

Shaping Our Own Destiny

BY MICHAEL JOSEPHSON

There's no doubt that our character has a profound effect on our future. What we must remember, however, is not merely how powerful character is in influencing our destiny, but how powerful we are in shaping our own character and, therefore, our own destiny. Character may determine our fate, but character is not determined by fate.

It's a common mistake to think of character as something that is fully formed and fixed very early in life. It calls to mind old maxims like, "A leopard can't change its spots," and, "You

can't teach an old dog new tricks." This "etched in stone" perspective is supported by a great deal of modern psychology emphasizing self-acceptance. Like Popeye says, "I am what I am." The message is: "I'm done. Don't expect me to be more, better or different."

These views of character totally undervalue the lifelong potential for growth that comes with the power of reflection and choice. How depressing it would be to believe that we really couldn't get better, that with dedication and effort, we couldn't become more honest,

respectful, responsible or caring.

There are so many things in life we can't control—whether we're beautiful or smart, whether we had good parents or bad, whether we grew up with affirmation or negation or with affluence or poverty. And though these circumstances of our lives surely influence our values and experiences, they do not control them. People of good and bad character come from all sorts of circumstances.

It's uplifting to remember that nothing but moral willpower is needed to make us better. No, it isn't easy. But if we strive to become more aware of the habits of heart and mind that drive our conduct, we can begin to place new emphasis on our higher values and become what we want our children to think we are. ■

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