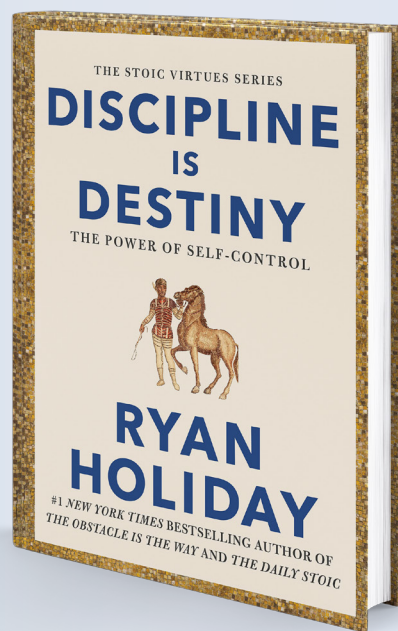


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Discipline is Destiny

The Power of Self-Control

By Ryan Holiday

Ryan Holiday is one of the world's bestselling living philosophers. His books, including *The Obstacle Is the Way*, *Ego Is the Enemy*, *The Daily Stoic*, and the #1 New York Times bestseller *Stillness Is the Key*, appear in more than forty languages and have sold more than five million copies. He lives outside Austin with his wife and two boys...and a small herd of cows and donkeys and goats. His bookstore, The Painted Porch, sits on historic Main Street in Bastrop, Texas.

The Virtue of Temperance in the Modern World

Most people in any modern, developed nation have everything they need to survive and then some. Today, ordinary people live the way kings and queens would have been lucky to live in the past. We have the freedom to do anything we want, go anywhere we want, and believe anything we want. At the push of a button, we have access to all the pleasures and distractions in the world. With so many luxuries and opportunities at our fingertips, it can be challenging to live a life of virtue. In ancient times, four key components defined virtue: courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom. While each element is distinct from the rest, each virtue is interrelated. While it's challenging to live a virtuous life in today's world, it's not impossible. With some focus and determination, anyone can master each virtue and live a life of honor, glory, and excellence in every sense.

This is the second book in a four-part series on cardinal virtues written by the renowned philosopher and New York Times bestselling author Ryan Holiday. *Discipline is Destiny: The Power of Self-Control* focuses on self-discipline, "the virtue of temperance." Holiday defines self-discipline as "giving everything you have and knowing what to hold back. Temperance, he believes, "is not deprivation but command of oneself physically, mentally, spiritually – demanding the best of oneself, even when no one is looking, even when allowed less." This book was written to help everyone "figure out how to manage their emotions, abstain from what should be abstained from, choose what standards to observe." Holiday believes that "it is through discipline that not only are all things possible, but also that all things are enhanced. More than talent, life is about temperament. And temperance." This book dissects the virtue of temperance and shows us how to master ourselves; how to strike a balance between our higher and lower selves; how to live our best lives through self-control, moderation, composure, and balance.

Part 1: The Exterior (The Body)

In today's modern world, it's pretty common to come across a person who appears to have everything they could ever want or need but still feels dissatisfied, discontent, and overwhelmed. Because it's so easy for us to get what we want, yet we're exposed to such an abundance of things that no one person can ever really have it all, it's almost impossible to live

in the moment and maintain a sense of gratitude for what's around us in our daily lives.

Temperance is about living a simple, modest life. It's about forging fortitude and self-control in all aspects except toughness and determination. Holiday believes that "We owe it to ourselves, to our goals, to the game, to keep going. To keep pushing. To stay pure. To be tough. To conquer our bodies before they conquer us." To begin developing the virtue of temperance, Holiday suggests, "When you have trouble waking up, when you find it hard, remind yourself of who you come from, remind yourself of the tradition, remind yourself of what is at stake. Think of how lucky you are. Be glad to be awake (because it's better than the alternative, which we'll all greet one day). Feel the joy of being able to do what you love. Cherish the time. But most of all, use it."

