Ethics, Karma, and Interdependence
Let’s ask God to help us to self-control: for one who lacks it, lacks His Grace.

The undisciplined person doesn’t wrong himself alone—but sets fire to the whole world.

Discipline enabled Heaven to be filled with light; discipline enabled the angels to be immaculate and holy.

The peacock’s plumage is his enemy.

The world is the mountain, and each action, the shout that echoes back.

This discipline and rough treatment are a furnace to extract the silver from the dross

—Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi
It is related that Ibn al-Mubarak said, “We have greater need of a little bit of refinement than a lot of knowledge.” I heard Muhammad bin al-Husayn say... that bin al-Mubarak said, “We sought for right conduct once the teachers of right conduct had left us.”

It is said that if one has three traits, one is never a stranger. They are avoiding doubters, behaving well, and restraining oneself from causing harm.

—Al Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
Some foolish impatient students take to concentration practice — this is preliminary concentration, not real meditation yet — without in any manner undergoing any preliminary training in ethics. This is a serious blunder. Ethical perfection is a matter of paramount importance.

Concentration without purity of mind is of no avail. There are some occultists who have concentration but they do not have good character. That is the reason why they do not make any progress in the spiritual line.

—Swami Sivananda,

*Concentration and Meditation*
The divine Law commands one to the duty of servanthood. The Way, the inner reality is the contemplation of divine lordship. Outward religious practice not confirmed by inner reality is not acceptable. Inner reality not anchored by outward religious practice is not acceptable. Divine Law brings obligation upon the creation, while the Way is founded upon the free action of the Real. The divine Law is that you serve Him. The Way is that you see Him.

The divine Law is doing what you have been ordered to do. Haqiqah is bearing witness to what He has determined and ordained, hidden and revealed. I heard Abu Ali al-Daqqaq say that God's saying [in the Opening Chapter] iyyaka nabudu—"You we worship"—preserves the outward practice, the divine Law. Iyyaka nastain—"to You we turn for help"—establishes the inner reality, the Way.

Know that religious obligation is a spiritual reality in that it was made necessary by His command. And spiritual reality, as well, is a religious obligation, in that the realizations of Him were also made necessary by His command.

—Al-Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
God Almighty and Glorious has said, “The sight (of the Prophet of the time of his Ascension), did not deviate nor overstep the bounds” (53:17). This is said to mean, “He maintained the conduct proper to the Divine Presence.”

The Most High also said, “Save yourselves and your families from the fire” (66:6). According to the commentary of Ibn Abbas, this means, “Teach them the stipulations of the divine law and refined behavior.”

Ali bin Ahmad al-Ahwazi informed us... from Ayisha that the Prophet said, “The child owes it to his parent to make good his name, his upbringing, and his education in conduct.” It is related that Said bin al-Musayyib said, “Whoever does not know what rights God Almighty and Glorious has over him and has not been educated in His command and prohibition is cut off from right behavior.” It is reported that the Prophet said, “God Almighty and Glorious had educated me in refined behavior and made good my education.”

The essence of adab, the most beautiful and fitting, refined behavior, is the gathering together of all good traits. The adib, the refined person, is he in whom are gathered all these good characteristics. From this is taken the word maduba, banquet, a name for the coming together (of such people).

I heard Abu Ali al-Daqqaq say, “Through his obedience the servant attains to paradise. Through refined conduct in obedience he attains to God.” I also heard him say, “I saw someone who, during the prescribed prayer before God, wanted to stretch his hand to his nose to remove something that was in it. His hand was seized!” —Al Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
I heard Abu Hatim al-Sijistani say... that al-Jalajili al-Basri said, “For the testimony of unity (tawhid) to be in force, faith is prerequisite, for whoever has no faith cannot testify to the unity. For faith to be in force the divine law is prerequisite, for whoever does not hold to the divine law has no faith and cannot testify to the unity. For the divine law to be in force refined conduct is prerequisite, for whoever has not refined his conduct cannot hold to the divine law, has no faith, and cannot testify to the unity...”

Ibn Ata said, “Adab, refined behavior, is to hold fast to the commendable things.” When asked, “What is the meaning of this?” he replied, “It means you behave properly toward God both in secret and in public. If you are like that, you are a man of refined culture even if you are a foreigner.” Then he recited:

When she conversed, her speech was all graciousness,
And when she kept silent, her silence was all fair.
—Al Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
[Al-Jurayri] said that whoever does not establish awe of duty and vigilance in his relationship to God will not arrive at disclosure of the unseen or contemplation (mushahadah) of the divine.

