

Connected Learning in a Time of Confinement

Week 6: Courage and Sacrifice

May 8, 2020

This anthology has been prepared in draft form for use in a special seminar curriculum and are provided for private, non-commercial use in extraordinary times. Additional information about the seminar and this volume is available from The Aspen Institute, 2300 N Street NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20037.

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

© 2020 The Aspen Institute

Published in the United States of America
by The Aspen Institute

All rights reserved

Table of Contents

- 2 How to use this curriculum
- 3 Philosophical Basis
- 4 Readings
- 5 Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, selections
- 7 Viṣṇu Śarma, "The Jackal Mothered by the Lioness"
- 10 Victoria Safford, "The Small Work in the Great Work," selections
- 12 Louise Bogan, "The Dream"
- 14 Image of the Week
Uğur Gallenkuş , *Untitled* (2019)
- 16 Guiding Questions, Week 6
- 17 Short Guide on Leading a Discussion

Other resources,

including daily meditations, periodic podcasts, on-line seminars and discussions, and occasional on-line conversations about this week's curriculum, are available at:

aspeninstitute.org/programs/executive-leadership-development/resources-for-living-and-leading/

How to Use this Curriculum

Connected Learning in Times of Confinement is designed to support people and their families, neighborhoods, organizations, and networks by building upon the Aspen Institute's unique expertise in facilitating meaningful conversations in a seminar setting.

We envisage a weekly curriculum that can be used in pieces, or all at once, or in various combinations. Our hope is that these readings and guidance will allow you and others to reflect on fundamental human questions in ways that nourish our hearts, minds, and fellowship in a time of confinement. A curriculum (from the Latin *currere*, to run) is a path, an exploration, not something to be mastered but an invitation to discovery and wonder. These materials are curated to intrigue and delight you, and we invite you to reflect upon them on your own, and to share them—with family, friends, neighbors, teams, networks. In this, the journey itself is the destination, a call to thought, dialogue, and action.

In a journey it is often helpful to have a guide, and in this curriculum you will find three guides:

First, the authors themselves—

we do not need to follow the authors, but we do well to understand what they are saying;

Second, guiding questions—

for each reading, there is a set of guiding questions designed for individual and collective reflection; they are not the only (or even most important) questions, but a way of getting started; these may be found at the back of the packet and are best read after you have read the texts;

Third, general guidance—

for each discussion, participants and discussion leaders may want to remind themselves of some best practices; these may be found at the back of this packet.

We invite you to share these readings widely and encourage others to engage in conversation. As you do so, know that fellow seminar graduates and their families, friends, and colleagues are doing the same. We all contribute to a global chorus of conversation about ideas worth sharing and acting upon.

**—Todd Breyfogle, PhD
Managing Director, Aspen
Executive Leadership**

About Aspen Institute Seminars

The Aspen Institute Executive Leadership Seminars Department drives change through reflection, dialogue, and action in service of a more free, just, and equitable society. We do this by: curating brave spaces of shared meaning which help people become more self-aware, more self-correcting, and more self-fulfilling; deepening participants' humane sensibilities and capacities for moral judgment through an examination of the humanistic traditions; establishing meaningful connections among diverse people and organizations in service of a better society.

For more information, including information about customized programs for companies and other organizations, please contact Kalissa Hendrickson, PhD, Director, at Kalissa.Hendrickson@aspensinst.org or 202-736-3586. [Learn more.](#)

Philosophical Basis

The Aspen Institute starts from an act of faith in the humanistic tradition: one must be reflective in order to insure that all human activity – political, scientific, economic, intellectual or artistic – will serve the needs of human beings and enrich and deepen their lives.

The Institute believes in the value both of the “Great Ideas” of the past as well as the importance of the sometimes inelegant and highly controversial ideas of the present.

The Institute is dedicated to the fundamental educational value of dialogue for mature men and women from different nations and cultures -- intercommunications between people of comparable competence from various backgrounds and specialized fields of experience.

