

Courage

This morning I want to talk about Practice in Everyday life. For some time we have been studying Bodhidharma who also points the way by giving us instruction. At times it may seem theoretical so I thought I would bring it back down to a more concrete level, a more familiar ground.

All of us are acquainted with the virtues, faith, hope and charity. Each of these has a Buddhist corollary. For example, to express faith, we chant, 'Faith in Mind'. Charity is seeing giver and receiver as one with the gift. There is one virtue that also seems fundamental to our practice, that is "Courage" - "Ying".

The Chinese character for courage is constructed of an ideogram that contains the radical for "grass". Below is a person with arms spread wide to signify "adult, standing alone in a wide open space, thick with grass. A wilderness signifies courage and heroism for he/she does not fear this place where wild animals roam. In Chinese thought the hero courageously endures nature's hardships by harmonizing with his environment as did the sage-kings of China, who in the mythical golden age were tested in the forests and on mountains, among lions and through storms.

Courage is not the absence of fear or desire, but the strength to conquer them. The images are clear and our everyday language supports this understanding. We speak of the "jungle" out there, outside our home. There's a battlefield at work, with warrooms to harness and direct resources. All of these images present us with a challenge to meet head on.

Even without these heavyweight images looking at our life from a Buddhist perspective we can see while sitting in zazen or being upright in our lives, courage is needed. How? Why's that? We need courage not to be ourselves. By this I mean when we are in a state of confusion or locked in habitual ways of thinking, speaking, reacting, we suffer because of our conditioned points of view. In the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha Shakyamuni spoke of the entangled reed mat. We can't see the pattern. Preferences, judging mind, are basically our unconscious tendencies clouding our vision.

We need to face the confusion of modern living, to find our way. We must face fear, our anxiety. When we sit zazen, we face ourselves.

Recently, because of rivalry at the office an award for outstanding effort was snatched away from the deserving team like a thief in the night. This was very disturbing to the nominating person. In sinking deep into the situation what came up was that it's not about winning or losing, about fixing a situation and making it right, not about getting rid of feelings or even understanding it. It just is. Herein lives the courage not to be oneself. To recognize where your mind wanders and gets caught, and then, let go.

Practice Instruction

"Sit Empty of Worldly Anxiety"¹

If you truly appreciate a single thread your eye can suitably meet the world and its changes. Seeing clearly, do not be fooled, and the ten thousand situations cannot shroud you. Moonlight falls on the

¹Cultivating the Empty Field, Zen Master Hongzhi, trans. by Taigen Dan Leighton with Yi Wu p.13

water; wind blows over the pines. Light and shadow do not confuse us; sounds or voices do not block us. The whistling wind can resonate pervading without impediment through the various structures. Flowing along with things, harmonizing without deviation, thoroughly abandoning webs of dust, still one does not yet arrive in the original home. Put to rest the remnants of your conditioning. Sit empty of worldly anxiety, silent and bright, clear and illuminating, blank and accepting, far-reaching and responsive. Without encountering external dusts, fulfilled in your own spirit, arrive at this field and immediately recognize your ancestors.”

Impermanence – Dogen

To what shall
I liken the world?
Moonlight, reflected
In dewdrops,
Shaken from a crane' bill. ²

²The Zen Poetry of Dogen, Stephen Heine, p.118