Beyond necessity, when everything we could dream of having is right at our fingertips, we become vulnerable to increasing desires, gluttony, laziness, and many other less-than-virtuous character traits. Even those who live their lives with the best intentions often end up neglecting their bodies and minds, falling into bad habits, and experiencing a state of internal imbalance. When our desires outgrow necessity, we find ourselves working harder and harder to get what we want and often ending up burnt out, stressed out, and in debt. Holiday reminds us that "No one is having less fun than an overextended, overcommitted person with debtors at their door . . . or a high-paying job they can't afford to lose. No one is less free than the person trapped on the treadmill moving faster and faster and faster but going nowhere. The less you desire, the richer you are, the freer you are, the more powerful you are. It's that simple."

The most important thing we can do to cultivate the virtue of temperance and achieve greatness is to take care of our bodies "Not just in the gym, but in the kitchen too." Holiday compares the human body to a high-end race car and urges us to "fuel accordingly." Following this seemingly simple path is far from easy. However, Holiday reminds us that "If we don't dominate ourselves physically, who and what does dominate? Outside forces. Laziness. Adversity. Entropy. Atrophy. We know that while it might seem easy to take it easy and more pleasurable to indulge our pleasure centers, in the long run, it is a far more painful route."

The path to greatness through temperance begins with self-discipline, and self-discipline starts with the body. A person who has gained mastery of their soul is a person who doesn't fear change or lack of abundance. A person who practices self-discipline and fuels their body well isn't only in better physical shape but is happier and more well-balanced. Holiday urges us to understand the importance of cultivating temperance, reminding us that "No one who is a slave to their urges or to sloth, no one without strength or a good schedule, can create a great life. Certainly, they will be too consumed with themselves to be of much good to anyone else. Those who tell themselves they are free to do anything will, inevitably, be chained to something. Discipline is how we free ourselves. It is the key that unlocks the chains. It is how we save ourselves. We choose the hard way . . . because, in the long run, it's actually the only way."

Part 2: The Inner Domain (The Temperament)

While practicing self-discipline and taking care of the physical body are crucial first steps to cultivating temperance, it's important to understand that the body is only one vehicle for self-discipline. Imbalance can (and does) still exist in people who keep themselves in perfect physical shape. We all know or have heard of someone who is in complete control of their physical form, but their minds and lives are a mess. Holiday explains, "It doesn't matter how much discipline we exert over what we eat or when we wake up if we are driven by distraction, at the mercy of biases or bad moods, given over to temptation, impulses, or instinct. This is no way to live—in fact, this intemperance condemns a person to never reach their full potential, with perpetual misery as a possible chaser. True self-control means moderation not just in what we do, but also how we think, how we feel, how we comport ourselves in a world of chaos and confusion."

Holiday urges us to "work smarter, not harder," reminding us that "discipline isn't just endurance and strength" – temperance also requires us to be able to make the best of any situation, finding opportunities to adjust, grow, and improve regardless of the constraints of our world or profession. The ultimate test is to achieve temperance "creatively, consciously, calmly" with "equanimity and poise, even initiative and joy." Cultivating the virtue of temperance is an all-consuming, full-time endeavor. However, Holiday says, "It's the journey of a lifetime, one that gets more impressive (and rewarding) the longer you stay at it."

This journey begins with understanding the difference between the "higher self" and the "lower self." These align with "two types of mental processing we do, which psychologists call thinking fast, and thinking slow." Thinking fast is associated with your gut instincts and attributed to the lower self. Thinking slowly, rationally, and philosophically is attributed to the higher self. It's about pausing when the going gets tough and letting temperament prevail over fear, anxiety, and prejudice. One area where this rule can (and must) apply in many of our personal and professional lives is where it comes down to having the discipline to say no to superfluous things. Holiday explains, "The secret to success in almost all fields is large, uninterrupted blocks of focused time. And yet, how many people organize their days or lives to make this possible? And then they wonder why they are frazzled, unproductive, overwhelmed, always behind." When everything we agree to means saying no to something else, it's impossible to be committed to anything without developing the discipline to say no.