The Aspen idea recognizes that the processes by which persons learn and develop or change their ideas are not mechanical or even purely rational. As there is a mystery at the edge of human thought, so there is a magic about human relationships, and the magic we attempt to invoke in Aspen is that of the sheer beauty of this area of the Rocky Mountains.

With Erasmus, we hold that “nothing human is alien” to the inquiring purposes of the Aspen Institute. The Institute intends to be, in sum, a place of excellence and excitement where men and women of the finest qualities of mind and spirit from all walks of life in the United States and abroad can meet to learn from one another through serious discussion of and work on significant problems facing society and the greatest ideas which have been expressed throughout history and today concerning these problems.

—J. E. Slater, President, The Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, 1972

**Connected Learning in
a Time of Confinement**

Readings | Week 6

- 5 Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, selections
- 7 Viṣṇu Śarma, "The Jackal Mothered by the Lioness"
- 10 Victoria Safford, "The Small Work in the Great Work",
selections
- 12 Louise Bogan, "The Dream"

The Courage to Be

by Paul Tillich
(1886–1965)

1 ...Man's self-affirmation has two sides which are distinguishable but not
separable: one is the affirmation of the self as a self; that is of a separated, self-
centered, individualized, incomparable, free, self-determining self. This is what
one affirms in every act of self-affirmation. This is what one defends against
5 nonbeing and affirms courageously by taking nonbeing upon one-self. The
threatened loss of it is the essence of anxiety, and the awareness of concrete threats
to it is the essence of fear. Ontological self-affirmation precedes all differences
of metaphysical, ethical, or religious definition of the self. Ontological self-
10 affirmation is neither natural nor spiritual, neither good nor evil, neither immanent
nor transcendent. These differences are possible only because of the underlying
ontological self-affirmation of the self as self. In the same way the concepts which
characterize the individual self lie below the differences of valuation: separation
is not estrangement, self-centeredness is not selfishness, self-determination is not
15 sinfulness. They are structural descriptions and the condition of both love and hate,
condemnation and salvation. It is time to end the bad theological usage of jumping
with moral indignation on every word in which the syllable "self" appears. Even
moral indignation would not exist without a centered self and ontological self-
affirmation.

20 The subject of self-affirmation is the centered self. As centered self it is an
individualized self. It can be destroyed but it cannot be divided: each of its parts
has the mark of this and no other self. Nor can it be exchanged: its self-affirmation
is directed to itself as this unique, unrepeatable, and irreplaceable individual. The
theological assertion that every human soul has an infinite value is a consequence
25 of the ontological self-affirmation as an indivisible, unexchangeable self. It can be
called "the courage to be as oneself."

 But the self is self only because it has a world, a structured universe, to which
it belongs and from which it is separated at the same time. Self and world are
correlated, and so are individualization and participation. For this is just what
30 participation means: being a part of something from which one is, at the same
time, separated. Literally, participation means "taking part." This can be used in
a threefold sense. It can be used in the sense of "sharing," as, for instance, sharing
a room; or in the sense of "having in common," as Plato speaks of the *methexis*

1 used in the sense of "being a part," for instance of a political movement. In all these
cases participation is a partial identity and a partial nonidentity. A part of a whole
is not identical with the whole to which it belongs. But the whole is what it is only
with the part. The relation of the body and its limbs is the most obvious example.
5 The self is a part of the world which it has as its world. The world would not be
what it is without this individual self. One says that somebody is identified with
a movement. This participation makes his being and the being of the movement
partly the same. To understand the highly dialectical nature of participation it
is necessary to think in terms of power instead of in terms of things. The partial
10 identity of definitely separated things cannot be thought of. But the power of being
can be shared by different individuals. The power of being of a state can be shared
by all its citizens, and in an outstanding way by its rulers. Its power is partly their
power, although its power transcends their power and their power transcends its
power. The identity of participation is an identity in the power of being. In this
15 sense the power of being of the individual self is partly identical with the power of
being of his world, and conversely.

