

Investigation of Will

Life has the great power to do as it will. We exercise this power constantly throughout our lives, having the nearly automatic impulse to want or not want whatever catches our attention. We want what benefits us and do not want what threatens us. All life does this to survive. Life moves toward food and away from predators.

Self-centered Western people use their willpower to get what they want without regard for the suffering they cause. Our culture encourages us to freely act upon our culturally conditioned will to harm: anger gets the job done, buy now and pay later, my way or the highway, disposable relationships, guns, littering. Anything that thwarts my ability to do anything I want when and where I want restricts my freedom as an American. Impatience and urgency accompany the lack of impulse control: I want satisfaction now!

A Westerner views life as a child, as someone who does not comprehend the context of their lives within the imbalances of the Earth Interbeing that Western-style behavior causes. We look at what we want or don't want superficially from our self-centered point of view and ignore the impacts our actions will have upon the wellbeing of others.

On the sacred path, we know the power of our actions, that our actions can harm others, life, and the Earth our further life on Earth. However, those on the path who live in Western culture and may have distanced ourselves from the harmful culture might not yet have sufficient self-discipline or discernment to keep us from harmfully imposing our will upon others. .

If we can insert a pause between an impulse to act in ways that harm others and acting upon that impulse, we have broken the conditionally forged link. We halt before we have made any mistakes and remain in harmony with the common values, before we become entangled in the consequences of our Western conditioned actions.¹ If we pause before we act, we will find the transformative path through our difficulties.

This pause depends upon us having perceived enough times how mindlessly and easily we have acted in ways that harm life and Earth but now want to break that pattern. When adverse consequence B always follows impulse A, we have perceived a pattern that we can disrupt by not immediately acting on our impulse: we can take a breath. We can pause.

Pausing in an emotionally charged situation depends upon us having an attention level higher than the emotional energy embodied within the harmful impulse. It also depends upon our will not to act harmfully, our willingness to pause.

¹ **Common values of furthering life on Earth (work in progress):** loving awareness of the sacred and the sacredness of all life, reverent contentment with the arising experience, surrendering to the sacred knowing how to further life on Earth, compassion, harmoniously interacting with others by knowing the sacred equality and unity of life, equitable sharing of the Earth commons, acting in valued ways that further life on Earth, and restoring and renewing our balance with Earth, life, and the sacred. By living in these ways, we deepen our loving awareness of the sacred and sacredness of all life.

The pause we imposed between the impulse to act and acting upon the impulse can extend into nonaction. Nonaction has the power to change the trajectory of patterned behavior and save us from acting harmfully. We self-discipline ourselves by saying no to self-centered and harmful impulses to act.

Sages know that imposing our will upon others does not end well because we know we cannot change others without in some way forcing a behavior change. We have not changed the other, only their behavior. Imposing our will upon a situation will not make it more to our liking, but it will make the situation more complicated and dangerous.

Nonaction allows situations to unfold on their own without our interference. Nonaction protects us from acting out our ignorance in situations where we do not know how to respond in ways that benefit all. Rather, sages work invisibly by changing themselves through self-discipline to reduce their contribution to what causes harmful situations in ways that further life on Earth.

Throughout the process of discerning what we will do, we remain firmly rooted in valued ways. As we learn how to live within the Earth Interbeing, we focus our will on knowing how to respond in ways that further life rather than trying to change the behaviors of others or to improve our circumstances. We seek to serve the needs of others rather than our own.

The power of life to respond to what we experience constantly drives us to do something. To overcome our willingness to harm others for self-benefit, we need a firm will to benefit life. Our power becomes a great power as we orient our will to further life on Earth rather than impose our direction upon others. We offer the power of our will to the sacred.

November 6, 2025

Rev. 12-18-25