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Will Power: Quotations from
Hazrat Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan

Will Power

Note: These quotations have been selected from the works of Hazrat Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan, the founder of the Sufi Order International.

Will is not a power, but it is all the power there is. How did God create the world? By will. Therefore what we call will-power in us is in reality God-power, a power which increases by our recognizing its potentiality, and proves to be the greatest phenomenon in life. If there is any secret behind the mystery of the world of phenomena that can be learned it is will-power, and it is by will-power that all we do, physically or mentally, is accomplished. Our hands, with all their perfect mechanism, cannot hold a glass of water if there is no will-power to support them. If will-power fails him, a person seemingly healthy will not be able to stand.

Man has been able to accomplish tremendous things by will-power. Success and failure are its phenomena. It is only the phenomenon of will which will bring one to success, and when will fails, however qualified and intelligent the person, he fails. Therefore it is not a human power, it is a divine power in man. Its work with the mind is still greater, for no man can hold a thought in his mind for a moment if there is not the strength of his will to hold it. If a person cannot concentrate, cannot keep his thought still for a moment, it means that will-power fails him, for it is will which holds a thought.

A part of that Will we inherit as our own divine heritage, and it is our consciousness of it which makes it greater. If we are not conscious of it, it becomes smaller. It is the optimistic attitude towards life which develops the will; the pessimistic attitude reduces it, robs it of its great power. Therefore, if there is anything that hinders our progress in life it is our own selves. It is proved a thousand times over that there is no one in the world who can be a worse enemy to us than ourselves, for at every failure we see ourselves standing in our own light.

If only the willpower is in control it will overcome all inertia.

The will is the action of the soul. One can also call the soul the self of the will. The difference between will and soul is like the difference between a person and his actions.

It is only when one does not begin to try that one does not know what is the pleasure of God.

It is very interesting to study the lives of the great in the world. We find that some great people have almost arrived at the fulfilment of their undertakings and just before they had reached the goal they have lost it; and there have been some great people who have attained the ultimate success in whatever they have undertaken. You will always find that the souls of the former kind are the ones who were gifted with great power and yet lacked faith, while the others were gifted with the same power, and that power was supported by faith. A person may have all the power there is, all the wisdom and inspiration, but if there is one thing lacking, which is faith, he may attain to ninety-nine degrees of success and yet may miss that very one whose loss in the end takes away all that was gained previously. There is a saying in English, 'all's well that ends well', as the Eastern people say in their prayers, 'make our end good'; for



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if there be a difficulty just now we do not mind, because there will be success, the real success, in its completion.

Now arises the question: how can one find faith in oneself, how can one develop it? One can find faith by practising self-confidence as the first thing, by having self-confidence even in the smallest things. To-day most people have the habit to say with everything “perhaps”. It seems as if a new word has come in use; they say “perhaps it will happen”. It is a kind of polite expression, or a word of refined people to show themselves pessimistic. I can see their reason; they think that it is fanatic, presumptuous, and simple to say, “It will be”, or “It will come”, or “It will be accomplished”, or “It will be fulfilled”. To say “perhaps”, -so they think -makes them free from the responsibility of having committed themselves. The more pessimistic a person, the more “perhaps” he uses, and this “perhaps” has gone so deep in souls to-day that they cannot find faith.

There is a passage in the Qur’an which says, ‘Rise to pray during the night or part of it and recite the Qur’an; surely We will light upon you a weighty word ... And remember the Name of thy Lord ...’ What speculation this passage has aroused! The solution of its mystery is this, that desire for comfort controls the will so much, the willpower has become so subjected to the desire for comfort, that comfort controls the will. The will has become a slave to the experiences of joy and pleasure that we get from all kinds of comfort.

Then we come to the question of how we can maintain our will. The nature of the life we live is to rob us of our will. Not only the struggle we have to undergo in life, but also our own self, our thoughts, our desires, our wishes, our motives, weaken our will. The person who knows how our inner being is connected with the perfect Will, will find that what makes the will smaller, narrower, more limited, is our experience throughout life. Our joys rob us of our will as do our sorrows; our pleasures rob us of our will as do our pains; and the only way of maintaining the power of will is by studying the existence of will and by analysing among all the things in ourselves what will is.

