ORTHODOX WAY OF LIFE
ASCETICISM
Way of Life

What’s our aim, purpose?

What is central force of today’s culture?

- Secularism - God is distant and unapproachable.
- Individualism and pleasure. I determine everything.
- Tolerance and relativism are main values.

What is central force in living Orthodox faith?

- God is pervasive, sustaining, all powerful, Truth in a living faith.
- Desire to be united with Him and seek to do His will out of love.
Way of Life

Our Fallen Condition
★ Our concern about bodily needs
★ Fear of death & sickness
★ Desire for social acceptance
★ All our self-centered thinking.

Our Present Condition

Our Natural Condition
Way of Life

- How is this fallen condition reinforced by our culture?
- Activities - Seek pleasure and avoid pain
  Social media, television, movies, video games, internet surfing.....
- Advertisements - shopping.
- Sex, fear, social acceptance, achievement.
- Will any of this bring us closer to God?

Can’t rest in the comfort of our culture. *Do not model yourselves on the behavior of the world around you, but let your behavior change*... Rom 12:2
Divine Economy - Plan

- How did God provide for us to regain our unity?
- Jesus Christ came for our salvation. Incarnation - Miraculous birth to a virgin. Taught, Crucified, Resurrected, Ascended (opening the gates of paradise), sent Holy Spirit, and established the Church.
  Gave us our universal Salvation - The path All out of unconditional love - the hope of eternal life based on faith.

- So how to we return to our natural condition?
With Faith and Love

† Have **Faith** in Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Have **Zeal** for our salvation. **Desire** eternal life with Him. Out of **Love** we want to do what God commands.

† What to do when we realize that we are not capable of doing this?

† Use our **free will** - rise up and oppose the inclinations of our body in this culture.

† We enter into a necessary **struggle** with ourselves. Start of **asceticism**.
Spiritual Warfare

- Can’t be lulled to sleep by reliance on faith alone, once saved always saved, or ethnic tradition (I am Orthodox)

- Spiritual warfare is necessary. We must participate.

- Forget about satisfying your bodies with all their cravings. Romans 13:14

- It is not listening to the Law but keeping it that will make people holy in the sight of God. - Romans 2:13

- Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (Eph 6:11)
Spiritual Warfare

* **You must not**
  ...let sin reign in your mortal bodies or command your obedience to bodily passions.
  ...not let any part of your body turn into an unholy weapon fighting on the side of sin.

* **You should**
  ...offer yourselves to God and consider yourselves dead men brought back to life.
  ...make every part of your body into a weapon fighting on the side of God.

* **Then sin will no longer dominate your life, since you are living by grace and not by law.**

Romans 6:12-14
Ascetic Disciplines

* How do we attack? What are Ascetic disciplines?
* Greek term askisis (ἀσκησις): practice, training or exercise
  - Athletic preparation

Saint Paul uses the image of a boxer.

"I harden my body with blows and bring it under complete control, to keep myself from being disqualified after having called others to the contest".

* Acknowledges there is a state of constant warfare raging between good and evil . . .
Way of Life

Let’s reflect again on how our psychosomatic system works.
Soul, Mind, Heart, Senses, Brain, Body, Passions, Spirit
Taste
Smell
Sound
Touch
Sight

Emotions
Actions

Bodily functions
Heart beat
Digestion
Breathing

Thoughts
Assumptions
Patterns

Heart

Mind

Brain

Soul

Reason
Will

God

Holy Spirit

Through the Heart we find Union with God

Passions

Body

Brain
Assumptions
Patterns
For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (Rom 7:18-23)
Spiritual Warfare

Think about It!
Why is it that we find it so difficult to do what God commands us to do?

Why are our intentions so often not carried out?
What are Passions?

- **Emotions** that control us.
  Sexual desire, anger, envy, desire for material goods, rejection, fear, love...
- **Desires** that cannot be satisfied.
  Material goodies, recognition, food, sex...
- **Express our egoism** or self-centeredness.
- **Attempts to satisfy spiritual longing** by this world means.