Holiday urges us to remember that "No one can say yes to their destiny without saying no to what is clearly someone else's. No one can achieve their main thing without the discipline to make it the main thing." It's equally essential to understand that once you decide to make that main thing your primary area of focus, you must put your entire mind into it. This leads us to Holiday's next area of focus: cultivating the discipline of patience. Holiday believes it's impossible for impatient people to do important things "because almost everything that matters takes longer



Patient people understand that trying to achieve perfection is futile.”

than it should, certainly longer than we would like. Meanwhile, the patient person is not only easier to work with, but more protected and resilient.”

Patient people understand that trying to achieve perfection is futile. They have the discipline to avoid procrastination. They know that if and when they make mistakes, they can learn from them. They understand that “Discipline is not a punishment, it’s a way to avoid punishment.” Patient people also know that “You don’t have to verbalize every thought. You don’t have to always give your opinion—especially when it’s not solicited. Just because there is a pause doesn’t mean you have to fill it. Just because everyone else is talking doesn’t mean you have to jump in. You can sit with the awkwardness. You can use the silence to your advantage. You can wait and see. You can listen more than you talk. You can speak only when you’re certain it’s not better left unsaid.”

Cultivating temperance in your higher self requires you to create healthy boundaries for yourself. Understand, first and foremost, that “We don’t need accomplishments to feel good or to be good enough. What do we need? The truth: not much! Some food and water. Work that we can challenge ourselves with. A calm mind in the midst of adversity. Sleep. A solid routine. A cause we are committed to. Something we’re getting better at. Everything else is extra. Or worse, as history has shown countless times, the source of our painful downfall.” Creating the boundaries you need to follow the rules above will give you the space you need to align your body, mind, and spirit so that you can discover all that you’re capable of achieving, which is likely to be more than you thought possible.

Part 3: The Magisterial (The Soul)

Once you’ve gained command over your physical body and have aligned your mind and spirit with it, the final test of mastering the virtue of temperance comes down to the soul. Temperance and restraint are common in monasteries and mountain retreats. However, Holiday asks us, “Can you achieve this stillness, this balance, in the chaos of real life? Surrounded by temptation? Whether the crowd cheers or jeers? Regardless of what would be tolerated, what you could get away with, what people even think is possible?” To find a person capable of mastering themselves mentally and physically on this level and having enough energy left to give of themselves is extremely rare.

This part of temperance is all about selflessness and sacrifice. It’s about putting your ego aside and leaving other people’s mistakes to those who have made them. It’s about showing up, persevering, giving more, and living up to impossible standards. It’s about keeping yourself together even in the most chaotic situations where everything seems to be falling apart, and every-

one is watching and waiting for you to fall apart too.

Retreats are temporary, and conquerors aren’t rare. “Talented writers, groundbreaking scientists, incredible athletes, bold entrepreneurs—all these types are rare. Rarer still, and all the more impressive, are those who manage to achieve these feats without losing control of themselves, without becoming slaves to their ambition, to their careers, to their urges,” explains Holiday.

The secret to all this lies not only in self-discipline but flexibility. To be flexible in every sense of the word is an enormous challenge. It requires us to live and let live while resting comfortably in our own traditions and allowing new and improved ones to be created. It also requires us to adjust as the world, and our position within it changes – remaining true to our principles without becoming bitter, an outcast, or falling victim to failure. “Rigidity is fragility. Formlessness is unbreakable.” It’s all so much easier said than done.

The four virtues are about instilling good character in ourselves through the art of self-discipline. Self-discipline – and through it, temperance – must be cultivated. It’s something you can only prove by the life you lead. “We can learn about virtue all we want, but when we get to the crossroads, there we will have to make a choice. Self-control must be observed physically. It must be embodied mentally. It must be rendered magisterially when our moment comes. It’s our decision what this will look like. Not just once, but a thousand times in life. Not just in the past and the future but right now, today.”

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