

The Spiral of Courage

I sat on my parent's deck a few days ago, typing away on my laptop. The breeze was blowing gently, the birds were singing a background chorus. I wasn't really thinking about anything at this particular moment - I was making a pause. I looked up from my computer to take in the beautiful mid-July day.

It was at this moment, after months of inquiry and weeks of writing, that I understood. I understood the journey that I had been on. I understood courage.

In mathematics, a spiral is a curve that begins at a central point and returns again and again, each time getting progressively larger. Spirals can be logarithmic, Archimedean, hyperbolic, or perhaps a half dozen other configurations. The main characteristic of a spiral, however, is that it returns a little larger, a little stronger.

And so it has been with courage. I started out, fast asleep with a closed heart, daring nothing. I opened my eyes and slowly awoke – I noticed things. I cautiously started out from the centre point. I paused. I contemplated a course of action, trusting my intuition and using my heart as a guide. I acted. I reflected and learned from the experience. This made me open to noticing the next challenge. The spiral curved around and continued.

This next time, inspired on by my previous courage, I noticed more clearly the challenges that lay in my path. I examined them even more carefully and chose to carry on - returning me to where the cycle started again.

And so it was also with the writing of this inquiry. Each time I thought I was finished, something else was pointed out to me – something I hadn't noticed. I tried to become more awake, I continued, trying to write more with my mind, my heart, and my gut. I reflected on what I had learnt. The spiral curved round and returned again.

It is not sufficient to say that I have learned from this inquiry. At first, I learned, of course, and I explored and learned some more. This is not what I mean. Because of this inquiry about courage, I am *changed*. I may look the same, but I am *changed*.

My courage is a path, a path littered with challenges. I walk along this path. In the past, my eyes looked up – my gaze was focused on my destination. My toe caught and I stumbled. Now, I am *changed*. I am focused instead on my path, I notice things. I still encounter challenges, but I pause to examine them. Is this challenge one I can tackle myself or will I need help? It can't have been too small or I would have kicked it out of the way.

When I encounter such a challenge, I have three choices: ignore it, toss it aside, or use it to build. I see now that the courageous choice is to build.

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- 2. Pause*
- 3. Use your heart to contemplate about this challenge.*
- 4. Act courageously. Sometimes this is easy; sometimes this is difficult.*
- 5. Reflect on the experience so that you can learn from it.*

You circle around on the spiral, more courageous than before. You encounter the next challenge.

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an excerpt from Jungwirth, H (2013) "small acts of courage" pp 126 – 128