- Forces become etched into our brains, programed into our automatic responses, and need to be rooted out.
Brain

- Brain has etched in it patterns of behavior - Mental programming
- What is its primary concern?
- The devil knows our weakness and continually tempts us.
- But who chooses?
- Devil has no power unless we give it to him.
We can look at sinful tendency in two ways

1. The devil who tempts us

2. Our mental programming that produces automatic responses - passions
Passions

* Body
  Sexual lust, gluttony, love of pleasure, sloth, comfort, adulterous feelings, loquacity, absent-mindedness, restlessness, willfulness in everything, unseemly laughter, idle talk, sleepiness, daydreaming, craving the pleasant.
Passions

✶ Soul
a) **Mental:** opinion, belief in one’s own intellect, criticism, attacking mind of God, doubts, puffing up and arrogance, curiosity, mental plundering, straying thoughts

✶ b) **Desirous part:** self-will, unsubmissiveness, love of authority, cruelty, opportunism, self-reliance, covetousness, ungratefulness, possessiveness, extortion

✶ c) **Sensual:** passions that disturb peace and tranquility of heart, various kinds of pleasantness and unpleasantness, wrath, envy, hatred, anger, revenge, judgment, contempt, vainglory, ambition, pride, boredom, sadness, sorrow, depression, joy, cheerfulness, fears, hopes and expectations.
Source of Passions

✱ What is their Source - the root?

✱ Self-love or egotism

✱ Three things close to the cause of egoism: Pleasure, Greed and Pride

✱ Cut off - Reprogram
Pleasure: by self-directed opposition.
Greed: with generosity
Pride: with humility.
World is Filled with Passions

- The world is the manifestation of the world of passions, the passions live in individuals, customs and deeds.

- Coming into contact with one part or another of the world, it is impossible not to exacerbate your own inner wounds or passions due to their similitude and accord with it.

Saint Theophan
Path to Sin

* Surrounded by demons (temptations) seeking out our weaknesses.

* Chief enemy is thought - mental programming.

* Thought leads contemplation of it and delight

* Delight in it leads to desire and attraction to it which leads to resolve to act.

* The deed.

* Realm of thought (mind & brain) is battlefield.
Passions

* Aren’t there good passions?

* Two types: **Natural and Unnatural Passions**

  * **Natural passions** depend on nature and not on the will.
    
    Appetite for food,
    Fear of being harmed,
    Sexual attraction
  
  * Necessary to preserve our nature.
    The animal aspect of our being.

  * Not a problem unless they go beyond the need for self preservation.
Saint Maximus

“The natural passions become good in those who struggle when, wisely unfastening them from the things of the flesh, use them to gain heavenly things. For example, they can change

...appetite into the movement of a spiritual longing for divine things;

...pleasure into the pure joy for the cooperation of the mind with divine gifts;

...fear into care to evade future misfortune due to sin; and

...sadness into corrective repentance for present evil.”

(St. Maximus Questions to Thalassios 1, PG 90.269 - OS 9)
Unnatural Passions

- When we connect our longing for spiritual wholeness with things of this world.
- When we seek pleasure or happiness, we only find pain on the other end. Then seek more pleasure. Example?
Saint Anthony the Great  (251–356)

Things that are done according to nature aren’t sins, but those done by choice;
it’s not a sin to eat, so that the body will be properly maintained in life without any evil thought, but it is to eat without gratitude and improperly and without restraint;
neither is it a sin to look with chastity, but it is a sin to look with envy, pride and desire;
it is not a sin to listen quietly, but it is with anger.
It’s not a sin to let the tongue be unrestrained in thanksgiving and prayer, but it is to speak evil;
to not let your hands do acts of mercy, but to commit murder and theft. So each of our members sins ... doing things its own way and not according to the will of God.

(On the Character of Men 60, GrPh 1, p 12; cf. Phi 1, p. 338 - OS 92)
Insights from Science

* Antonio Damasio - *The Feeling of What Happens*
* Daniel J. Siegel, *Mindful Brain*
* Andrew Newberg, *Why We Believe What We Believe*,
How Emotions Work

Antonio Damasio - *The Feeling of What Happens*

* Something from our senses initiates a response.
* Brain sends commands to other regions of the brain and most everywhere in the body.

1. **Bloodstream** - commands are sent in the form of chemical molecules that act on receptors in the cells of body tissues.
2. **Neuron pathways** - commands take the form of electromechanical signals which act on other neurons or on muscular fibers or on organs which in turn can release chemicals of their own into the blood stream.