—Al-Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
I heard Abu Hatim al-Sijistani say that Abu-l-Nasr al-Tusi al-Sarraj said, “People have three levels of refinement. For the people of this world, refinement largely consists of eloquent speech and rhetoric, among with the memorization of sciences, of the names of kings, and of the poetry of the Arabs. For the people of the next world, refinement largely consists of training the ego and disciplining the body, preserving the limits of the law and abandoning desires. For the elite, refinement largely consists of cleansing the heart of vices, guarding inner secrets, being faithful to one’s promises, protecting the present, not turning aside in thought along with refined behavior in the stations of the search, in the moments of presence with God, and in the stages of closeness to God.”

—Al Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
The Four Principles of Karma

1. Actions produce related consequences.
2. The consequences are greater than the actions.
3. You cannot receive the consequence without committing its corresponding action.
4. Once an action is performed, the consequence cannot be erased.

Yet remember, in accordance with Gnosticism:

A superior law always overcomes an inferior one.
Arjuna said:
1. Renunciation of actions, O Krishna, Thou praisest, and again Yoga! Tell me conclusively which is the better of the two.

The Blessed Lord said:
2. Renunciation and the Yoga of action both lead to the highest bliss; but of the two, the Yoga of action is superior to the renunciation of action.

3. He should be known as a perpetual Sannyasin who neither hates nor desires; for, free from the pairs of opposites, O mighty-armed Arjuna, he is easily set free from bondage!

4. Children, not the wise, speak of knowledge and the Yoga of action or the performance of action as though they are distinct and different; he who is truly established in one obtains the fruits of both.

5. That place which is reached by the Sankhyas or the Jnanis is reached by the (Karma) Yogis. He sees who sees knowledge and the performance of action (Karma Yoga) as one.

6. But renunciation, O mighty-armed Arjuna, is hard to attain without Yoga; the Yoga-harmonised sage proceeds quickly to Brahman!

7. He who is devoted to the path of action, whose mind is quite pure, who has conquered the self, who has subdued his senses and who has realised his Self as the Self in all beings, though acting, he is not tainted.

—Bhagavad-Gita: Yoga of Renunciation of Action
8. “I do nothing at all”—thus will the harmonised knower of Truth think—seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, sleeping, breathing,

9. Speaking, letting go, seizing, opening and closing the eyes—convinced that the senses move among the sense-objects.

10. He who performs actions, offering them to Brahman and abandoning attachment, is not tainted by sin as a lotus leaf by water.

11. Yogis, having abandoned attachment, perform actions only by the body, mind, intellect and also by the senses, for the purification of the self.

12. The united one (the well poised or the harmonised), having abandoned the fruit of action, attains to the eternal peace; the non-united only (the unsteady or the unbalanced), impelled by desire and attached to the fruit, is bound.

13. Mentally renouncing all actions and self-controlled, the embodied one rests happily in the nine-gated city, neither acting nor causing others (body and senses) to act.

—Bhagavad-Gita: Yoga of Renunciation of Action
Irada, the will to find God, is the beginning of the path of spiritual travelers, the first title given to those who are determined to reach God Most High. This attribute is only called iradah because will is the preface to every undertaking. What the servant does not will, he does not carry out. Since this is the start of the enterprise of one who travels the path of God Almighty and Glorious, it is called 'will' by analogy to the resolution involved at the beginning of everything else.

According to etymology, the disciple is 'he who possess will,' just as the knower is 'he who possesses knowledge' because the word belongs to the class of derived nouns. But in Sufi usage, the disciple is he who possesses no will at all! Here, one who does not abandon will cannot be called a disciple, just as, linguistically, one who does not possess will cannot be called a disciple.

—Al Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.

–Majjhima Nikāya 79:8

[The body and mind] cannot come to be by their own strength, Nor can they maintain themselves by their own strength; Relying for support on other states... They come to be with others as condition. They are produced by... something other than themselves.

–Buddhaghosa, Vissudhimagga 18:36

Now this has been said by the Blessed One: “One who sees dependent arising sees the Dhamma; one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent arising.”

–Majjhima Nikāya 28:28
That which arises dependently
We explain as emptiness.
This [emptiness] is dependent designation.
Just this is the middle way.

Because there is no phenomenon
That is not dependently arisen,
There is no phenomenon
That is not empty.
—Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.18-19
Do not imagine that you are a great initiate and that you only have to sit in meditation and enter into Samadhi. You will have a terrible downfall. Even after years of practice, you will find you have not progressed an inch forward because there are deep within you lurking desires and cravings which are far beyond your reach. Be humble. Make a searching analysis of your heart and mind. Even if you are really a first-class aspirant, think you are an aspirant of the lowest class and practice the eightfold steps. The more time you spend in the first steps, Yama and Niyama, ethics, the less will be the time needed to attain perfection in meditation.

It is the preparation that takes very long, but do not wait for perfection in ethics in order to take the higher practices of the path. Try to get established in ethics and at the same time practice the other steps. The two must go hand in hand, then, success will be rapid.

–Swami Sivananda