

SHARPENING YOUR SWORD

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Integral Coaching Canada held a Conference & Retreat for our coaches from around the world that was entitled, “Sharpening Your Sword.” Prior to launching the Conference, we explored this metaphor more deeply to understand some of the facets regarding what it means to engage in a practice of sword sharpening. What does it really mean to sharpen your sword and what are some of the assumptions that we can make about a title that has the word “sword” in it or the word “sharpening” in it? How is it relevant in my life as a coach - as a human being - to be with these words?

First, let’s start by tuning into how you currently relate to this phrase, or metaphor called “Sharpening Your Sword.” Please take a moment to explore your responses to these questions:

- *What is your immediate reaction when you hear these three words: Sharpening Your Sword?*
 - *Do you immediately gravitate towards them? Do you pull away from them?*
 - *What do you think is most influencing the direction you take (towards or away) when you hear those words?*

- *What images arise for you as you have glimpses of:*
 - *What “Sharpening Your Sword” might entail or ask of you? (pause right here and really answer this question...)*
 - *What the impact might be in your life if you did in fact “Sharpen Your Sword” in some way? (pause and really lean into what this impact might be...)*
 - *Who might you need to become to pursue “sword sharpening?” (No, really... who?)*

Okay, now that you’ve had a chance to see your initial, automatic, immediate way of relating to this metaphor, please, take a moment to set this view and array of feelings down - as best you can - and open your curious mind, receptive heart and relaxed body to now take in what is being offered in the following paragraphs. Take a look, take it in, let it swirl around in you, see what arises and thereby what is speaking to you. Fresh, new, in this moment.

There are so many ways in which the **sword** and the **sword bearer** have been held over many centuries. As you read them, please give yourself time to take them in and then go beyond the specific content into how this is relevant in coaching, in your life, in your day to day world, in your longings and needs, and see what and how it is speaking to you. And, of course, you also may notice or remember aspects of these descriptions threaded through your ICC coach training, as they have certainly been deep sources of inspiration as we built our school.

THE ART OF THE SWORD

The sword - being given a sword, being invited into sword practice, and then engaging with your own sword over time - has long been considered one of the highest levels of internal arts development and practice. It is an art that takes a lifetime to master and the level reached in the art relies upon a high development of spirit. From the perspective of a sword practitioner, the sword isn't simply seen as a weapon. Rather, it is seen as a way of cultivating refinement and expressions of one's true nature. And, of course, there is a progression of external and internal development that occurs over time:

Beginners use the sword with their body.

Intermediate students extend their chi in and through the sword.

Masters govern their swords through their hearts.

Does this sound familiar in your coach training and your progressive embodiment of the coaching method and way of being of an Integral Coach™?

In Taoist teachings, it is the heart that is said to be the place in which the spirit resides and that it is from this place that all movements of one's consciousness arise. It is then through the engagement in some form of practice that we are able to actually cultivate and manifest this teaching in day to day life. One form of practice is that of sword play. In sword play, the aim is to contact the spirit and allow it to express itself through to the movements of the blade. In other words, it is cultivating a fuller, more conscious and skillful connection between what is inside with what is expressed out in the world. In order for this to occur, the spirit must first be found, the chi stirred into action and then the blade can come to life. Talk about integration!

Taking this one step further by completing the loop from the movement of the sword back to the heart, each movement of the blade serves as a feedback loop between heart and action, action and heart, in repeated cycles. In other words, every subtle shifting of spirit is reflected through the blade and dictates the 'cleanness' of each cut and arc of the sword. Read these words again: Every subtle shifting of spirit is reflected through the blade and dictates the 'cleanness' of each cut and arc of the sword. Think about that.

- *How do these words speak to you with respect to something in your life right now?*

Through this perspective of the sword and the sword bearer, "Sharpening Your Sword" is not just about the blade; it's about what is sourcing that blade, how it is being sourced, as well as the impact or outcome of the movement of the blade.

Stepping back now, and putting this description into your day to day world, please consider these questions and see what takes shape for you...



