

Bravery  
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Kaneohe Marine Corp Base  
lightly edited  
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In a brief review, we have talked about how meditation is a tool to train your mind from wild and crazy thoughts. In a nut shell, it is how to train in being present and having situational awareness. It is a mind training. We talked about how we all know how physical training worked and benefited us. If we want to have bigger biceps or run a marathon we were familiar with the concept of training. We start slow and easy.

We have already spoke that we all admit there's an aspect of craziness in all of us. That is, if anybody could see inside our heads or if there was a thought bubble displaying our self talk throughout the day, we might be seen as crazy. Actually, this is a good starting point, we're somewhat driving ourselves crazy and anxious. Another definition of meditation is mind protection, a way to protect one's mind from hurtful thoughts and from hurting others. You armor yourself with mindfulness. You start to have space and non-reaction time around your thoughts. You become at choice rather than at reaction. We have probably noticed at times that our emotions can go from 0-60 in a millisecond, mindfulness gives you the millisecond to interrupt the avalanche. I have called this the millisecond that changes the world.

In the beginning of training, even physically, the process of getting in shape is a lot of work. It's work, it's takes exertion. Often, there's the upside of seeing some small changes, being a little buff, feeling better, looking better, being able to participant in more activities, having more strength and endurance. You can count on your body. All these metaphors work with mind training as well. At first facing the wildness of our minds is difficult. We think we're unique in how loud our habitual discursiveness is. In fact, we all will say I can't do it and that's where sheer discipline and commitment come into play. It is like digging out of a hole, there is only one way out. I've said the way out of our psychology pain is by going into it. The way out is in.

I've talked about meditation as the process of making friends with ourselves. In all honesty, who do we think we're going to spend our lives with? Is there any escaping yourself? There is a commitment to yourself that you might as well enjoy this guy or gal, what she thinks about, how gracious or not she /he is to her world. You might as well make the internal landscape friendly, uplifted, and kind.

This is all a kind of pep talk because the reality of sitting is that it is hard and not supported by our culture, yet. But here I am at a military base talking about mind training and kindness to self. Fairly amazing situation. I've thought for years that the military is a bell weather of sociological and cultural change. The military cares about the job getting done which is protecting our freedom and our country.

The military at first had problems with segregation, like the culture at large, but also provided opportunity for segregated regiments, that is, the Japanese 442 and the black pilots, and the Tuskegee squadron. Woman have also had an increasing role in the military and have been given opportunities not based on sex. I'm not saying perfection likely on any of these fronts, but the military has often lead social change. The armed service has a job that's bigger than prejudice. They can't afford ignorance.

Perhaps the military will be the tipping point from our culture in terms of mindfulness of being curious about our internal war. Perhaps mind training will be the cutting edge that promotes peace in the world.

The vocabulary that one would use to describe military trainings are the very same concepts and words needed to train in spiritual life. Bravery, focus, situational awareness, loyalty, patience, mastery of self, commitment, and will. These words are applicable to the spiritual warrior and the military warrior. They are like the samurai's code of ethics.

Also, as I've said, my teacher framed the process of mind training and mind taming as warrior's work. The same training that makes a great soldier and army are the same disciplines that it takes to strengthen your mind. It take discipline to make the time, discipline to do the technique and the discipline to be curious about your own lives. Discipline, exertion, and curiosity are important. It's your life. It's your mind so be curious about what makes you happy and how you get in life's predicaments.

You see in the end, the whole process is about you wanting to be happy. The greatest philosophers from Aristotle to Plato to the Dalai Lama have said the purpose of life is to pursue genuine happiness. Happiness is a big subject. Some guy somewhere may think a war will make him happy and solve his poverty. Hitler thought he would get happy this way and convinced a population to follow that. Virtually everything we do in a day leads back to some desire for us to get happier.

One ingredient I have seen is that happiness is dependent on presence. You can't be happy when you're not present. Meditation works because when you are more present, here in your life, you get happier, flat out. Your brain recognizes presence and peace and having a large, relaxed view in life as a fun way to be. I'm asking to start noticing small victories, small place where you changed a behavior, laughed instead of reacting, felt instead of hiding. It's a fun process to wake up, but it not with out exertion. It's similar to working out, your biceps get bigger, you lose weight, etc. Here you are more patient, faster to smile, more tolerant, please notice and bank these small victories or gains.

I was at Waimea Bay this weekend and read the memorial to Eddie Akau, the fabled lifeguard who gave his life to his ship mates. The world famous surf contest 'the Eddie' is of course named after him. There was a biblical quote on the memorial to him from the Bible: St John's 15:13: Greater love have no man than this; to lay down ones life for one's friend.

It made me once again want to thank you as Marines for your service and sacrifice. You all have signed up to possibly make that kind of ultimate sacrifice for America, for myself and my family. One does not get to live in Hawaii without your presence.

This is by way of introduction, as today I would like to talk about bravery. What do you think some aspect of bravery is?

It seems one definition is that we're willing to do something, an act, that is not logical from a self preservation point of view. The classic is the charging into the machine gun nest to save others or paddling to try to get help from a sinking ship. It's fascinating that we have this inherent quality. Some program takes over that's larger than saving your own okele. It looks a lot like love and altruism to me. You love your colleges, your buddies. We had the delight of being involved in a squadron before and after they were deployed to Afghanistan. The closeness of this group was amazing. They were quite disparate people, different ages, backgrounds and they had found a way to appreciate and support each other in a stunning way.

So there's this kind of heroic act that we see in war and other bizarre situations. A guy jumping in front of an approaching train to save somebody they don't know. That is outer bravery which is the physical action that defies self preservation.

Then there's an inner bravery of living without our story line, the bravery and curiosity of facing our anxiety. Every time you say thinking in meditation, you are being brave because you are going against a habitual pattern of how you define yourself and your world. Meditation is this bravery of facing yourself, your fears, You don't just give in to fear, anger, and anxiety. This takes some bravery.

I just coached a surgery nurse who is having a hard time. She was a very high powered, self described 'A' type person whose life came to a screeching halt because of retirement. She fell apart without an outside definition of herself. She had never experienced space. She only knew do,do, do, do, doo doo. She had gone through a heart surgery herself where they break open your thoracic cavity, She said as a nurse it was known as the most painful surgery of all surgeries, yet she said she rather go through that surgery again than spend time with herself. Big time bravery! Gary Zhukov, a retired Green Beret Captain, said he rather do a jungle foray than do sitting practice, it's hard.

I've called this incessant thinking our baby sitter. It's like a constant need to tell ourselves that we're Ok. It's like we're one step removed from living life, because we're listening more to the commentary. You don't play the game, you listen to a description of the game and think it's the game. It is tremendous bravery to be with yourself. This is inner bravery that also transcends self preservation.

The secret aspect of bravery has to do with the invitation to actually step into fear and to use fear as the stepping stone to fearlessness. I will talk more about this but it's a little like when James Kirk from Star Trek says, 'Space the final frontier.' It's really unmasking what the fear is that drives our lives so much and leaning in to and through the fear into fearlessness. It's the dismantling of our illusion of separation altogether.

So three aspects of bravery outer, illogical acts that are beyond self preservation. The outer physical act, the inner bravery of willingness to face our own stories and babysitter and finally the bravery of really facing fear. There all are a sort of a death, a death of our solidity altogether. There all are somewhat illogical and transcendent of self preservation. They also seem to be inherent to our species.