

Courage
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I want to go back again and touch into why we do this practice. Although I have given you many studies that prove it is good for all kinds of physical and mental improvements, the real reason we do it, is because we have more fun in our lives. This isn't a yuck yuck kind of fun but we start to notice that our lives seem to go better, there's a flow, an ease to our lives when our minds are more fresh, open and present. I've said that's the point of mindfulness, presence is inherently more fun, presence makes time good. We have a good time in life verses a constant struggle and war.

If you look back on a day, sometimes it's apparent we're struggling all day, a sort of combat with our world, which we hope to win. What we win is questionable, but there's an edge of protection of me, and what I want going on constantly. So it feels great to declare peace. The body/mind likes peace.

If you really analyze what's happening with those moments when we're happy, full of life, there's two qualities there. One, you're present, discursiveness isn't analyzing, jockeying and two, your heart is open. Think as big as when you come home from deployment to as small as playing catch with your dog. The noise in the head is diminished and there's a warmth to your heart. The mind/body presence is supercharged by heart felt presence.

These two aspects of opening are an inherent training in what makes a Marine. It takes the training to be present and the courage to be awake. I want to talk about that courage to be awake as it is a core value of the Marine. Again the spiritual warrior, as one who is brave, and the Marine Corp have the same values. Today, I would like to talk about a core value of the Marines and of the warrior altogether.

I believe a case can be made that the Marines have the most respected brand in the world: the few, the proud, the Marines. It's a deserved and earned reputation. The Marines have a storied history of courage. It's an unparalleled lineage of service and bravery. As a citizen I want again to thank you.

I went on the official web page of the Marines and found this definition for courage: "The heart of our Core Values is the mental, moral and physical strength ingrained in Marines that sees them through the challenges of combat and the mastery of fear". I'd like to talk about that courage which it takes to face fear and to be a master of fear.

The actual histological roots of the word courage is old French and means to have heart, inner most feelings. In other words, to have courage is to be aware of our feelings, and of our fear. Trungpa Rinpoche once said that the key to warriorship is not being afraid of who we are. There is some ubiquitous sense that our worlds are overwhelming, and because we're juggling so many balls that the house of cards may collapse. There's always fear of death in the background or in combat situations immediately present. More than that there's this highly complicated picture of how do I get food, shelter and some rack time for myself, my family, my tribe, and my country.

I've associated courage with curiosity and the willingness to dig deeper into our lives, our fears, and to actually look at our minds, our feelings. Did I say the "f" word, the 'F' bomb: feelings. There may be a

myth that having feelings is a sign of weakness. And there may be times, when in the middle of the hunt or the middle of combat, that how do you feel about this is quite absurd and counter productive to the mission.

And it's also true that the code of courage in the Marine's values is the mental, moral mastery of fear. So we need to know fear to defeat it. Again as Sun Tsu said 'know thyself and the enemy, one hundred battles one hundred victories'.

What we are doing with mindfulness is allowing ourselves to know ourselves. We are allowing a profound relationship with something that has been largely ignored in our culture, our interior landscape. What really makes meditation so hard? We're having to let go of our stories, our hurts and history.

Gary Zukav, author and Green Beret captain, said he rather go on a combat mission in the forest of Viet Nam than sit with himself in meditation. It is because we are afraid of being with ourselves. That's a stunning realization. And I've said mindfulness is like an 'e' tool, a shovel to dig yourself out of this fear. I've also said meditation is sometimes called mind protection, because we start to not treat ourselves so harshly. The first step is not to judge but to extend ourselves some gentleness and some kindness. We're protecting ourselves from ourselves, calling a truce on all the judgements that we do in a day, at least starting to become aware of the noise, the fear and smile at it.

In an aside, this may sound philosophical or conceptual because the first part of mind training is for the body to get used to stillness. So let's talk about that. Our culture is always on the move. We cover a lot of our courage up by nervously keeping ourselves busy. Now we can not only fidget and doodle and have our legs bouncing up and down, we can distract ourselves completely and from being heart felt with our phones and entertainment devices.

