

Sunday, February 3, 2008

Persuading in the moment.

Yin Yang From time to time, I blog about persuading and battling in the moment, with fearlessness, calm, absence of anger, and compassion for everyone including opponents. Samples of such blogposts are here, here, here, and here. When successful with this approach, my opponents are less likely to stiffen up to be ready to defend against an attack by me, and are more likely to be open to my words and off guard to the timing, direction, and form of my attacks. It is part of the ironic power and strength of softness that t'ai chi master Cheng Man Ch'ing repeatedly addressed. Following are some inspirations that I have internalized to assist in reaching greater calmness, fearlessness, and non-anger in going to battle, no matter how tough the approaching battle. One inspiration is this passage from Zen in Martial Arts: The Present Moment: "A Japanese warrior was captured by his enemies and thrown into prison. That night he was unable to sleep because he feared that the next day he would be interrogated, tortured, and executed. Then the words of his Zen master came to him, 'Tomorrow is not real. It is an illusion. The only reality is now.' Heeding these words, the warrior became peaceful and fell asleep." Similarly, Zoketsu Norman Fischer said: "In Buddhist funeral services we always say, in true reality there is no coming no going no increase no decrease no birth and no death. This is a deep expression of our gratitude for existence as it is, our knowing that life in order to be life is always full of death, and death, in order to be death, is always full of life." Concerning this concept, Tibetan studies professor Ringu Tulku (see here, too) writes that the concept "that all phenomena are devoid of coming and going ... means that an enlightened bodhisattva sees the truth, the way things are. This is seeing directly without adding any concept or philosophy. Within this clear vision there is not the slightest doubt about anything, so there is no need for clinging or running away. A realized bodhisattva has no dualistic view. Within this sheer and naked seeing, spontaneous compassion arises. Once we no longer feel compelled to cling to ourselves and fixate on our own problems all the time, we can look around and see everything clearly. We can perceive others' lives and understand how and why they experience their problems. Although we see that others are suffering greatly, we know that their suffering is almost needless. They are not doomed to be in pain, because their suffering just comes from a wrong way of seeing and reacting. If they could see how things truly are, they would not suffer anymore. This is the understanding of an enlightened being." Ringu Tulku, *Daring Steps Toward Fearlessness: The Three Vehicles of Buddhism* at 58 (Snow Lion Publications, 2005). Being heavily influenced by Buddhism, but not being a Buddhist myself, it is a big concept for me to swallow that we can all transcend suffering by becoming enlightened. One way for me to proceed in this direction is to know that people can harm others physically, but cannot harm their souls. Another way is to move away from my clinging to my body and my obsession with whether my mortal death will bring an eternal void with no awareness or consciousness by me. One way for me to do this is to try to be less self-centered about hanging onto my own life. Another approach is to recognize that if I have no awareness or conscience after I die, I will have no worries about my death at that point. Thich Nhat Hanh puts it well as follows: "Birth and death are only doors through which we pass, Sacred thresholds on our journey, Birth and death are a game of hide and seek" Thich Nhat Hanh, *Chanting and Recitation from Plum Village*. Page 188. Finally, another inspiration on this path is less profound, or is it? One day in the Fairfax County Bar Association lawyers' lounge, I overheard -- as much as I tried not to hear -- a very calm colleague speaking by phone to a client who was very late to his court date, which possibly was a jury trial after an appeal from a District Court bench trial. This lawyer at first sounded wimpy, as he asked his client what he should tell the judge, as the client apparently regaled the lawyer with his tale of being stuck in Washington, D.C., with another obligation; I had visions of my own likely reaction, which was to tell my client that he was cruising for a bruising from the judge if he took such a lax attitude about arriving late to court. However, the lawyer's approach kept personal responsibility in his client's hands, kept the lawyer calm (and, thus, more powerful), and kept open the lawyer's and client's ability to continue working together as a team. This lawyer was practicing t'ai chi perhaps without even knowing it. Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in Persuasion at 19:00