

I Remember Rosa Parks

C y n t h i a K n e e n



I remember Rosa Parks. As the civil rights movement was beginning in the United States, one day she said, “No, not today. I’m not going to the back of the bus today.” Day after day she went to the back of the bus, and then one day, “No, not today.” At that moment in that bus on that day I think Rosa Parks had meek, perky, outrageous, inscrutable dignity. If she had taken her action without an inner journey, I don’t think it would have had the same impact. Instead, her dignity that day was not simply Rosa Parks’ dignity, or African American dignity, or ex-slave dignity, or a woman’s dignity, or a poor person’s dignity, or a tired person’s dignity. It was everyone’s dignity—black dignity, white dignity, yellow dignity, brown dignity, red dignity, tired dignity, slave dignity, slave owner dignity, young dignity, old dignity, poor dignity, rich dignity. Every human being could stand a little taller because that day, without rage, without animosity, without shame, without a small self, she said, “No, not today. I’m not going to the back of the bus today.”

No, not today. You can call this meek, perky, outrageous, inscrutable dignity, “Couldn’t care less.” Usually, *couldn’t care less* means just toss the coke can out of the car window. Just one-up the other person. Just steal what you want. “Nothing matters. I won’t get caught. Couldn’t care less.” But here couldn’t care less means you’re not trying to get something out of your action. You’re not trading tit for tat. It’s more generous than that. You act. You communicate. You take responsibility for the situation’s well being. You just do it. I once had a boss who said, “Don’t worry if people like you or not. They won’t like you anyway. Just do your job. Just try to move the company forward and be optimistic up until the day it doesn’t work.” Couldn’t care less. Meek, perky, outrageous, inscrutable dignity takes out your hope and fear. You go beyond yourself, are inspired, and that’s the dignity.

There is something in couldn’t care less that is essential to being a courageous, powerful and dignified human being. Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche said, “Couldn’t care less is what allows you to get up in the morning and work for others’ benefit without having a stake in the outcome. It allows you to transcend grasping. It allows you to take a fresh look. Without it you wouldn’t be able to go beyond the dogma of basic goodness and really be of benefit.” The artist Marcel Duchamp said that as an artist he created a work, but once the work was finished it was out of his hands. It no longer belonged to him, so he never listened to the critics. It’s not that he felt superior. It’s that now his work belonged to the public—couldn’t care less.

Couldn’t care less is caring enormously. It is relaxing, expanding and working with whatever comes up. Couldn’t care less lets you step into fear. Couldn’t care less provides the strength you need to shrug off your commentator and your cocoon. Couldn’t care less allows you to open your senses and enjoy. Couldn’t care less allows you to live and die with dignity. Couldn’t care less means every moment is not separate from basic goodness. There is a totality of basic goodness in everything you do. Basic goodness depends on nothing. It just is what it is. Therefore your integrity, dignity, courage and character are their own proof. Your genuineness is beyond logic—couldn’t care less.

With meek, perky, outrageous, inscrutable dignity you are not trying to win over the other person or conquer the world. Everything is more carefree and egoless than that. You work tirelessly with everything, yet you do what you do for its own sake, so reality takes place directly. Your action is powerful, because you couldn’t care less.

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"Couldn't care less lets you step into fear."

There is a phrase in show business—"Do your best, and forget about the rest." This expresses basic goodness and couldn't care less. "Do your best" is your activity in the moment, which always has purpose. And, "Forget about the rest" is the wisdom that you don't live for a purpose. You live because you live. Because of the pervasiveness of basic goodness, you can actually relax and celebrate your life. An interviewer said to Fred Astaire, "It must be wonderful to be able to express yourself!" And he replied, "I don't dance to express myself. I dance because I dance." This is meek, perky, outrageous, inscrutable dignity and couldn't care less. When Mother Theresa said, "God doesn't want you to succeed, he only wants you to try," she was expressing immense purpose and couldn't care less. When a lion roars in the jungle, all the other animals stop and listen. The lion isn't roaring to intimidate the other creatures. It roars because it roars, because that's what lions do. They are kings of the jungle, and they couldn't care less.

Relaxing your *concept* of vision into the *practice* of your everyday life is attaining dignity and couldn't care less. The message of Buddhism, Shambhala and other wisdom traditions is that you can relax into general, non-specific goodness. This is how to create a dignified atmosphere around you and a decent common ground between you and your world.

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