


FROM: 23038076
TO: Lummus, 
SUBJECT: Dad, a fall, and fear
DATE: 09/07/2012 07:10:51 PM

MP.44
~~dementia~~

Dad, a Fall, and Fear

8.17.12

This past month has been a world wind. My Dad had a fall coming down the stairs at his home. It is very good that my sister was there, because mom did not respond appropriately. She was immobilized and my sister had to yell at her to call 911 while she stayed with Dad. It is so frustrating. Being in prison means I cannot be there for my family. I live only 90 minutes away, so I could come anytime to help out. I worked at a job that would allow me the flexibility for me to take care of things on a short notice, unlike my sisters who live 3 hours drive or half a day's flight.

My father fractured his skull behind his right ear and caused a concussion and bleeding from his ear. The head trauma has caused a decline in cognitive abilities and hearing in his right ear. He has regained most of his ambulatory ability, but he is still unstable. He should still be using a walker, but refuses to use it. He spent the first couple of weeks in the hospital and then moved into the assisted living facility we had chosen. Mom and Dad are not happy living in the apartment, but it is really where they need to be.

The fall scare activated death fear in me. The lack of contact and my feeling of impotence only exasperated the fear. All I could do was weakly phone in my disembodied voice like some ghost from the past. My sisters had to take the brunt of the traumatic events. My Mom at first did not function well, but seems to be coming around. An estate sale is coming in a month and Mom and Dad still have lots of material to go through. I doubt there is much that they need to keep, but Mom and my sisters feel pressure to go through everything. I guess I would be that way too. The process of throwing away first most, then almost everything that I own in preparing to come to prison was tough. All my possessions are a few family pictures. Nothing else remains. I want a picture of my great grandparents (Dad's side), a book of lummus genealogy and shaving mug of my granddads. The last was not my suggestion, but my mom's. It was on my desk from childhood, so I think it is a good idea.

Death focuses attention. My going to prison is a death. Death to my life before. I am my cocoon and will be reincarnated. I don't have much use for metaphysics of religion (Buddhist or Christian), but a metaphorical reinterpretation of reincarnation works for me. Each moment is a death and rebirth. So the transition into assisted living helps to process the cycle of life. The closing of the door and the appreciation of the life that is my dad's. The lives that went before (father, grandparents) and the lives that will come after (mine, max, max's kids?).

My fear had already been recently reactivated with my former Cellie's vulnerability (the one with psychological and heart issues). So fear was close to the surface. My normal pattern is to distract myself / disassociate. This used to happen even before I was fully conscious of the emotions. My meditative practices keep your internal consciousness focused on changing emotional states. I still have the desire to escape and still do. But more and more I am staying feelings that used to send me into an autopilot mode.

The other emotion is grief. Grief at not being there. Grief at losing my Dad little by little. Grief at not being able to connect in his last years of declining sentience. Dementia is a form of slow motion death. The consciousness dies little by little while the body remains. I need to do more with this emotion. More sitting with my grief is called for.

allan lummus

mindful prisoner

betweenthebars.org

FROM: 23038076
TO: Lummus, Allan
SUBJECT: Facing my fear
DATE: 09/07/2012 07:11:49 PM

mp.45 More Fear 8.18.12

I started teaching a class on Anger Management for the Psychology department. The week before my first class I started feeling tightness in my back and I thought I had tweaked some nerves in my back from running. It only got worse the next week. I started the class and then I became aware of why my back was tightening up. The fact of getting up in front of a roomful of people who were forced to be there because of the courts or drug program, many of which make a show of being hostile to SOs out on the compound.

I was expecting just a lot of non participation. I was not really anticipating open antagonism. This was the trigger and brought my own fears and anger at myself for not anticipating this outcome caused me to lose my train of thought and stumble through the end of the second class. I went to my room and sat in meditation on and off for the afternoon. Then went to the Buddhist meditation that night. By the end of the evening I sat with my fears and anger and saw where they were coming from and made some decisions on how to proceed in the class.

The part where I stumbled in the class was in my attempt to relate the method in the class to situations in the inmates lives. It became clear in retrospect that many situations the inmates could not see as a situation that they "should" control their anger. Even though I personally could see the utility (all situations should be driven from compassionate communication), these inmates needed to be persuaded that the model works first in some situations before applying it to the tougher situations. So we will restrict the use of anger management model to situations (relationships) that the inmates determine they want to control their anger.

I will begin the class by taking the last class as a trigger or stimulus for my anger. Then describe how I responded to both identify why I was getting angry (self blame for not anticipating the situation) and how to empathize with the inmates (they were not in the class by their free will) as a way to stay connected to them. Then finish the class by taking only family/friends as relationship for examples for anger management (ones that almost all people want to maintain).

The process of facing my fear was quite intense. It first rose in my body, prior to even my consciousness. it reminded me of Waking the book by Mathew Sandford. He was a paraplegic who lost his use of his body below his chest when he was 13 in a car accident that killed his sister and his dad. The process of healing first took the standard medical model of disconnecting from his body that no longer worked and over compensate for the parts that did "work." But he over time came to start connecting to his body through yoga. He has become an internationally known yoga instructor who can teach able bodied students because of his knowledge of the whole mind/body connection.

So as my fears of facing those who have prejudices against me in a classroom found voice in my back pain, I meditated. Breathed. Relaxed. Brought the fear up in my mind. Made connections between my anger at me and them. I blamed myself for not anticipating the inmates responses to my questions. I blamed them for resisting my teaching. Then brought compassion to both me and them. I brought compassion to myself for trying to apply the material to their lives and made plans to how to do it better the next class. Then I brought compassion to their lives by seeing how taking the class itself was an anger trigger for them. They did not want to be there and did not want me as their teacher.

The fear did not disappear, but radically shifted. It was not debilitating. I could breath. I could feel compassion for me and for them. My body relaxed and the knot in my back released some of my fear. The fear sat in mind consciousness and not just in body consciousness. I had to come back and breathe to release more tension but the pain was not in my back in the form of a physical knot of muscles and nerves. My fears were my own creation through my internal blaming of me and them. I reconnected with the feelings and changed the internal script to embrace both myself and them with compassion. While the feelings did not disappear. It did change from being so unmanageable that I could not even bring it into my consciousness (my back pain) to being in my awareness and not overwhelming me.