

## WE MUST STAND ALONE

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By Thor Kilmalehto .

The most difficult lesson that life has to teach us is that we must stand alone. Every crucial experience in life must be passed through alone: birth marriage death and illumination. If we wish to be fed, we must eat our own food. If we wish to learn, we must make the necessary effort. Every bit of development in every way must be achieved through individual exertion.

We must enter the Path on our own initiative. We must continue of our own free will. Coercion is never exercised. Very frequently there is no encouragement from any source. Often there is no understanding or sympathy on the part of others. You must stand absolutely alone. You must continue because any other course of action is unthinkable. You must continue because you must be true to yourself. You must continue though the goal ahead seems very remote, for life in any other direction no longer seems attractive. Life outside of the Path seems to one who has gone but a little way, aimless, unbearably trivial, irritatingly superficial.

Henri Fabre, the great anturalist, in his fascinating book "The Social Life of the Insects" describes a species of caterpillar that cling to one another in a long line. Round and round they go in circles, totally blind to anything a fraction of an inch beyond their ken. So do average human beings seem to one who has irrevocably placed his feet upon the Path. How can people spend an afternoon in inconsequent chatter and bridge games when there is so much work to be done in the world? How can people see stupid pictures and read trashy books when there is so much wonderful knowledge to be gained, so many interesting fields of exploration in every kind of human activity? How can people see the evil all about them, how can people read of the tyranny and oppression prevalent in the world and not be moved to eradicate it? How can intelligent, refined and educated people absorb malicious propoganda, hold base prejudices and unthinkingly utter remarks that are sabre-thrusts? How can people enjoy warmth and comfort and ease when starving and suffering hands beat upon the door? Of course, it is true that we cannot walk around with a chip on our shoulders and refuse to recognize every little relaxation life affords, or arbitrarily try to force a change in our social system.

Your fury rises at the conceit, vanity and smug self-satisfaction evident on every side. A burning desire consumes you to spend every moment tellingly. You must make up for lost time. And when you have inwardly taken the vow that forever binds you to a new life, you find that you stand alone. No one will congratulate you on the new resolution that you have taken. NO one will commend you for lifting a lance in the battle of right against wrong. No one will appreciate your spiritual strivings and give you courage to dare, to struggle, to press on to the heights. No one will say joyfully, "Another champion to fight the battles of the Lord!"

Even the people who love you will hamper you every step of the way. "You must porceed slowly" they will tell you. "You must avoid conflict. You must avoid friction. You must be diplomatic. You must think of yourself first". You , yourselves, can add the time-worn, sho-worn cliches that well-meaning friends hurl at aspiring souls. With the best intentions in the world, they would clip the eagle's wings. They would destroy the young deer's fleetness of foot. They would dampen the ardor of the heart burning with love and zeal.

You must stand absolutely alone. You must find your strength within. You must believe in yourself. Any outward support proves to be the reed of Egypt

that pierces the hand that leans upon it. You must learn to listen to your heart. You must learn to follow the promptness of your soul. You must learn to look for guidance from within. The judgment grows strong through exercise. The intuition develops through obedience to its promptings. The power to stand alone is the fruit of loyalty to your ideals despite fierce, unremitting opposition.

Henrik Ibsen in a powerful play, "An Enemy of the People" depicts a physician who discovers that the water of the town is polluted. The town earns its livelihood through the sick people who come for the healing waters of the baths. When the people of the town learn of the physician's discovery they turn against him like a pack of wolves. They call him "an enemy of the people". They fear that the income of the town will be effected.

John Galsworthy in an equally powerful play, "The Mob" portrays a true patriot who courageously opposes the intention of the government to enter upon an unrighteous war of annexation. He is killed by a fanatic. The final scene shows a statue erected in the public square in his honour.

It is hard to believe that you are right when multitudes oppose you. It is hard to remain unswervingly loyal when loyalty means the sacrifice of everything that you hold dear. It is hard not to falter, not to feel doubt as to whether the cause is worthwhile when loyalty means severing the ties that have become rooted in the soul. When we come to parting of the ways, we must bid ourselves be strong and of good courage. When the time comes to wear the crown of thorns, though deep be our despair, we must unflinchingly say, "Thy will, not mine, be done".