- *To what degree do you see the connection between your spirit and the ‘cleanness’ of each action you take? With yourself, with others, in nature, in thought, in words, in action, in non-action?*
- *How does your latest action actually reflect the latest state of your spirit?*
- *Is there any kind of block between your spirit and your ability to express it?*
- *What would happen if you considered the access to and expression of spirit and the quality of that expression to be a life-long practice?*

The last dimension of the Art of the Sword is the community of practitioners. Yes, there is the distinct practice that each person engages in and then there is the coming together to practice as a community. While each community has its own character and nature, the one what we most gravitate to is one that is rooted in what is called ‘cooperative training.’ Here there is a profound commitment to give and receive, to challenge and be challenged, to support and be supported, to contribute to each other finding their edges of development and discovering how to move beyond them. To learn together. To rest together. To speak. To also experience silence. In a cooperative training environment, there is a belief that each person you play with, in sword or push hands, has something to teach you and therefore, you greet them with respect, curiosity and humility.

What has this practice community be rich and vibrant is when everyone brings this spirit of engagement to each moment of their time together. What each person gains can then be carried over into their personal practice. And the cycle continues. Does this sound familiar? We sure hope so, as this was held and nurtured in the coach training that you received from Integral Coaching Canada.

MASCULINE / FEMININE PERSPECTIVES of the SWORD

The second perspective of the “Sharpening of our Swords” that we are drawing upon is what is seen and inspired through the vantage points of masculine and feminine and the necessity for both. Here we are exploring the masculine and feminine aspects of the sword itself, specifically the meanings of the blade and the sheath. Some have described the blade of the sword as representing masculine characteristics: the active force, the driving feature that penetrates, cuts into, and carries out a goal. The sheath, within which the sword is housed, has been described as a symbol of more feminine characteristics: the receiving force, the protective feature, the place of listening to what is sourcing the body and what is happening with the blade. And, of course, a sword can only exist with both the sheath and the blade, masculine and feminine. Perhaps you recognize this in how you need both in a coaching conversation (or a conversation with anyone, quite frankly!) and your capacities as an Integral Coach™: being receptive, listening, taking in, as well as bringing forth powerful questions, sharing in a form of an offer, and speaking with clarity.

Taking this a bit further, the effectiveness and the integrity of the sword depends upon the quality of the balance between the two. Too much blade with a small, light sheath and the sword is too heavy to be skilfully wielded. Too much sheath with a small blade has no reach or impact. Thus, we need both, in balance and dynamically playing with each other.

What this perspective illuminates for us are the qualities, energies and characteristics unique to the blade, and unique to the sheath so that we can better understand the importance of each, know which we tend to gravitate to, what we need more of, and less of as well as how to hold the blade and the sheath as parts of a whole. Certainly, this is something that you have all explored in your coaching training as you learned what were your preferences, your 'go to' ways of interacting with your clients, friends, family, and colleagues.

- *Which perspective or aspect of the sword do you most readily relate to? Relate to least?*
- *What do you tend to rely upon when trying to address your challenges and/or desires in life?*
- *What would be more available to you in your life if you focused on the sheath while wielding the blade?*
- *Can you feel the necessity of both perspectives as you consider the sharpening that you want in your own life?*
- *Does your sharpening need more rest, nurturing or more direct movement into the world right now, in this moment?*

SHARPENING YOUR UNIQUE SWORD

Okay, now please take a pause for a moment to digest what you have just read and experienced. How did your body react? Tingling in some places, pulling back in others, drawing forward, breathing more deeply? What was going on in your body as you read these words?

Once you feel ready, please explore the following questions:

1. What **two things** spoke to you the most as you read these few pages?
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2. How do these perspectives of "Sharpening Your Sword" from the Martial Arts and the Masculine/Feminine speak to you in terms of **feelings, sensations, thoughts, and urges for action**?
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3. What **one new insight** did you take away from this document that informs what “Sharpening Your Sword” means to you now?
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As you consider cultivating capacities in one or more of these many facets, know that it is not about the sharpness of your blade in a literal sense. It is way more than that. It is your life, personally and professionally. It involves the understanding of the **sword** and the **bearer of the sword** on behalf of you living your life with integrity, fire, deep nourishment, efficacy, agency, love, service, satisfaction, solace, peace, ease, moving through barriers, dynamic resilience, and more. These times that we are living in need your unique sword bearing skill.

Feel free to explore how you currently source and wield your sword in coaching conversations (casual and formal) and how you can make some powerful shifts that bring more spirit, integrity and clean actions of listening, speaking, receiving, and offering to the shared field.

In this exploration, see if you can uncover the unique aspects that the masculine and feminine perspectives bring to the subject of ‘Sharpening Your Sword’ and how to hold these in a more dynamic and integrated way.

And there is all that is holding you in this exploration, the sheath that holds us all. And your sword is quivering. Ready. Already ready. And waiting for you.