings and behavior as they relate to others?

REFERENCES:

“Be Happy! It’s a Choice” Article by Nicholeen Peck

Implementation Course Step 1: Essence of Self-Government (Introduction)

“Real Control – Help for Parents” Article by Nicholeen Peck

“Can A Person Control Their Emotions?” Implementation Course Step 1 Tone (Self Assessment)

“As a Man Thinketh” by James Allen

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Did you enjoy the article? What idea, story or quote stood out for you most?
2. Let's explore where the desire to control rears it's head in our life; consider people and settings, strategies of control and differing degrees of desire to control. In what ways do you find that you try to control others? At Work? Home? Marriage? Government? How do these situations differ in the strategies you use? Are the control tactics effective? Reflect on the short-term, long-term results including the solutions and effect on relationships?
3. What do you think of when you hear the words 'self-government'? Perhaps as a group have one person be the scribe and record everyone's answers as they throw them out. Look at your list. Are there any words that express emotions? Are they negative or positive? What difficulties and successes have you experienced in your efforts to develop greater self-control so far in your life?
4. The article focuses on [emotional self-control](#). Do you believe that you can deliberately chose how you feel? It goes against some of the popular culture of our day. How about physical self- control? How about mental? Do you believe you can have self-control in all the areas of your life? What areas do you feel strongest in? Why? What areas do you feel weakest? Why?
5. Self-Analysis Exercise: Think of a disappointing or unexpected situations you recently encountered. What thoughts ran through your mind? How did you feel as a result? How did you respond? What was the result of your response. If the results were undesirable, think about all the different ways you could have responded.
6. Describe someone who has impacted your life (changed your perspective, taught a principle that stuck with you, or someone you try to be like). What did you learn? How did they teach you? Have you noticed areas in your life where your self-control has given you confidence and power to influence others in positive ways?
7. We reap what we sow, it's the law of the harvest. There are many great things that we can expect as we develop greater self-control. Recognizing this is a life-long journey and something that we can grow more and more consistent with, what are the fruits of becoming a self-governing adult? What power, character traits, blessings are you seeking as you growing in your capacity govern yourself?
8. What are your buttons? What things trigger your negative reactions and interaction with others? Read more [HERE](#).

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CHALLENGE:

Chose a challenge from those listed or create your own. Let your Circle know what your challenge is for the month. Be prepared to report back on your progress.

1. Begin keeping a journal and each day analyze one situation, that you encountered. Be sure to write about one or two situations that are positive. Try to write it with no judgement, guilt, or emotional attachment, simply a description like you are an observer. What happened? What was the result? We need to have a knowledge of our own behaviors to begin to see the causes and effects more clearly. You can take it one step further and write down other options or ways you could have responded. What might the result have been? Share one analysis entry with the group next month. (Be sure to chose one you feel comfortable sharing)

2. "To realize I had the control the whole time and could take it back when I wanted to was completely liberating." Truly at the heart of why so many of us stay stuck in & continually recreate suffering and struggle is because we do not know, or believe, that we do have a choice. Even before it is 'fully understood', the simple acknowledgement of this truth alone begins to transform hearts.

Write down your current beliefs about your ability to control yourself. Can you see lies that you have grown to believe? Challenge them.

Make "I have the power to choose" your new mantra. Use it throughout the day to interrupt and replace the lies - the negative self-talk or tendencies to blame, to rationalize, justify, or view things as a victim. Share your insights with the group next month.