

Statement of Strength

by Cynthia Kneen

In Akira Kurosawa's film *Kagemusha: The Shadow Warrior* there is a medieval battle scene filmed from a cliff above the plains where a fight between two clans is taking place. A great warrior and his generals are seated on the cliff so they can see and be seen by their troops. In the scene the great warrior is a "shadow warrior," an imposter chosen by the clan's leaders because he looks like the true warrior. No one but the inner circle knows that the true warrior has died. This shadow warrior is a gentle peasant with a big heart. From time to time he gasps as he watches the carnage of dying men and dying horses on the plains beneath him. Each time he gasps, the generals command him, "Hold, hold." He composes himself, then he gasps again. They say, "Hold, hold." It's a fabulous scene. He sits there choicelessly with his soft and gentle heart and also an attitude of strength, stillness, balance, and command.

When you take your seat in meditation, you are like this shadow warrior. Your approach is that you are a dignified person. You are sane, regal, and worthwhile as you are, and it is fully natural for you just to sit and be with an open heart. Your attitude is not to escape what's happening, but to get into it. Your intention is to open your senses, engage fully in what you're doing, and proclaim your sanity. You have taken your seat and adopted a sense of command, like a great warrior taking your seat on a battlefield. There is a meditation phrase called *taking your seat*, and you can use this image of the great warrior to remember it.

The most important meditation instruction is to have the attitude or view that you are sitting like a monarch. You are claiming your authority. You have gained perspective. You are in command of your life. This doesn't mean you are being fierce or stoic, or trying very hard. You are just sitting down on a chair, on a cushion, on the floor, on this earth, and being yourself. The traditional analogy for the meditation cushion is an imperial seat. The strength is that you are removing yourself from your ordinary concerns, bringing stillness and balance to your body and awareness to your mind. You aren't *doing* anything. You are simply making a statement of strength.

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