

Fear and Fearlessness.
Kaneohe Marine Corp Base
Dr. Dean M. Nelson

March 26, 2016

We have been talking about courage as apart of the training of mindfulness, presence. And we defined courage as not a simple heroic act but the moment to moment bravery that it takes to be heartfelt present in our worlds. That kind of presence is healing in the sense we actually stop the kind of neck up mental worry and subtle war that permeates our lives. The struggle we keep alive to protect our version of ourselves and our worlds.

We went to the marine's values, the code that a Marine lives by and in it is a phrase about courage and the mastery of fear. Today I'd like to talk about fear and fearlessness in the context of meditation and healing, in the context of the warrior's code. In Sacred Path of the Warrior, the main reference book for this class, Trungpa Rinpoche makes a bold statement. He says the essence of cowardice is is not acknowledging the reality of fear. I was raised with that kind of tough guy attitude and I suppose on some level that bravado is good and on some level it looks brittle and as insecurity.

This made we reflect about a talk Trungpa Rinpoche gave once where virtually the entire talk was him going over and over the statement: 'You don't need to be afraid of who you are.' I have to admit it was one of those 'dah' moments fro me asI didn't really get what he was saying. OK, we don't need to be afraid of who we are. Huh?

About 10 years later, I was on a solitary mountain retreat and I realized I was frightened all the time. I was frightened to go outside and pee, I was frightened about my very existence, that was the reason for all that talking inside my head. I was frightened. I was scared of myself, scared of aloneness, scared of death, frightened about life. I flashed to the talk Trungpa Rinpoche had given and finally got what he was saying. Today I'd like to talk about the work and kindness and courage it takes to not be afraid of ourselves.

The warrior's mastery of fear is to first really feel or analyze what we're afraid of. We talked about meditation as an e-tool as a shovel, as a sword and now we polish this simple shovel and use it as a mirror. We face our fear. The most profound one that pops up is the fear of death which seems somewhat universal ane perhaps organic. However, the Marine corp is full and heroic deeds where someone has given his or her life for another or a cause greater than self. We spoke of this bravery, transcendent of self. Today i'd like to talk about the sort of inadequacy that we can't handle the demands of our world. What is the need for all that incessant thought? Why to do need to entertain our selves with busyness and deices all day? Just to ask the question is courageous and starts the process of facing our fear.

With meditation you start to have the power to let go of thought, which means you can face thoughts. This is a literal practice when fear, which most commonly manifests as anxiety or a kind of inadequacy comes up, stop the show and actually face or bring in the fear. There can be a kind of almost nausea

that happens but you stay with that energy. It feels like leaning into a storm. This is an experience. What I think you'll find is there is an eye of the storm that is quite interesting. There's an openness that happens that has textures of tenderness, peace and heart. It's like behind the mask of anxiety is this heartfelt presence. The bravery part of the process is to stay with that presence. Again it is the experience of courage, you stay with a heartfelt presence.

Back to the You don't need to be afraid of who you are slogan. If you stay with that courageous openness you find there's a friendliness to self that's needed. I think I told you about the time I first did an all day sit and I came up sweating and angry that if that was the way to enlightenment I wanted nothing to do with it. Then I stopped because in a moment I really the guy I was so scared to be with, the person I was trying to run from was me. And sitting or not sitting that was the guy I had to deal with the rest of my life. I wasn't comfortable with myself. The way out is in.

this extension of comfort with self is called maitri in Sanskrit. One teacher I had defined it as unconditional kindness to self. Even the thought of unconditional friendliness to myself is not kosher, it's not Midwestern, one has to be constantly vigilant and nasty to oneself, it was kind of unwritten law. Over the years of being a coach and a mediation instructor I would say this is the hardest program I have seen in our worlds. I'm afraid it maybe a remnant of original sin but it's epidemic, we're certain somehow that we're bad, unworthy. If we examine much of our self talk, much of it is that we're suspicious characters, we don't measure up to some crazy making standard.

