

## CHAPTER 15 COMPANIONS IN ACTION AND NON ACTION

### TROUBADOUR'S SONG

Let me draw you in this tension of our bodies,  
in this tension of our minds  
to the focus of the heart space,  
to the place beyond all sorrow,  
to the immense release of spirit  
in the power of this moment, letting go.

Let us play like the harpist  
plays the harp, O the music,  
like the archer pulls the string  
across the heart, O the singing.  
Let us fly with compassion  
and forgiveness. Let us share  
in this moment what few dare,  
O the joy, true companions.

Shall we draw with true courage  
from the waters of the ever  
watching stillness, brother warriors  
with a thirst for something deeper,  
with a thirst for something richer,  
with a thirst for this moment.  
Let me play you like the harpist  
plays the harp, O the music.  
Draw me like the archer draws  
the string across the heart.  
Let us fly like the arrow  
toward the center,  
toward the healing,  
toward the power  
in this moment,  
if we dare.<sup>i</sup>

## THE ARGUMENT

For many years two old men lived together simply. The two abbas were often silent and spoke frequently only in smiles and gestures. One day one of them broke that silence, "Let's be like other men for a day. Let's talk, let's laugh, let's argue."

The other broke into a loud laugh, "After all these years you want to start that? Well, let it be so." Throughout the day they told each other jokes and stories. They spoke of the way they each experienced the heat in the day, the stars at night, the smell of the desert after rain. They shared the heart secrets God had whispered to them, and then they became quiet again.

After a space of time as the night was approaching, the first one said, "This was a wonderful day. Thank you. But we never did argue about anything."

His companion said, "I don't know what to do about that. What's to quarrel about?"

The other got up quickly, grabbed an old brick, set it down in front of his companion and proclaimed, "This is mine!"

His companion simply stared at him like he was crazy. So raising his eyebrows a bit he gestured with his hands at his companion and then at the brick.

"Ah, I see. No, this brick is mine."

The other smiled, "NO. NO, it's mine and always has been mine!"

"Well, if it is yours, then take it. It's getting late. Let's have a good night's sleep."

"You're right. This was a wonderful day - laughing, talking, arguing. Thank you."

And so, they left the old brick, walked the short distance to their huts, and went to bed like so many other humans - after a tiring argument.<sup>ii</sup>

## COMPANIONS IN ACTION AND NON-ACTION

The primary calling of the people on the path is presence. Presence springs out of the great silence. If we do not spend our time in the timeless great silence we have no presence to bring.

When we do our own homework we make the violent pilgrimage into our own broken heart, present to what is outcast or pariah, broken, frail, great, joyful, limited or limitless within ourselves. We do not bring judgment, but the qualities of mercy and compassion. We are not violent with our frailties or boastful of strengths. What is there that is not gift?

Acknowledging our addictions and our freedom, illusions, delusions and inspirations, the ten thousand voices in the inner chambers and the silence of the innermost sanctuary, we become companions of what is rich and poor,

acceptable and outcast within us. In that fierce embrace the false ego is crushed and something very new and very beautiful is born. We are capable of being present to self and others in very humble ways.

People of the path do not justify themselves by doing 'good deeds' on other people, avoiding at all costs perpetrating the delusions of victimhood or power and control. Any service to others that gives the false impression that there is some place to go, somebody to become is avoided. Our spirituality is one of simplicity and presence. We do not add. We subtract.

We must be aware of this particularly with regard to subtle ideas of spiritual advancement. We practice the presence of silence and awareness so as to avoid this delusion. For this reason the guidelines for gatherings in this book have rotating flexible facilitation. The Spirit of Wisdom guides us, not the intellect or charisma of a leader. Of course there are leadership roles within the body of companions. These alternate to avoid this very human predicament.

When we think we are becoming something better than we were, we are in danger. We are looking at achieving. Achieving implies a spiritual hierarchy - a huge illusion - as if spirituality were a position or commodity to get, an earned possession. This is simply another forgetfulness that leads to greater delusions. The false ego will run with this form of ambition, which is as poisonous as the ambition for power or the ambition to amass possessions.

Spiritual ambition is as ego driven as any other ambition. Its goal oriented drive assists the ego in establishing a sense of being important, valuable, respected, a mover, shaker, wise one, a person of power, in other words, it establishes the ego in a sense of otherness - an inflation of specialness. "I have something to bring, something to attain." Here the emphasis is on "I." The false ego amasses all sorts of righteous and good reasons to promote its goal driven agenda. In fact, drivenness, compulsion and attachment to results are discerning elements in differentiating true call and the attempt of the ego at an inflated escape from its powerlessness. At times like these the folk of the path must look within and about; do the practices, and sink into the great "I am" as a refuge.

