

## Honor or Shame - Harmony or Harm

Have you heard these phrases lately?

I must defend my honor;

He's an honorable person;

He was received with honors;

She graduated with honors;

You dishonor me;

He received a Dishonorable Discharge.

There are plenty more. Add some yourself.

It is clear, the word Honor can be used as a noun and a verb.

It is also used as a state of being.

What is Honor?

Webster's and Oxford define the word in similar fashion.

Honor - Webster's:

(n.) - a good name or public esteem; a showing of merited respect;

(v.) - to regard or treat with respect; to live up to the terms of a commitment.

Honor - Oxford:

(n.) - high respect; glory; nobleness of mind;

(v.) - adherence to what is right or to a conventional standard of conduct.

Combine these definitions and it could be read that, one's being in the state of honor means they are within or part of a sphere of cyclic harmony. "Their good deeds bring honor upon themselves. So, today we honor XX for the great benefits they provide our community."

To be in a state of honor is a peaceful place, a harmonious place. All is well. Life is beautiful. We are honorable people. We know it and they know it. Nice feeling is it not? But, how did we get to this place - to be described by the word Honor as a noun? Answer: we became a verb. Our actions, our methods, our beliefs have directed us to treat others with respect; or, to adhere to expected conduct; or, to fulfill our commitments to others and to the sphere of influence we are a part of. These are qualities right out of the dictionary definitions.

Honor is an ancient virtue which indigenous societies have lived by. When each society member exists in a state of honor, that community remains in harmony. All

assist the community, attend to their commitments, and do not shatter the fabric that holds together that community. To maintain this state of affairs, these societies need the community as a whole to respond with the same rhythm. That rhythm includes the adherence to the expected norms established by the community as a whole. Even as each member exhibits their individualism, they also understand and exhibit their allegiance and alliance to the community's standards. It is a cycle. When one is in the state of honor, they have acted honorably (v.), and they receive an honor (n.) for those actions. They in turn, return the esteem of that honor (n.) by continuing to act honorably (v.) - the cycle of individual and community harmony.

The reader may wonder how this is different from living by the laws established for their own community. The difference is this: most laws as we know them are not made by the community as a whole. Those laws are made by representatives who are placed in the lawmaking function by a majority of that community. There is no discussion, consensus and agreement by the community as a whole. "This law is on the books, now abide by it!" This opens the door for individuals to not share in the rhythm of the community, either by their own choice, or by exclusionary initiatives established by those laws. This provides an opening for individuals to act as outsiders to the expectations of that sphere of community.

Okay, how does this relate to Honor?

When one or more individuals operate outside of that cycle, harmony is disrupted. A "dissonance" or noise creates an interference to the rhythm of the community. Now, there is a problem. The fabric becomes stretched or broken. The individual enters into a state opposite to Honor. They have become dishonorable, and enter the state of dishonor. What is dishonor? In many indigenous societies that is the state of Shame. Now we need a definition, and a return to Webster's and Oxford.

Shame - Webster's:

(n.) - something that brings censure or reproach; a painful emotion caused by a consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, impropriety, disgrace, disrepute.

(v.) - to bring shame to; to force by feeling guilty.

Shame - Oxford:

(n.) - a state of disgrace, discredit, or intense regret;  
a thing that is wrong or regrettable.

(v.) - bring shame on; make ashamed; force by shame.

The reader may see this acting outside of the sphere as inconsequential. For

societies which rely on its members responding with the same rhythm, this outside action is consequential. Again, it may seem this is an ancient or aboriginal concept not related to contemporary societies. Think. If we were a community of ten, and one member decided to step to a different rhythm, contrary to the expected norms, that one member represents ten percent. How about two individuals, or three? Three now raises the ratio to near one-third. Does the rhythm then wobble? Does it become out of tolerance? The fabric of the community is harmed. Harm is an opposite to harmony. Harm can cause chaos. Harm can cause destruction. Harm disrupts the current and future course of the community.

If the outsider is a true believer in that specific sphere of community, then they have shamed themselves by their actions. The community sees that member in the state of shame. Check the definitions above. So, what to do? Does the community punish or remove the member for acting outside the norm? Is that always the best solution? Does punishment work? Does removal create a long term solution? Some might say, the punishment sets an example for others. Some might counter, that punishment angers others who do not agree with that punishment. Result: a lack of harmony, and an advancement in dissonance. Then, what about removal? Sometimes removal is required to protect the community from further shameful actions, especially when they cannot be altered. But consider: is it not better to assist that member to return to the state of honor? True, not all outside actions can be returned to honorable. When it is possible, the community has a part in assisting that return.

That member who has acted outside the norm, may have specific and legitimate reasons, concerns, disputes, or oppositions to the norms. That member needs to be heard by the community. That member also needs to hear from the community the reasons for their existence, and the community's concerns. Now this becomes a dialogue. Dialogue is not punishment. It is a quest for a return to harmony. It is a healing of the harm that caused the break in the rhythm. Through dialogue comes understanding, and a resolution to assist that member in removing the shame of their actions, and returning to honor. The cycle of harmony then can be restored. It is a restoration that is formed by discussion, consensus and agreement by all parties concerned - the individual member and the community of members. This is a restorative solution. It is a method used for centuries. Somehow, the twentieth century lost that ability. There is no reason it cannot be brought back.

Best Regards to All

Chaplain on Signal Mountain  
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