* Results in global change in the state of the organism.
* Then we become aware of a feeling.
Nature of Spiritual Warfare

* Feelings are a result of a physical state.

* We can’t wait for our feelings to develop to control our behavior. We need to interact at the time of the stimulus and work to change the automatic response of the emotional response.

* We have to **change the program** that causes the response.
Nature of Spiritual Warfare

* Two places we can interrupt the cycle
* When we first receive the sensual stimulus
* or when we notice the emotional feeling but before we automatically take an action.
* What do Church Fathers advise?
  Learn to do both especially the first.
  Guarding the Heart or Watchfulness.
Attention and Watchfulness

*Mindful Brain*, Daniel J. Siegel

* We can focus our minds in a way that changes the structures and function of the brain. (96)
* Attentional processes, emotion regulation, and capacity to observe internally, to introspect and reflect, are all considered trainable skills. (Lutz and colleagues 2014) (97)
* This is how we can prepare for cooperation with God. Develop attentiveness in our mind with help of Holy Spirit.
Attention and Watchfulness

* Need mental strength
  Overcome “pleasantness” of the moment.

* Demands “unceasing prayer” & help of Holy Spirit.

* Put God first over all else.
  Seek the fire of the Holy Spirit within
  Structure our lives so this is true.

* Act with clarity of mind, firmness and love.
Attention and Watchfulness

- Brain imaging studies suggest frontal lobe is critical in directing our ability to act freely and make decisions and this can be interpreted that free will is conscious choice involving an introspective monitoring of the self. (158)
- The more you concentrate on a moral idea, the easier it becomes to act on that belief. (reprogramming)
- Frontal lobes monitor our ability to stay attentive and alert, helping us focus on task.
- Nuns showed greater activity in the frontal lobes.
Focus on Spiritual Ideals

- To maintain a sense of well being:
  - Must work at it continually
  - Reinforce positive feeling and beliefs.
  - Benefit of religious ritual and daily prayer.
- Key to creating any reality is based on a concentrated repetition of ideas. (189)
- More we focus on our object of contemplation, the more real the thought becomes.
- Be careful about what you pray for or meditate on because it may eventually become your personal truth.

To make spirituality central part of your life focus on spiritual ideals as often as you can. Andrew Newberg, Why We Believe What We Believe, p 190
Gird up the loins of your mind... not conforming yourselves to the former lusts but ... you also be holy in all your conduct.  
1 Peter 1:13-15

Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul... submit yourself to every ordinance...  
1 Peter 2:11, 13
Spiritual Warfare

* Engage in the best training or conditioning routine as Guided by Church.

* Everyone is different - Seek a guide.

* Create an ascetical rule for yourself.

* It is all inner work

* Attribute success to the Lord

* Dedication to God is most essential. It’s Holy Spirit who works in us.
Ascetic Disciplines

- Fasting
- Prayer
- Services and Sacraments
- Simplify life & Spiritualize environment
- Read Scripture and Church Fathers
Way of Life

* Must be **concerned** about salvation and thirst for loving relationship with God

* Must be **aware** of tendency to sin or respond to passions

* Must be **willing** to enter into training to perfect our being

* Must have **humility** to accept the Holy Spirit.
Orthodox Way of Life

- Church shows us the way to deal with this difficult but most important challenge we face.
- Cannot do it by our own effort but only through grace of the Holy Spirit.
- Called a purification of the Heart.
- A difficult path requiring persistence and endurance.
- Avoid the easy path
Synergia

- Salvation depends on Cooperation
- Not between equals but finite man working with Almighty God
- Not about earning Salvation but about cooperating with Grace.
- The more we can control the passions and act with virtue the greater the force of the Holy Spirit
Life of Repentance

- Church provides us with many “tools” to aid us along our path to Salvation.
- Prayer and Fasting
- Repentance and Holy Confession
- Worship and Holy Communion
- Praying with Icons
- Reading the Bible & Church Fathers
- Ordering our Life
- Putting others first.
Orthodox Life

Creation

Fall

Awaken

Baptism

Grace

Synergy

Will

Worship & Communion

Repentance

Ascetic Discipline

The Church

Incarnation

Resurrection

Love God

Love neighbor

Virtuous Life

Death & Final Judgment

Prayer

Fasting

Study

Meditation

Orthodox Life

Theosis