The true healthy ego is a servant of the truth. It functions out of obedience to the true Self. From the day of our birth we have been infused with divine presence. Each of us is already in unspeakable union - always have been. Since the root of the word obedience is listening, time in the silence and listening with discernment to the community are the hallmarks of the healthy ego.

Most importantly companions on the path are not afraid to laugh and sing, play and be foolish, cry, weep, seek justice and compassion, be creative. We are present as outcast to outcast, openly frail and broken by our own crimes and/ or the crimes of others; drug addict to drug addict; PTSD veteran to PTSD veteran, etc., etc., the whole mix of it all. Into this mix a companion brings the quality of time spent with the timeless silence, as well as the humor and compassion by being fully present to the self. No separation. No judgment.

Companions are present at the table of the poor and the table of the rich and powerful. We make no distinction. We refuse to reject the 'other'. In political, social, legal situations we serve Holy Wisdom in solidarity with the earth and creation. We do not react but act through presence in a manner that opens possibility. How is this possible but through the grace of the eternal silence and a life lived in its presence? We acknowledge the blessedness of this 'condition of being', although this is not always easy.

The folk of the path are present at interfaith and intercultural crossroads praying with all; refusing to reject or condemn the other, or to give the one true faith answer in our own houses of worship. We also maintain practice in our own traditions. By our unwavering presence may we be a sign of mutuality and the sound of the

great hum of unity that in reality sings throughout the diverse world. May our presence confront the illusion of division. May we remember always the fierce embrace.

As companion of the path we are people of the precious present, the blessed here and now. We are people of the fierce embrace. Our presence defies the easy answer and the rigid code of the law. It releases the untold blessings of holy wisdom. It is through presence we become the blessing of God, not through our 'ideals' or perceived 'good' actions or intent. Those latter things are simply ego. Our discipline is to know nothing but this ruthless practice of presence.

### **COMING INTO THE SILENCE**

Sit quietly breathing with the silence. In that silence ask the soul of your soul to show you your spiritual ambitions. As each ambition rises into your mind's eye, bless it, show respect and compassion for it, love it. Be present to yourself. After the meditation, make a list of your spiritual ambitions. Now burn them and scatter the ashes upon the earth.

### **SOUND AND SILENCE: Holding Paradox**

In silent presence life is singing. We hear the hum of a leaf, the song of a bird, the ten thousand things come forward, a river flows, a baby cries, a raindrop touches a puddle and the water echoes out in circles. The roar of a passing train passes through you. The rippling water is smooth again. Things come and go. A salmon leaps out of the water, then returns to the deep pool. Listen to the song of the universe.

### **CONTEMPLATION**

#### **Non-Action**

Non-action does not mean being completely inert, but rather that nothing is initiated from the ego-self.<sup>iii</sup>  
~ Huai Nan Tzu

#### **Action**

While the action of assertion, man's common tendency, is preconceptual and rational, it cannot penetrate the hidden recesses of creativity. The action of assertion is viewed from the externals of intellection, while the action of nonassertion [wu wei] is activated by the inner light. The former action is limited and finite, the latter free and limitless.<sup>iv</sup> ~ Chang Chung-yuan

#### **Harmony**

Doing what they did with no ulterior motive, they accorded with dao; saying what they said with no ulterior motive, they were in communion with de; happy and easy with no sense of self-importance, what they gained was in harmony; though they had a myriad of different manifestations they yet accorded with each of these things in their various natures, their spirits resided in the tiniest tip of an autumn dawn, and yet were larger than the sum total of the cosmos.<sup>v</sup> ~Huainanzi

## A Reminder

It is worth reminding ourselves that what brings us the greatest joy and satisfaction in life are those actions we undertake out of concern for others. Indeed we can go further. For whereas the fundamental questions of human existence, such as why we are here, where we are going, and whether the universe had a beginning, have each elicited different responses in different philosophical traditions, it is self-evident that a generous heart and wholesome actions lead to greater peace.<sup>vi</sup> ~His Holiness the Dalai Lama

## Doctrine

The Doctrine is the doctrine of non-doctrine,  
The Practice is the practice of non-practice,  
The Method is meditation by non-meditation,  
And Cultivation which is cultivation by non-cultivation.