For the concepts of self-affirmation and courage this means that the self-
affirmation of the self as an individual self always includes the affirmation of the
power of being in which the self participates. The self affirms itself as participant
20 in the power of a group, of a movement, of essences, of the power of being as such.
Self-affirmation, if it is done in spite of the threat of nonbeing, is the courage to be.
But it is not the courage to be as oneself, it is the "courage to be as a part."

The phrase "courage to be as a part" presents a difficulty. While it obviously
demands courage to be as oneself, the will to be as a part seems to express the lack
25 of courage, namely the desire to live under the protection of a larger whole. Not
courage but weakness seems to induce us to affirm ourselves as a part. But being
as a part points to the fact that self-affirmation necessarily includes the affirmation
of oneself as "participant," and that this side of our self-affirmation is threatened
by nonbeing as much as the other side, the affirmation of the self as an individual
30 self. We are threatened not only with losing our individual selves but also with
losing participation in our world. Therefore self-affirmation as a part requires
courage as much as does self-affirmation as oneself. It is one courage which takes
a double threat of nonbeing into itself. The courage to be is essentially always
the courage to be as a part and the courage to be as oneself, in interdependence. The
35 courage to be as a part is an integral element of the courage to be as oneself, and
the courage to be as oneself is an integral element of the courage to be as a part. But
under the conditions of human finitude and estrangement that which is essentially
united becomes existentially split. The courage to be as a part separates itself
from unity with the courage to be as oneself, and conversely; and both disintegrate
40 in their isolation. The anxiety they had taken into themselves is unloosed and
becomes destructive. This situation determines our further procedure: we shall deal
first with manifestations of the courage to be as a part, then with manifestations of
the courage to be as oneself, and in the third place we shall consider a courage in
which the two sides are reunited.

The Jackal Mothered by the Lioness

by Viṣṇu Śarma

(1200? BCE - 300? CE)

1 Once, a lion and his wife lived in a certain forest. One day the lioness gave
birth to twins. Every day the lion went hunting, killed deer or some other prey and
brought it to the lioness. But once it happened that though he roamed all through
the forest, the lion failed to find anything. The glorious divinity, the sun, was
5 already behind the Western Mountain. As he was on his way home, the lion came
upon a baby jackal lying on the trail. Looking at it he thought, 'It is just a baby,' and
picking it up gently, he carried it between his teeth with great care and brought it
home alive. He then handed it over to the lioness.

'Have you brought any food, beloved?' asked the lioness.

10 'No, my dearest,' answered the lion, 'I could find nothing today except this tiny
jackal cub; and I could not find it in my heart to kill him, thinking, "After all, he is
one of our own kind and a baby at that." There is a saying which goes as follows:

15 *Even when your life is in great peril
never strike a woman, a child, a Brāhmana,
or an ascetic wearing Śiva's symbol,
specially not those who place their trust in you.*

20 'Have this little creature for your wholesome diet for the time being; I shall see
what I can find and bring you something else at dawn.' And the lioness at once
remarked, 'Beloved: you spared his life because you thought, "he is a baby". How
can I then kill and eat him to fill my belly? For we have been taught this:

25 *Refrain from what is prohibited
even when life itself is at stake;
do not abandon what is prescribed;
this the Eternal Law states.*

30 'So, this fellow shall be my third son.' Saying this she started nursing him at her
own breast and soon he became very strong and healthy. So the three cubs grew up

1 together unaware of any genetic difference and spent their childhood acting the same way and indulging in the same amusements.

Now, one day, a wild elephant roaming around came to that part of the forest. Seeing the elephant, the two lion-cubs quivering with fury started towards him, 5 eager for the kill. But the jackal cub restrained them saying, 'Oh, no! This is an elephant, an enemy of your race; so don't go near him, brothers.' With these words, he ran home as fast as he could. Seeing their elder brother turn tail, the two lion cubs became dispirited. Ah! How admirably put:

10 *One single doughty warrior
with fiery courage headed for battle,
fires an army entire,
but if there is one broken blighter,
15 the entire army is routed.*

And so:

20 *For this reason, the Earth's rulers
look only for mighty warriors,
valiant, resolute, fiery-spirited;
and steer clear of the faint-hearted.*
25

On reaching home, the twin lion cubs, laughing heartily, reported all that had happened to their parents with real zest, describing how their elder brother had behaved. 'You know what,' they said, 'the moment he saw the elephant, he couldn't 30 run fast enough to put a safe distance between himself and the beast.'

