

# THE PULSE OF SPIRIT



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## WHAT COURAGE LOOKS LIKE

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Courage is not a lack of fear. It's a mistake to think that one day we'll be courageous because we do not feel fear. Courage is about eating our fear—not ignoring it. Real courage is thinking wisely and thoroughly about the risks that are present in our life, and then acting with wisdom and strength and passion.

Maya Angelou says this about courage:

*Courage is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage.*

To embody all the virtue within us, we have to act, we have to have courage. It is the difference between an un-lived life and a fulfilled life.

Recently, Dr. Jane Anetrini and I led a *Life Destiny Immersion* workshop. It was a time for people to explore the underlying factors that are present in their life and to free themselves from what may have been holding them back. Oftentimes, what holds a person back is a past experience that they have interpreted as failure. Past failure, as a person experiences it, can lead to disillusionment. It can lead to a great unhooking of the passion of the heart from the person's ability to take action in life. And so to live a courageous life, a person has to find a way of transforming what they have seen as failure into learning.

People experience failure relative to all kinds of things: projects, relationships and jobs, to name a few. Whatever has been interpreted as failure in a person's life is an opportunity to

learn. Along with that experience of failure may come something else, which is grief. So, related to whatever it is, whether it is a relationship or a project or a job or a place where you have lived, there can be grief about things that have not gone as you hoped they would go. And undealt with, that grief can paralyze a person. It can stand in the way of their courage.

In the *Life Destiny Immersion* workshop, we were invited to come up with a new mantra for our life. In considering these things, here was one of mine: “My grief is transformed.” To be truly courageous we not only have to eat our own fear, we have to eat our own grief. We find out that when we do face our grief, it is transformed through us into something else. It is transformed into learning. It is transformed into courage. It is transformed into the power of love.

Courageous people have faced their own failure and, with that, their own grief. Here is a list of people who experienced what they could well have accepted as failure, but who turned it into learning and then courage.

*Henry Ford had five business failures that left him broke before inventing the Model T.*

*Oprah Winfrey was fired from her job as a reporter and told she was unfit for television.*

*Winston Churchill suffered devastating military defeat and failed in every election for public office until he was elected prime minister at age 62 and led England through the Battle of Britain.*

*Albert Einstein did not speak until he was four and did not read until he was seven and he was expelled from school. His application to the Zurich Polytechnic Institute was rejected.*

*Isaac Newton did poorly in school and failed at running his family’s farm before discovering gravity.*

*Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor because “he lacked imagination and had no good ideas.” He had several businesses that ended in bankruptcy.*

I’ll add somebody else to the list: Mother Teresa, who served unfailingly for decades in Calcutta. And when she died, they found some of her journals, and the world was shocked to find out that she had times of profound doubt about her relationship to God. And yet that did not stop her. She transformed those doubts into her profound service to humanity.

When we feel all alone, it can be easy to allow what we interpret as failure to bring us to a place of disillusionment. But even in our solitude, we are not alone. We are in the presence of our ancestors and in the presence of the saints of the ages, whether those saints are acknowledged by any human religious institution or not. We are in the presence of stars, in the

presence of Being, with that surround cheering us on. So who are we to either rest on our laurels or rest on our failures?

True courage is not an act of martyrdom, or some last stand. It is not a self-destructive act to make a show of something. True courage is the act of someone who is playing to win, playing not only for their own personal success or their own personal fulfillment, but playing for the fulfillment and the success of all who are cheering them on, knowing that what I do and what you do is fulfilling the hopes and dreams and the possibility of something that is far larger than you, and far larger than me, and even far larger than all of us together.

Think about this solar system in which we live. As far as we know, there is no other place that has the preciousness of life as this place does. In no other place are there human beings, flesh-and-blood embodiments of the reality of Being, the reality of the divine spark that is present through all the cosmos. The reality of the Creator of All is here in flesh and blood through us. There is no other place in the solar system where that is happening.

Now that we are able to take photos from space that look back at this jewel of a planet, this blue-green orb spinning in space, the knowing that there is something altogether uncommon and altogether precious overtakes us. And it is not hard to imagine that the stars are witness to what is happening here. They do not have the opportunity we have, of being flesh-and-blood human beings and of creating something so incredibly luscious, so incredibly beautiful: a living embodiment of the Divine, not only through us as human beings but in all the life-forms of this planet. Even as it is, with the impact of human civilization, it is so beautiful and so rich, even though in many ways we cannot be proud of our contribution to the health of the planet. How much more beautiful it could become; how much more beautiful we could become as human beings.

Try this on for yourself. It is a declaration of being from Clive Larsen in North Reddish, England.

*I am a star. We are stars.*

*I am a sun. We are suns.*

On the inside, we are already a star—a being of radiant love and light. We are a sun. As we accept that this is our nature, we are also becoming a realized embodiment of that on the outside. This takes courage. It takes courage to be the beauty of who you are, to be spectacular. It is our destiny to be spectacular, to be wondrous on the outside. It takes courage and passion to let it show. It takes transforming our grief into love.

So if there is grief present in some hidden corner of your life, it is possible that that grief is a weight that is holding you back, like a stone you are carrying around that is keeping you from being the star who you are, from becoming that in the living of your life. How could your life be different if you took that stone of grief and transformed it into love? And then, with that love, set about to fulfill your life in the sight of stars?

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