Will-power is like a battery of life, and as difficult as it is to deal with a strong mechanism, and as dangerous as it is to work with a battery of enormous power, so difficult and dangerous it is to develop and to work with the will-power. In the first place, power is blinding, beauty is revealing. Wrong and unjust and unreasonable tendencies may rise from power, and one may destroy oneself in its expression. Christ has given a hint on this subject where he says, “He who taketh the sword shall perish by the sword.” But by this it is not meant that one must not develop will-power. It only means that one prepares, before developing will-power, knowledge and strength to control it when it is once developed, and the knowledge and the clearness of vision to utilize it rightfully.

Very often people have asked me if there is any practice, any study, anything which one can do in order to develop will-power; and I have answered that yes, there are many practices and many ways, but the simplest and best practice which one can follow without being taught is to have one’s reactions always in hand. Such words as ‘I cannot endure’, ‘I cannot stand’, ‘I cannot sustain’, ‘I cannot have patience’, all mean to me, ‘I am weak’. By speaking thus we only admit in other words that we are weak. And can



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there be anyone in the world who is a worse enemy to us than our own weakness? If the whole world were our friend, that one enemy, our weakness, would be enough to ruin our life; but once this enemy is conquered we can stand against all those who come into conflict with us.

The first exercise to help the will-power to develop would be to check every act, word, and thought which we do not wish to occur; to avoid unintentional actions, speech, and thoughts. The other exercise that is necessary for the development of the willpower is that of seeing that neither our mind nor our body rules us, but that we rule our body and our mind. Desires such as appetite, thirst, sleep, even the desire of moving or standing or walking, all these desires should be under control. There should be a time in every day when every desire of the body is checked. See if you can do it; and then as long as you can let the body go without listening to it, do so. It takes a great deal of trouble to rule the body, for it is not willing to be ruled.

In order to practice self-control in all one does in everyday life, the best thing is to develop in one's nature a certain amount of indifference. Every word that is said to one need not be taken to be so important that it upsets one's whole being, disturbs one's balance, and robs one of one's will-power. There are things that matter; but there are many things in one's everyday life which do not matter much, and one is often apt to put undue stress upon them.

When a person allows himself to be disturbed, that shows that his concentration is not good; and if his concentration is not good, that shows that his will-power fails him. The best way, therefore, to protect oneself from disturbance is to develop the power of concentration, so that the will-power develops naturally and one is able to withstand all the disturbances which arise when one has to live in the midst of the crowd.

Very often a person thinks that by being active or determined he maintains his will, and that by being passive he loses his will. But it is not so. Where there is a battle there is an advance and there is a retreat. By a retreat one is not defeated and by an advance one has not always succeeded. A person who exerts his will all the time, strains it and exhausts it very soon.

Those who are wise but without will are as helpless as a person with will-power but without wisdom. There is no use keeping wisdom at the front and will-power at the back; nor is there any use in keeping will-power at the front and wisdom at the back. What is necessary is to make the two as one, and this can be done by becoming conscious of the action of both in all one does.

There is also always a battle between will-power and wisdom; and the first and wisest thing to do is to bring about a harmony between wisdom and will-power. When a person says, 'I wish to do this, I will do this', and at the same time his sense says, 'No, you cannot do it, you must not do it', then even with all his will-power he either cannot do it or he will do something against his better judgment.

To know when to persist in our own will, when to allow the will of others, is often difficult, and sometimes we think it most difficult to know what is the will of God and what is our own will. Sometimes, six months afterwards, sometimes a year afterwards, or years afterwards, we see clearly



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what we should have done in a certain case, what course we should have taken, which at the time we could not discern, although we tried to. If at the moment of difficulty, we were as calm, as free from these thoughts of the pleasure, the happiness, the discomfort or the loss that will result to ourselves, we should see as clearly in that moment and perceive plainly the will of God.