The jackal cub heard this and his heart distended with anger; his blossom-lip quivered, his eyes reddened; his brows twisted into triple-arched curves. And he spoke harshly, severely reprimanding his siblings.

The lioness then took the little cub aside and gently admonished him. 'Now, 35 now, sweet child; you should never talk like this to them; they are your brothers.'

But her gentle, calming words only made the jackal cub even angrier and he turned on her in a fury chiding her bitterly, 'What?' he exclaimed, 'Am I inferior to these two in courage and beauty, in learning and skills? Or in discipline and use of the mind? Am I? That they should ridicule me in this manner? I shall kill them; 40 don't you doubt that.'

The lioness laughed quietly at this outburst; as she did not wish to see him die she recited this verse:

*Brave you are, handsome too, my boy,
and you have acquired knowledge;*

1 *but you come of a lineage*
 where no elephant is slain.

5 ‘Now pay close attention to what I have to tell you. My darling child, you are
the son of a jackal mother, whom out of compassion I reared, feeding you with my
own milk to make you strong. So, while my two sons are still babies, and do not
know that you are a jackal, you had better make haste and run away to live among
your own people. Otherwise, once they know the truth, you can be certain that you
are walking the path to death.’

10 When he heard this the jackal cub was terrified to death; and he quietly stole
away to join his own people.

The Small Work in the Great Work

by Victoria Safford

1 I knew a colleague once, now dead (I knew and loved a colleague once),
who when I met him first was already very old, maybe 90, maybe more. He and
his partner owned a little cabin in Maine that we rented every summer for a few
weeks, when we were living in New England. Somehow it came out, but not in the
5 first year, that Clive (the owner, Clive Knowles) had been a minister, a Unitarian.
He let this slip one day, and I think it was another year at least before he told the
story. He was not a chatty guy.

He grew up in Nova Scotia in a mining family, very poor, came down to Harvard
for his degree, and took his first church in the middle of the 1930's in Gardner,
10 Massachusetts. In his second year, the wealthiest member of his congregation paid
a visit, and said he knew that Clive was letting union organizers hold meetings in
the basement. The visitor told him, "I'm the biggest donor to this church, and I'm
the biggest donor to every church in town. There will be no union here, and no
union meetings." But Clive held a meeting anyway and the following Sunday the
15 Standing Committee demanded his resignation, and he gave it.

He came down south after that, and spent the next 50 years here in Alabama, in
Mississippi, Texas and eventually in California, organizing migrant workers, black,
white, Latino. But he held onto his black preaching outfit: white shirt, narrow tie,
black suit, some kind of big, black hat, and his robe, so when he came into a town
20 he could be among the workers without raising the suspicions of authorities. He
was just "the preacher," and indeed, he did preside through the years over many
funerals for people, and christenings and marriages. When I met him decades and
decades later, he said, first, "I was a Unitarian minister." That's where he began,
though he had served a congregation for less than two years in his life.

25 And so of course I said, all chipper and fresh-faced and eager, "I am, too! I'm
a minister too! Unitarian Universalist!" But Clive just looked straight ahead; he
stared out over the water, as we sat side by side watching his dog chase sticks in the
pond. He looked straight ahead and said, not so affirmingly, "Uh huh." Then, after
a long while, as if he hadn't heard me, or as if he hadn't understood, or in his great

This excerpt is taken from a talk Safford delivered as part of the Birmingham Lectures at the 2002 Unitarian Universalist Convocation in Birmingham, Alabama. The full text is available online at <https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.uuma.org/resource/collection/20FCD5D4-D494-4817-93F4-D4264C5B8ACD/BirminghamLecture4.4.pdf>. Portions were later revised and published in Paul Rogat Loeb, editor, *The Impossible Will Take a Little While: Perseverance and Hope in Troubled Times* (Basic Books, 2014) pp. 228-229.