There was a famous saint from Tibet called Padmasambhava who lived 1,000 years ago and a prediction is assigned him. He predicated that in the future we would develop devices that would allow us to be distracted, from appreciation of the present, our whole lives, from cradle to grave, from morning to night. I was recently at the North Shore and an absolutely beautiful sunset was taking place. There was a foursome of these 2 beautiful couples and all 4 of the group was glued to their phone, not at all appreciating this amazing Hawaiian sunset.

I've talked about physical discomfort and that this does almost entirely go away. It's a bit of a suck it up. You know you're sitting there in good posture quite sure you're going to explode with the pain in your shoulders or knees. Then a good sexual thought comes up, or perhaps a great emotional upheaval and we don't feel our body. Interesting, yeah?

I've said there absolutely is a middle ground of when it's smart to move a little on the cushion. It's not going to get you a medal to hurt yourself. It's you inside that has to push a little and notice how much is the physical pain thought. You will get used to this posture of awake. I've called it the hardest yogic posture there is. And it's been done for thousands of years by millions of people. The beginning is rough, no question. There will be a time you search for physical discomfort to distract you from an emotional diatribe.

There's a quality of this one shovel of effort at a time. My job as a drill instructor is to encourage you to have heart that the only way out is in. Courage again. The gift from even a modicum of mastery of this technique is a gift of kindness to yourself and profound appreciation of your world, and your life.

Have the courage to be with ourselves. Have the courage to not be afraid of ourselves. The first level is this basic tool of presence. Further, a second courage develops which is the courage to be kind to ourselves. We're committing to not being reactive to our emotional stories, and to not cause harm to self and others. This is a sharpening of the shovel so to speak into a sword. Carlos said the shovel could be used like a weapon or a sword. The metaphor here is you start to be able to sort out when you are not being kind, when you are making trouble to yourself and others. You have the ability to let go of thoughts that cause harm to self and others. This development of heart, or of courage is a direct outcome of the gentleness and humor needed to cut our discursive thought.

We can be kind to ourselves and we can know when we dig our holes of self judgement and mental painful habitual patterns. We can objectively start to see our entrapment and when there's kindness, courage to say no to a story line. It may be story lines of guilt, of shame, and of trauma. We have the courage to host the totality of our experience.

Hosting is in some ways a development of courage. We host our emotional nightmares, we host our emotional pains, our traumas, and our wounds. We become such good friends with ourselves, and so unafraid to look at how we cause harm to ourselves. Like a Mother hosting us in this world, we extend the courage to host our pains. At first just to be with our pains and to hold them.

There's a beautiful quote from Shambhala Training that has to do with this, 'that fearful mind should be put in the cradled of loving kindness'. The mind protection gives us an acuity to see wounds, to analyze where we're wrong, rascals and when we need to let go of beating ourselves up. My teacher said this form of courage wasn't mammy bummy but likens it to milk with Tabasco in it. The milk is soothing but the Tabasco is acknowledgment of our foibles and weaknesses, and then the courage to forgive, resolve and move on. This takes heart and courage.

The last aspect of courage I wish to speak of is the courage to be awake. Semper Fi -always faithful. You're always loyal, faithful to God, Country, the Corps and Family. You train in being heartfelt and awake. Always faithful, always loyal to heartfelt courage, and to presence. Again, this is a development of the practice. The stepping stone is the wind of delight. At first it's the faintest breeze of letting go into appreciation. This freshness comes from the resting of your spirit, your mind in your heart, again courage to have heart. You literally go to your heart to live rather than your head. Mushashi said 'Perceive that which can not be seen with the eye.' It takes a profound discipline to live this freely. It's the space of the nobly born. It's the realization of sacred world. It's the synthesis of the Marine's code of courage, honor and commitment.