You must stand alone. You must take the course your soul dictates. You must follow the star that shines for you alone. The deeds of others who stood alone will be your inspiration. The lives of others who stood alone will be your encouragement. The patience, the fortitude, the sublime firmness with which others faced martyrdom will steady the trembling hand that shrinks from taking the cup of tears. When the hour comes, you must stand alone.

Open your Bible. On page after page you are told of the fight that must be fought alone. Abraham had to leave his father's house and his birthplace and journey to a land where he was an utter stranger. Joseph was cast into prison on a false charge. Moses, as an adopted son of the daughter of Pharaoh, had a brilliant court career in his very hand; but his heart made him identify himself with a despised and rejected slave people. Nathan, the prophet, stepped before the guilty king and made the accusation that has rung down the ages, "Thou art the man". Ahab, King of Israel, turned from Elijah, the prophet and cried tauntingly, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Jeremiah was struck by a priest in the temple and was put into the stocks to be jeered at by the mob. In the performance of his divinely imposed duty such bitter opposition was his lot that in despair he cried aloud.

"Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me  
A man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!  
I have not lent, neither have men lent to me;  
Yet every one of them doth curse me." (-Jeremiah, Chap. 15, v.10)

Turn the pages of history. Has the lot of the reformer, the thinker, the pioneer ever been easier? France let her savior, a fair young girl, go to the stake. Picture the trial in which she had to face all those learned doctors of the law. Henry Hudson, in the very bay that he discovered, was cast adrift in a boat with his son. Lincoln was shot in the hour of victory. The pages of history drip with the blood of its benefactors.

Will you say, dear friends, that they were wrong and that their accusers and jailers and tormentors were right? Nay, society was wrong, and these lone figures were gloriously right, right in the eyes of conscience and of God, and vindicated years later by mankind, slowly catching up to their vision of the truth.

What is the lesson for us to learn? A very stern one, brothers and sisters. We must be faithful to the truth as we see it. We must not expect the plaudits of the multitudes. We must not depend upon the approval of friends or family. We must inwardly strengthen ourselves to face criticism, reproach and opposition. Take as simple a matter as diet. Today diet is one of the standard methods of treatment of the medical profession. Would you believe that the first men to acquaint the public with what diet can do were outside the ranks of the medical profession? Would you believe that their sensible ideas were ridiculed and scorned by physicians? Would you believe that people threw stones at these pioneers in the streets of New York City. Do you know that in New York State the medical society still relentlessly runs every naturopath out of town? The chiropractors are also persecuted.

Many of us are under the false impression that living the life of truth and love will exempt us from struggle, conflict and opposition. By no means. When we stand for righteousness and justice, we must be prepared to oppose unrighteousness and injustice. When we stand for truth we must be prepared to fight falsehood. Would we be free men, we must be eternally vigilant. A people careless of its liberties will find them trampled upon. The exploiter, the usurper, the dictator, like hissing snakes, ever await the opportunity to strike. Women gained the long due right of suffrage after years of struggle. Our country had to pass the agony of Civil War to free the slaves.

It is test and trial all along the way. Only the strongest can survive. It is the final test of your soul development. To be right and to know that you are right when everybody else is wrong. To be faithful to the right in poverty, in exile and in suffering. To carry on through the hours of deepest depression. To carry on in loneliness, discouragement, and tears.

What is the aim of this fiery discipline? You become absolutely dependable. Your will becomes like tempered steel. Your nerves are under perfect control. You are beyond the power of any influence that would swerve you from your appointed task. You stand unimpressed by the thousand conflicting forces and influences in the world. You know your own mind. You know your own soul. No specious argument can ever sway you.

When you consider these ideas, many questions arise in the mind. How shall you know that you are right? How shall you know that you are taking the right course? How shall you know that you are exhibiting real independence and not mere stubbornness and obstinacy? How shall you reconcile standing alone with sharing in the tasks of the group? Friends, there lies the paradox of the spiritual life. There lies the enigma of soul development. Only your soul can tell you. And only time can prove that you are right. He who has found the Inner Light and he who recognizes the Voice of the Cosmic owes allegiance to Conscience and to God alone. He is beyond any man-made law. He becomes a teacher of the world like the prophets of old.