

# Bravery: In the Eye of the Beholder

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March 2014 – Melissa Bradley-Ball, MS, NCC, BCETS, FAAETS



**T**his morning I was felt inspired. I read a blog post by the wise young soul [Hannah Brencher](#) who wrote about the anatomy of brave.

*You don't actually get to stand beside someone and tell them whether or not they've reached a level of bravery. You don't actually get to determine what does or does not make a person brave, or lovely, or worthy, or good. That's not your right. That's not your calling.*

*Here is the truth about bravery. Here is her essence– she can't defined by a measuring cup or a yardstick or a square foot. Bravery isn't the kind of thing you measure; it is the kind of thing you activate. It's pretty obvious to everyone– we walked into a life that isn't always kind or bearable or comfortable or good and it takes a real chunk of bravery to just get through a day sometimes.*

*Bravery– if you ask me– is the day my best friend told me that she was getting sober and I watched her hands tremble over the hurdles of what would come next. Bravery– if you ask me– is watching a dear friend of mine raise four beautiful children with all the grit she's got, and showing up for those children even when she is tired & broken & worn. That, my friends, is titanical bravery to me. Bravery– if you ask me– is the day he was diagnosed with cancer and the only response on his lips was this, "I will fight this thing. I will be relentless and I will fight this thing." Bravery– if you ask me– is just her showing up at my door, the one with the big red handle, and speaking the truth out loud, "I want more. I have been afraid to say it for a really long while but I want more for this life of mine."*

*So no, you don't get to stand here and tell someone that a hurdle that has taken them years to finally get over is something they should have learned to limbo under several yesterdays ago.*

Hannah's words about bravery were reminders that bravery is in the eye of the beholder.

Bravery is an experience from within for none of us can externally judge the level of bravery of another because we rarely have a clue of the work of the internal antagonists which the saboteurs which live within creating resistance, paralyzing fear and excuses.

*Bravery does not necessitate the absence of fear.*

*(Author Unknown)*

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It's safe to say we have all experienced darkness in our lives. Darkness comes in many forms - physically, emotionally and spiritually. There are so many quotes and works of art based on the interplay of lightness and darkness. Day and night are parts of the Laws of Nature. Darkness is something we are often scared of and lightness is often connected to hope. Why is that?

We usually have a different view of the world at night? Fear, panic and dread seem more intense at night. When the light of morning comes, sometimes life can feel manageable again.

In the FIVE STAR book by Barbara Brown Taylor *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, Taylor speaks of how we – as a society – are conditioned to be afraid of the dark. Even in spiritual traditions, such as Christianity (which she is an Episcopal Priest), darkness is often perceived as the absence of faith. She spoke of a man who was terribly afraid of the literal dark. She shares:

*The darkness never stopped terrifying him. Every single night it took all the courage he had [to do his nightly chores]. But while his fear of the dark may have been baseless, the bravery it drew out of him stayed with him for the rest of his life. "Courage," he writes now, "which is no more than the management of fear must be practiced. For this, children need widespread, easily obtained, cheap, renewable source of something scary but not actually dangerous." Darkness, he says, fits that bill. Most parents would give their darkness challenged child another chore or offer to go with him. How do we develop the courage to walk in the dark if we are never asked to practice?"*

**And by John Patrick Shanley:**

*"I am not a courageous person by nature. I have simply discovered that, at certain key moments in this life, you must find courage in yourself, in order to move forward and live. It is like a muscle and it must be exercised, first a little, and then more and more. All the really exciting things possible during the course of a lifetime require a little more courage than we currently have. A deep breath and a leap."*

- *What helps you find your sense of brave?*
- *When have you stepped out in true bravery (remember, it is when you faced what was scary to you, not someone else)?*
- *If you had not stepped out during those times, who would you be now?*
- *What would you have lost if you had not found the courage?*
- *What did you risk when you found your moment to be brave?*

- *How do you ask the darkness to teach you what you need to now? (from Barbara Brown Taylor)*

Finding our sense of “brave” can be continuing to show up even when we worry that our current life events will never change. Of course thing can’t NOT change, because change is inevitable.

