

Keys for Living

This month the key is: “*Courage*”

There are so many great “c” words: clarity, compassion, courage, creativity, candor. Courage is my focus today.

Courage can come in many forms. Personal courage allows us to be honest with ourselves and risk the sometimes unknown territory of change. Great personal courage is at the heart of all growth and change. **I believe it takes great courage just to ask the Universe to provide us with truth, and it takes great courage to be open to noticing the truth when it is presented to us.**

It is important to not allow fear of failure or a sense of defeat trick to us into not being open to the truth. Remember: **Just because we know a new truth, that does not mean we have to be ready to act on the new information.** Life is a series of steps, a building of moments. Being open to the truth is only step one. Doing something differently in the face of new information is another step in a process, another level of courage. We can ask for truth or clarity, know it, and then pray for the courage to act in accordance with the new knowledge.

Do not trick yourself into thinking you do not have enough courage to change in the ways you may wish. You only need enough courage for the next step—not the whole trip.

I have often told the story of when the angels told me I needed to care about a particular issue. After genuine self-reflection, I told the angels, in all honesty, “I don’t really care about that issue.” After great debate between the angels and me, I finally surrendered: “So if it is important to my path that I do care, then please help me care, because right now, I don’t.” And in the next week, various TV shows, phone calls from friends, radio shows, magazine articles, all came to me without seeking. In a matter of a week, I could genuinely say I began to care about something I really did not care about before! **Just ask for help with the step in front of you. That is enough.**

Courage also takes the form of social integrity. It takes courage to be honest with others about who we really are while weighing the consequences of doing so. Not everyone will be comfortable with our truth. Social integrity is a balance between comfort, safety and courage. It always involves evaluating the perceived risks and costs of being honest, and the costs which come with not being as genuine as possible with others. Social integrity and courage means taking the time to re-evaluate our levels of honesty and the perceived costs, honoring that our perceptions, values, and situations can change. **It is important to not judge ourselves or others, but to always seek appropriate amounts of clarity and courage to be as honest as we believe possible.**

Many people have shown great courage in many ways: Rosa Parks when she claimed a seat on a bus; the men and women who have survived the personal tragedies of September 11, 2001; people who persevere in the face of great physical, social or emotional challenges. **Remember though, that life is a series of steps—and we only need to be where we are and ask for the courage for the next blessed step.**

I would like to end with some wonderful observations about courage from Maya Angelou:

I am convinced that courage is the most important of all the virtues. Because without courage, you cannot practice any other virtues consistently. You can be kind for a while; you can be generous for a while; you can be just for a while, or merciful for a while, even loving for a while. But it is only with courage that you can be persistently and insistently kind and generous and fair... if you don’t have it, sooner or later you will stop and say, “Eh, the threat is too much. The difficulty is too high. The challenge is too great.”

“Courage allows the successful woman to fail--and learn powerful lessons from the failure--so that in the end, she didn't fail at all.”

This newsletter is dedicated to my mother, Betty Jane Hafner, May 13, 1929 – June 22, 2006

Look for fascinating interviews with Maya Angelou, Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, Oprah Winfrey, etc., at the Academy of Achievement website: www.achievement.org.

~ When I dare to be powerful—to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid – *Audre Lorde (1934-1992)*

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When you are on a journey, it is certainly helpful to know where you are going or at least the general direction in which you are moving, but don't forget: the only thing that is ultimately real about your journey is the step that you are taking at this moment. –*"The Power of Now" by Eckhart Tolle*

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~ Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage. –*Anais Nin*