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**Metta Mail: When striving is surviving.**

1 message

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To: mettamail@commongroundmeditation.org

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I experienced walking meditation during the half day retreat at Common Ground Saturday which is funny because I can't walk but probably not any funnier than the fact that I used to slam dance, jump rope and play hopscotch (yes, in my wheelchair).

I've been meditating for 25 years but only participated in walking meditation once before - about twenty years ago. This attempt didn't last long because my clanky (now old time) power wheelchair couldn't take it. Rather than driving slowly, this chair fried its computerized brain trying to figure out if I wanted it to move forward or shut off. I took myself out of the line after a few "steps" because of all the electrical clatter it was making trying to cope with walking meditation.

My wheelchair nowadays is smarter so I thought I'd see if it could handle prolonged slowness -- I had no idea how it would do -- in our 7 years together I've never driven it slow. It sports the fastest motors you can get on a power chair and I max them out at 8.5 MPH everyday just making quick jaunts around my 900 square foot house - let alone driving around the lake with my dog or barreling through the grocery store. To the dismay of my pedestrian friends, I hate going slow. Luckily, I married a man with long legs.

Well, it turns out that this wheelchair hates going slow too. When Mark told us to begin walking, I turned my speed dial down to about 5% capacity and hoped for the best. My motors shook and bucked like a racehorse under such restraint but at least they kept moving forward without clicking or turning off. As I made my way into the lobby I relaxed seeing that this wheelchair could do walking meditation. Now the only problem was me. I'm so used to pressing the joystick full speed ahead that I found myself anxiously pushing forward on my driving stick trying to get from the lobby back into the meditation hall with gradually increasing speed.

Realizing the ridiculousness in striving to get somewhere when the whole point was to walk mindfully in circles, I slowed down and returned my attention to the shaking wobble of my speed-constrained wheelchair. This went on for the entire walking meditation. Again and again I caught my mind anxiously caught up in striving -- all kinds of striving. Striving to get to the next section of room, striving to learn how not hit the doorway at stilted speeds, striving to stay in line, striving to find the correct pace, worrying whether the people behind me wanted me to hurry up or slow down. It's hard to find the correct pace in a wheelchair with no step-to-breath ratio for guidance!

Finally, Mark told us to stop and walk (or roll) back to our spots. I know it might be hard to understand, but I was very happy to "sit down." My hand was numb from clenching to control my speed. Allowing my mind free to wander, I reflected on my struggles with the hindrance of striving. (Is it a subsection of restlessness on the hindrance list?) I haven't worked much with

striving in my practice before and never thought of it as something I personally needed to pay special attention to, but suddenly it became clear that striving was an issue so totally paramount in my life that for me to not see striving was akin to a fish not recognizing water.

Striving is my way of life. I've lived with a significant disability since birth and every single activity of daily living for me contains (requires?) striving. Simply brushing my teeth is a daily feat requiring all of my strength. Things like holding my head upright, breathing and even talking require conscious effort and striving to accomplish.

Besides the physical, I feel I must make constant great effort to achieve everything I do—from getting through the morning routine, to proving myself a worthy human being, to the more common effort to help others and make some difference in the world. Nevertheless, most people still treat me like I'm invisible. Every day salesmen and store clerks ask their questions to my teenage caregivers rather than me as if the teenager is the one with the money and decision-making power. People stare in disbelief when I mention that I have a job and a husband. This is just normal life stuff for me. Still, I strive to carry on and not let the prevailing societal assumptions about my life define me.

How would my life even work without striving to achieve and get somewhere despite the odds? Honestly, right now I don't know except that it would take a paradigm shift in my consciousness. I need to re-study Buddhist teachings on striving that up until now I didn't find particularly resonant. I'm guessing for now I'm thinking I will try to observe the strife in my strive and see if I can work around that. Perhaps I can find a way to bring in acceptance of the present moment by acknowledging the conflict of fighting inherent in my strife without losing my warrior-like motivation to get through the day? If anyone has studied striving and has some insight to share, please email me!

Anyway, the insight of striving is something I might never have recognized without my experience of walking meditation.

On another note, my apologies to all the people apparently piled up in the traffic jam behind me during walking meditation Saturday. My husband told me that I was going more slowly than is comfortable for people to walk! I had no idea what was going on behind me or that it was difficult to balance when walking slowly, but my wheelchair and I will certainly have no problem speeding up next time. :-)

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