1 old age had somehow forgotten what I had only told him just five minutes before,
he turned and looked me in the eye and said, “So what kinda work do you do?”

But he had heard me. He had not forgotten what I’d said. He needed to know
more, though, because what I’d told spoke nothing of my “mission,” or of how I
5 might be living it, or what it might be asking of me, or what this world requires.

You are a Unitarian Universalist minister. So what kinda work do you do?

10 Matthew Fox writes somewhere of the “the small work in the Great Work,”
the place of your little life and love, your little daily days and little earnest effort
as a solitary person within the larger Life and larger Love that some call Holy,
some call God, some call History, and some call simply larger than themselves.
Like everybody else, just like everybody else, we are doing small work within the
15 Great Work of creation, and thus do we aid it and abet it in unfolding (as Annie
Dillard said). We stand where we will stand, on little plots of ground, where we
are maybe “called” to stand (though who knows what that means?)—in pulpits,
in classrooms, in field of lettuces and apricots in our black preacher clothes, in
hospitals, in prisons (on both sides, at various times, of the gates), in streets,
20 in agencies, in offices at 25— and it is sacred ground if we would honor it, if we
would bring to it a blessing of sacrifice and risk. It’s sacred ground, just as the floor
of any gym in South Dakota might suddenly be sanctified by one child, one young
woman’s dancing and her song (ancient, holy), the interior clarity of her spirit,
that spoke there to the hate-filled world, and transformed that place with faith and
25 deep remembering.

Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of hope—not the prudent gates
of Optimism, which are somewhat narrower; nor the stalwart, boring gates of
Common Sense; nor the strident gates of self-righteousness, which creak on shrill
and angry hinges (our people cannot hear us there; they cannot pass through); nor
30 the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of “Everything is gonna be all right,” but a very
different, sometimes very lonely place, the place of truth-telling, about your own
soul first of all and its condition, the place of resistance and defiance, the piece of
ground from which you see the world both as it is and as it could be, as it might
be, as it will be; the place from which you glimpse not only struggle, but joy in
the struggle – and we stand there, beckoning and calling, telling people what we
35 seeing, asking people what they see.

... [E]very day offers every one of us little invitations for resistance... and we
make our own responses. I suppose we gather in these Convocations to check
those now and then, and to hear the truth in love from colleagues who know us
40 and our calling very well, and who will call us back if it seems we’ve lost our
way or lost our nerve. If love and trust are deep enough and true, we’ll do this for
each other, and that is sacred work. And in between these Convocations, we rely
on other means that we hope and pray are sound.

The Dream

by Louise Bogan
(1897–1970)

1 O God, in the dream the terrible horse began
To paw at the air, and make for me with his blows,
Fear kept for thirty-five years poured through his mane,
And retribution equally old, or nearly, breathed through his nose.

5
Coward complete, I lay and wept on the ground
When some strong creature appeared, and leapt for the rein.
Another woman, as I lay half in a swoon
10 Leapt in the air, and clutched at the leather and chain.

Give him, she said, something of yours as a charm.
Throw him, she said, some poor thing you alone claim.
15 No, no, I cried, he hates me; he is out for harm,
And whether I yield or not, it is all the same.

But, like a lion in a legend, when I flung the glove
20 Pulled from my sweating, my cold right hand;
The terrible beast, that no one may understand,
Came to my side, and put down his head in love.

Notes

Connected Learning in
a Time of Confinement

Image of the Week

[Image Link](#)

Uğur Gallenkuş, *Untitled*, (2019)
from #ParalelEvrenSavaşBarış (#ParallelUniverseWarPeace), and compiled with other photomontages by the artist in the video: [Amazing Photomontages by Turkish Artist Ugur Gallenkus | World of monstrous contrasts](#)

Notes

Connected Learning in
a Time of Confinement

Guiding Questions

The best questions arise from careful listening (to the author, oneself, and others), and from the spontaneity of wonder

Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, selections

- What are the “two sides” of self-affirmation as Tillich describes them?
- What does Tillich mean by the “centered self”?
- How is the “centered self” related to the world?
- What does the “courage to be a part” mean to you in theory and in practice?
- Are there ways in which you would like to be more courageous?
- Does being courageous require sacrifice, that is, giving something up?