This is the Mind of non-mind, which is wu hsin,  
The Thought of non-thought, which is wu nien,  
The Action of non-action, which is wu wei,  
The Presence of the absence of volition,  
Which is Tao.<sup>vii</sup> ~ Wei Wu Wei

## The Four-Fold Way:

Show up, or choose to be present.  
Pay attention to what has heart and meaning.  
Tell the truth without blame or judgment.  
Be open to outcome, not attached to outcome.<sup>viii</sup> - Angeles Arrien

## Being With

The great paradox of Jesus' life is that he, whose words and actions are in no way influenced by human blame or praise but are completely dependent on God's will, is more "with" us than any other human being.....Indeed, Jesus is free to love us because he is not dependent on our love. And He is with you wherever you are. . . . (Koran 57:4) Commentary: . . . The companionship expressed by "with" is that of the Being and the non-being, for there is no being other than Allah. . . . If Allah - May He be exalted! - was not, by His very Essence, which is the Being of all that is, "with" the creatures, we could not attribute being to any of these creatures and they could not be perceived either by the senses, by the imagination, or by the intellect. It is their 'being with' which assures to creatures a relation with being. Better yet, it is their being itself. This 'being with' embraces all things, whether they are sublime or lowly, great or small. It is through it that they subsist. He is the pure Being by which 'that which is' is. The 'being with' of Allah consists therefore in the fact that He is with us through His essence; that is, through that which we call the divine Self (huwiyya), universally present. . . . Indications of this divine 'being with' are contained in the following verses: And He is witness of all things (Koran 34:47) And Allah, behind them, encompasses them (Koran 85:20) Wherever you turn, there is the Face of Allah. (Koran 2:116)<sup>ix</sup> ~ 'Abd al-Kader

## Divine Presence

Bidden or unbidden, God is present. –Erasmus

## The Simple Prayer

Great silence, may I hear you this day.  
Great humming sound, may I feel you this day.  
Great seed and hidden source, illuminate my heart and way today.  
May I honor myself, as a child of the unseen source.  
May I walk in deep peace and know all creation, as my deepest relations.  
May I honor all creation, as the manifestation of the unseen source.  
May I live in loving kindness and simplicity.  
May I live in holy freedom, responsibility and obedience  
To that seed and hidden source.  
Great silence, may I hear you this day.  
Great humming sound, may I feel you this day.  
Great seed and hidden source, illuminate my heart and way today.

## Story

~Tell a story of a time when you were in a situation where the elements of class, money, power were uneven or differing. How did it play out?

~Tell a story of a time of transformation in which you were – or someone else was- truly present – not seeking to change this or that. What happened for you? What happened for them?

## Blessing

May God, beyond all name and form, share with you his glory beyond measure, and make you enter into the mystery of his presence.

~Dom Bede Griffiths

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<sup>i</sup> Flaherty, Barbara. *Holy Madness*. Chanting Press. Anchorage, AK 2006

<sup>ii</sup> Flaherty, Barbara. Adaptation of story as told by Thomas Merton (trans) (1960) *The Wisdom of the Desert - sayings from the Desert Fathers of the Fourth Century*; Shambhala Pocket Editions. Boston 1994.

<sup>iii</sup> Ames, Roger T. *The Art of Rulership: A Study of Ancient Chinese Political Thought* By Huai-nan tzu. SUNY Press, New York 1994.

<sup>iv</sup> Chang Chung-yuan, *Creativity and Taoism*. HarperCollins. New York 1968.

<sup>v</sup> Lau, D.C. and Roger T. Ames. *Yuan Dao: Tracing Dao to Its Source*. Annotated translation of Chapter One Huainanzi. Ballantine Books, New York 1998.

<sup>vi</sup> His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millenium*. Riverhead Books. New York 2001.

<sup>vii</sup> Wei Wu Wei. *All Else is Bondage; Non-Volitional Living*. Sentient Publications; 1st Sentient Publications Ed edition. Boulder, CO 2004.

<sup>viii</sup> Arrien, Angeles. *The Four-Fold Way: Walking the Paths of the Warrior, Teacher, Healer and Visionary*. HarperOne;1 edition. New York 1993.

<sup>ix</sup> Kitab al-Mawaqif. *The Spiritual Writings of 'Abd al-Kader*. State University of New York Press. Albany, N.Y 1995.