

Questions to Ask Yourself Before Making Your Affirmations

Excerpt from *The Life We Are Given*

by George Leonard and Michael Murphy | p. 58 – 62



Does the affirmation really represent a change in me rather than in the external world? Affirmations as used in Integral Transformative Practice are not magical. They are statements of an intention to change your functioning in a positive way, not to make the external world play tricks for you. We were dumbfounded when one 1992 participant asked if, in the metanormal category, he could affirm that he had won the California Lottery -- twice. "That would be metanormal, wouldn't it?" Then there was the woman who wanted to affirm that her business would net her \$150,000. This, too, was inappropriate. But the increasing amount of time she was in the flow state or developing her intuition or becoming more balanced and centered, she might well contribute to the financial success of her business. In every case, we asked participants to affirm positive changes in their own functioning rather than in the external results of that functioning.

Am I getting ahead of myself? A twenty-nine-year-old financial manager and neophyte golfer made this affirmation in 1992: "I play par golf consistently, and my drives are, on average, 200 yards long." This woman, whose drives then averaged 125 yards, was actually a long way from par. Closing the gap over a ten-month period was not beyond the realm of possible. And her affirmation did involve her own functioning rather than outside forces. Still, we found it questionable. The process as well as the result is important. To drastically foreshorten or entirely bypass the journey of mastery is to forfeit much of the richness of life.

George Leonard started aikido as a raw beginner at age forty-seven and was awarded his first-degree black belt five years and three months later. To have magically attained black belt rank in a few months time would have been to miss out on many joyous and poignant moments and to violate an essential rhythm of practice.

Still, this is a matter of degree. We would not want to discourage practitioners from speeding and enhancing improvements of their functioning. Learning involves short, spectacular spurts as well as long stretches on the plateau, and affirmations can shorten the plateaus without breaking the rhythm of practice. One person in the class, a competitive Master's Class runner, had been trying for years to reduce his waistline in order to increase his speed and endurance. In 1992, he affirmed reducing his waist by one and a quarter inches. His chief device for realizing this affirmation was an especially vivid and persistent image of a "girdle of fire" around his waist whenever he was running. In just three months, with the girdle of fire image, his waist was smaller by two full inches--this without any changes in his diet or exercise regimen. This person was by no means bypassing his practice, having been a serious and disciplined runner for over twenty years. But despite all his prior training, such a sudden spurt of improvement in physical conditioning testifies to the generally unrecognized powers of affirmation and imaging.

When we see the body as a structure of heavy meat and bones, all we can do is cut it or drug it or otherwise manipulate it from the outside. But when we create a picture more consistent with modern physics and see the body as elegant, ethereal fields of waves joined in innumerable feedback circuits, then we realize that thoughts and feelings can set off sympathetic vibrations in it. The deeper vibrations connected with the power we have called "intentionality" can produce transformation in weeks, days or perhaps even minutes.

And how about the woman golfer who wanted to shoot par? Her record of affirmations at the end of the year tells the story: "I do not play par golf (surprise!). My drives now range between 150 and 175 yards. Generally my game is more consistent, and I'm hitting it straight down the middle more often."

Our advice? Don't be greedy, but also don't be timid.

Is the change a healthy one? The word "health" shares ancestry with "heal," "whole," and "holy" and should serve as a watchword not only in making your affirmations but throughout your practice. Bear in mind that transformation can be negative and destructive as well as positive and constructive. Attention to good health is of the essence. We consider the affirmation, "My entire being is balanced, vital and healthy," as a gold standard and safety net for all the others. At the same time, we feel it wise to examine each affirmation of its own in terms of good health. You would not want to develop massive upper-body muscles to the detriment of a balanced body. You would not want to develop the ability to take out-of-body journeys at the expense of mental stability. Even at best, transformation can involve destruction: the breakdown of old patterns in the creation of the new. Consider the overall health of body, mind, soul and heart before making your affirmations. If at any time during the process you should feel your health is being threatened, you can always slow down or pull back.

In the 1993 Cycle, Hollis Polk, a thirty-five-year-old real estate broker, affirmed that she was 5 foot 4 inches tall. At that time, she was 5 foot 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches. To realize her affirmation, she would have to grow two and a quarter inches. We urged her to reconsider, but she was dead set on 5 foot 4. After two months, she reported she had grown three-quarters of an inch, but was suffering pains in her ribs and joints. At this point, she agreed to back off. By the end of the class, she had grown between an inch and an inch and a quarter, with no ill effects.

Good health is the bottom line, and in this matter it is also important--as we will point out more than once in this book--not to neglect what mainstream medicine has to offer. Take your flu shots, if indicated. Make prompt and intelligent use of the exquisite diagnostic instrumentalities and healing capabilities developed by our science. This practice aims to integrate worlds that some people foolishly attempt to separate.

How will this change affect others in my life? Say you affirm a significant increase in your personal autonomy, your ability to control your own destiny. Say the affirmation is fully realized. Previously you'd been very dependent on other people. Now you're making decisions for yourself and generally operating more effectively. Do you think family and fellow workers will be overjoyed? Well, maybe. Before making your affirmations, consider the likely effects on the people around you. Discuss your plans with those you work with and those you care for.

Do I really want this change? Am I prepared to live with it? There's an old saying: "Be careful what you ask for. You might get it." Are you really the kind of person who is willing to be taller or enjoy abundant energy or express your love openly and freely or get in touch with self-existent delight or manifest metanormal capabilities? Are you the kind of person who is willing to realize your latent powers? Are you willing to live with a fuller expression of beauty and creativity?

Sometimes we have to look deep inside to know how fearful we are of our own potentialities. This fear has roots in society's tireless efforts, covert and overt, to shape us within the boundaries of "normality," which in a mass society too often devolve toward the lowest common denominator. During his years of writing on the subject of education, George Leonard discovered that educators are sometimes even more threatened by exceptionally high abilities than by exceptionally low abilities in their students. One student in Virginia, for example, took home a programmed course in geometry and finished a semester's work in one long weekend. This left the teacher with a daunting question: What can I do with him the rest of the semester? And, if he should continue at this rate, how about the semester after that? If this mental transformation is threatening, how much more threatening are transformations of body, heart and spirit?

To become consciously involved in an enterprise that may presage further human evolution takes courage and a sense of adventure. As in all high adventure, there are risks and no certainty of success. But regular, disciplined practice builds a base camp of security and support. No matter how high you climb, your practice is always there, waiting for you.