

Daily Meditation 02-17-25

Alexei Navalny: More Courage, Sacrifice, Conscience, Spiritual Warriorhood

Good morning.

Today, we celebrate the memory and the courage and the actions of Alexei Navalny, who died this day, Sunday, a year ago, at the hands of the Russian President, as he represented the democratic movement within today's Russia.

One thing to remember about Alexei, is he evolved in his witness to an alternative to oligarchy. For example, and it's a very important example, when he began his political career, he was very nationalistic and anti-immigrant and the rest. But he evolved to understand that his country is very diverse, and has different ideologies and different backgrounds, whether ethnic or religious or political. And he very much opened up his movement, admitting that he had made a mistake in being too narrow, too much of a silo. And what happened was he actually expanded his movement.

Now I call him a spiritual warrior. Really, he was a martyr after all. And he knew, when he returned to Russia after being poisoned and spending months in Germany recovering, he knew that to return was to get arrested again. So that certainly is courage on his part.

Now I've been using this term "spiritual warrior" for several months because I felt that spirituality's great gift to a political movement, is to stick by your values, your conscience, and to endure, no matter what the obstacles. We see this in Dr. King, of course, we see it in his movement, the many thousands of people who went to jail and so forth, lost their job, got beaten in the streets by police on horseback, fire hoses, and so much more. He made ordinary people, invited ordinary people into their strength, into their warriorhood, into their courage.

And I've written, for example, in my book *One River, Many Wells*, I devote the very last chapter of this ecumenical work to the theme of Spiritual Warriorhood. Because I realized, when I was at the end of my book, the second to last chapter is on Compassion, I realized that if you look at all the themes of that book, Compassion being one, but really Meditation, and many other themes that all spiritual traditions have in common — I realized things don't happen without courage, without that inner strength, that world traditions call Spiritual Warriorhood. Even what we call martial arts, most of them began as spiritual practices to be physically strong and responsive. Think of Aikido. Think of Tai Chi, Qi Gong. These are about developing the inner self and your inner strength.

I once too, was wary of invoking the term Spiritual Warriorhood, because it seemed to overlap with soldierhood, until I learned better: until I listened to Native Americans tell me their stories about moving from being a soldier literally, to being a warrior, and how their elders led them into warriorhood. And one of them told me it was four years of training to undergo that transformation from soldier to warrior.

I really don't understand why some people are dumping on me. Apparently they haven't read what I've written, or they think they're smarter than the whole history of the indigenous traditions. They say

nothing of Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, that all talk about this inner struggle, overcoming our fear, standing up for what we really believe in.

I'll tell you a story of when I first met Lorna Byrne. Lorna Byrne is a simple woman from West Ireland who, from her earliest memories, two years old, has seen angels and communicated with them. You can look at her web page, B-Y-R-N-E. And she's dictated several books in her late adulthood about her encounters with angels. Years ago, when I went to meet her for the first time, she was going to be in New York, and I was too, so we arranged to meet. And I wanted to check her out, because I was impressed with what I'd heard about her story, but I really wanted to check her out.

So we sat and conversed. And early in our conversation, she said the angels told her that I'm a general in the army of spirituality. My immediate response was, "General? Army? Spirituality? Don't use those words together in one sentence!" And she shot back at me and said, "well, the angels do."

So I learned something that day, that even the angels have so many words to describe spiritual warriorhood, and they don't hesitate to use them: army and general and so forth. And it really taught me something. You know, this woman is unlettered. She's illiterate, and she was young. The doctors in the west side of Ireland, which is the indigenous side of Ireland, they speak the indigenous language — they told her parents that she was "an idiot." And what they meant at that time was that she was dyslexic, what we call dyslexic. And they told her parents she would never learn to read or write, so don't expect her to, coming out of school.

So this illiterate woman, she nevertheless shared with the world her experiences with angels and spirits. And later in her life, she was given permission by the angels who had visited her over the decades, to dictate a book. And I say "dictate" because she couldn't write a book, but she could tell the stories, and others could write it up. That's what she did. And she's had three books that I know of, that have reached millions of people.

So I tell the story because it was an awakening to me, that, first of all, this illiterate lady shot back at me, effectively to shut up! But there's something she was telling me, was that the language of warriorhood should not be given over just to evil forces: that the archetype, the spiritual warrior, is a necessary one and a powerful one. And of course, the whole tradition of Angelology includes St. Michael being a great archangel. And he's always pictured with the spear or something like that, because he is a fighter against negative forces, including bad angels.

So I tell you this story to just integrate it into our other teachings that we've been sharing lately, about the struggle that we're in. And again, it was St. Paul who said that our battle is against "powers and principalities." Powers and principalities are a technical word for bad angels, bad destructive forces and spirits and angels.

And we thank on this day, Alexei Navalny for standing up, and not only battling these forces, but keeping a sense of humor, keeping his humanity, and keeping his humility and carrying on the work.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.