Viṣṇu Śarma, “The Jackal Mothered by the Lioness”

- Both the lion and the lioness spare the jackal cub. Is this an act of restraint and sacrifice or an act of courage?
- Is the jackal’s flight from the elephant an act of cowardice or courage?
- How might the lion cubs define courage? What is the difference between recklessness and courage? Between cowardice and prudence?
- What is the meaning of the final verse “but you come of a lineage/ where no elephant is slain”?
- How do we read this tale through the lens of Tillich’s “courage to be” and “courage to be a part”?

Victoria Safford, “The Small Work in

the Great Work”, selections

- Who is Clive and what is his story? Is his tale of sacrifice and courage? What has he lost? What has he gained?
- Do we think of Clive as successful? By what standards?
- What is your small work in the great work?
- What is your little plot of ground?

Louise Bogan, “The Dream”

- Read the poem aloud: What words, images, and/or feelings does the poem evoke in you?
- How is the experience of fear and cowardice described? Are those familiar feelings?
- Is the flinging of the glove a sacrifice? If so, what is given up?
- Is this an act of courage? What is gained?

Uğur Gallenkuş, *Untitled* (2019)

- Set a timer and look at the image for 3 minutes: What do you see? What feelings does the image evoke?
- This image, and the video from which it is taken, highlights contrasts of courage and sacrifice. Whose acts of courage and sacrifice do the images reveal? Conceal?
- What are we willing to sacrifice—or not sacrifice—for a better world? Why?

General questions for the week

- What is the small courage within the great courage?
- What is the small sacrifice within the great sacrifice?
- In what ways do you want to live with greater courage? With greater sacrifice?

Short Guide to Leading a Discussion

General Principles for Participants

- Read the text(s) to be discussed in their entirety (ideally twice)
- Make notes about what you understand, don't understand, agree or disagree with
- Focus comments and conversation on the ideas expressed in the shared text(s), not on outside
- knowledge
- Seek to understand your fellow participants, not to persuade them
- Be freely authentic and morally present
- Listen to the text, to others, and to yourself

General principles for discussion leaders:

- Hold the space for honesty and vulnerability: be honest and vulnerable yourself
- Ask questions, don't teach: the aim is shared understanding and meaning, not agreement
- Be attached to the conversation: avoid rigidly following your planned order of questions
- Make sure every voice is heard: don't move too quickly to fill the silence
- Start and end on time: end not with conclusions but with questions you're taking away

Format:

- Match the texts to the time allotted (*Each text can productively stimulate 20-40 minutes of discussion, and can be read discussed individually or together in one sitting, depending on the time available; it is better to end with more to be said, rather than straining to fill the time*)
- Begin with introductions:
 - name (if not everyone is well known to one another)

- what is on your heart and mind?
- the person speaking chooses the next person
- Set the frame:
 - remind participants to enjoy the gift of time and conversation by avoiding other
 - distractions
 - revisit the key general principles above
- It always helps to read a passage aloud
- Layer your questions: be patient, each layer builds upon the next
 - What does the text say? (sometimes we read the same thing different ways)
 - What does the text mean? (sometimes we interpret the text differently)
 - What does the text mean to me? (sometimes we apply the texts to ourselves differently)
 - What does the text mean for us? (we may have different understandings of what the text means for living in community)
 - What does the text mean for society? (we may have different approaches to what the text implies for action in society)

Some helpful tips to keep the conversation going (for discussion leaders and participants):

- "say more about that"
- "where do you see that in the text?"
- "how is that related to what N said earlier?"
- "do you think that's true?"
- "do others see it the same way?"
- "what did you see in the text that we haven't addressed?"



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
executive leadership
SEMINARS

Visit [aspeninstitute.org/programs/executive-leadership-development/](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/executive-leadership-development/) to learn more