And it seems to be our Western culture. I've read the Dalai Lama's writing about how shocking this was for him to get, that we as westerners thought bad of ourselves, our lives. He said certainly you don't want bad things to happen to yourself, you wish yourself well and the answer is shocking-not so much. That is why this piece of maitri is such a pivotal piece in our path. When some fundamental shift happens about our goodness, the path becomes ever so much easier, so much more joyous.

How does one be friendly to oneself? I'd like to talk about 3 levels, outer, inner and secret teachings on how we can allow maitri to seep into our beings.

The first, the outer way is of course the sitting practice of meditation. Every time we interrupt a thought we're interrupting a fear on some level. Most of our discursiveness is covering that fact that we have little or no control in our lives and if that isn't insulting enough then we die. Even that we don't get to control. So every time we say 'thinking' or let go of our thinking with a smile, we allow a puff of unadulterated uncontrollable fresh air into our system. We relax in the not knowing. Pema says it well, we start getting comfortable with uncertainty.

We start to dismantle the edifice of uptightness, of control, of permanence, of trying to make permanence out of impermanence. That is a brave step towards friendliness to self, we can relax in our worlds, we can in fact cheer up. More and more I've been advocating that the third aspect of meditation practice is this humor or lightness to ourselves. It's allowing some head shake at how crazy we are, how we've tied ourselves into knots. It's a laugh or cry situation and it's more beneficial to laugh. The outer way to start this friendship, unconditional friendship with ourselves is the sitting practice. We practice this kindness of fresh air of lightness to ourselves. We do not need to be afraid of who we are.

Trungpa wrote a beautiful line about sitting meditation from the Shambhala teachings: "that fearful mind should be put in the cradle of loving kindness". That is what we're doing with sitting meditations putting that fearful mind in the cradle of loving kindness. We're starting to learn to be kind

to self. I

The inner practice is a sort of neutral, frank self assessment, like examining a diamond in the rough or a big golden nugget not formed into an ornament. The inner process is based on the outer humor and non judgment. Although your not harshly judging it's not like all of our actions and thoughts get a pass. There's a self examination or feeling ourselves in learning kindness. We know more than any when we're not gallant and rascals. We can use the shovel now as a mirror and appraise ourselves. We can also not make such a big deal that we are a bit self centered and that doesn't always work so well. Again warrior's work but with the development of humor and forgiveness, gentleness to self it's all workable. We're not condemned.

We can feel ourselves and our motives. We don't let ourselves of the hook and we don't beat ourselves up for entertainment.

In sweeping terms we know when we are causing harm to ourselves and others, the letting go of the story lines in mediation practice sharpens our acuity for our actions and self talk. There's a mind training slogan that really helps me here, ' Of the 2 judges hold the principle one.' No one knows yourself like yourself-you've been there for the whole gig. So you can know most of the time when you're trying to pull a fast one and when your motivation was pretty clean. This builds a confidence and more letting go. You can say, I was being a rascal and confess, make amends and commit to do better. It's a process of the unconditional friendliness that you don't let yourself hurt yourself and others. You also don't let yourself stab yourself over and over with the hook. A frank assessment of what was going on here really helps and then no secondary torture sessions.

Mastery of fear is not about suppression of fear, it's about facing it and further than that to see the space behind the mask of fear. Mediation practice starts to dismantle the distractions that hide fear. We do not need to be afraid of who we are.

In other words once you've decide the universe is not out to burn you to hell but is good and kind and gracious the game is over. Your built from good stuff so how bad can you be? Your desrvant of unconditional friendly's to yourself because your built from wisdom and compassion. It's the secret of secrets. The path is in the having no doubt about your own goodness. That the secret aspect of unconditional friendliness.

Being redundant maitri or metta practice is probably the biggest surge of connection to the path and the teachings. Because you can be kind to yourself your view of other changes. You see how we're all working so hard and how much fundamental fear, anxiety we live in. The softening allows for even more joy and relaxation.

Maitri, self kindness, leads to compassion to self and other which leads to profound realization of inter connectedness which leads to openness which leads to ease and joy which leads to wisdom and to the 4 limitless ones of love, compassion, joy and equanimity.