

Of the Two Witnesses, Hold the Principal One

In any situation there are two witnesses: other people's view of you and your own view of yourself. Of those, the principal witness is your own insight. You should not go along with other people's opinion of you. The practice of this slogan is always be true to yourself.

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You know best about yourself, so you should work with yourself constantly. This is based on trusting your intelligence rather than trusting yourself, which could be very selfish. It is trusting your intelligence by knowing who you are and what you are. You know yourself so well, therefore any deception could be cut through. If someone congratulates or compliments you, they may not know your entire existence. So you should come back to your own judgment, to your own sense of your expression and the tricks you play on others and on yourself. This is not self-centered, it is self-inspired from the point of view of the nonexistence of the ego. You just witness what you are. You are simply witnessing and evaluating the merit, rather than going back over it in a Jungian or Freudian way.

From Training the Mind & Cultivating Loving-Kindness by Chogyam Trungpa ,

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The next slogan, "Of the two witnesses, hold the principal one," is saying that one witness is everybody else giving you their feedback and opinions (which is worth listening to, there's some truth in what people say) but the principal witness is yourself. You're the only one who knows when you're using things to protect yourself and keep your ego together and when you're opening and letting things fall apart, letting the world come as it is - working with it rather than struggling against it. You're the only one who knows.

From Start Where You Are : A Guide to Compassionate Living by Pema Chodron,

Of the Two Judges, Rely on the Principal One

For other people to see you as a dharma person is one judge, but ordinary people do not know what is hidden in your mind and may just be taking joy in certain improvements in the way you act. One sign of proficiency in mind training is that there is never any shame or embarrassment about your state of mind. Consequently, do not be attached to the judgment of others, but rely principally on the judge of mind itself.

From The Great Path of Awakening : An Easily Accessible Introduction for Ordinary People by Jamgon Kongtrul, translated by Ken McLeod.

Maintain the Chief of the Two Witnesses

The two witnesses are others and oneself, and both have some value. It is worthwhile to heed other people's estimation of us, but, as Sechibuwa swiftly points out, it is not the chief of the two witnesses. We can pull the wool over other people's eyes, either intentionally or unintentionally by showing our best side regardless of what is going on inside. Others are to be taken into account, but the chief witness is our own internal awareness. With careful, honest introspection we can judge the quality not only of our physical and verbal behavior, but also of our own private mental activity. We ourselves are the principal witness of whether our Mind Training is authentic and working properly.

Excerpted from: The Seven-Point Mind Training (first published as A Passage from Solitude : Training the Mind in a Life Embracing the World), by B. Alan Wallace.

Retain the Two Witnesses of Foremost Importance.

The first is the external witness of other people who observe our outward behavior and appearance. If our practice is developing well, others will judge us by our actions and will easily see whether our Dharma has been taken to heart or is merely on the tip of our tongue. If we are truly practicing, our gross emotional afflictions will decrease and our outward behavior will improve. However, this witness is not fully reliable because it is possible to deceive others by outwardly spouting clever words and pretending to be meditating and studying, while inwardly not engaging in any practice at all.

Therefore, the second witness is our spiritual master who embodies the Three Supreme Jewels and who is not separate at all from the intrinsic nature of our mind. If we are aware of this inner witness, who understands everything that is to be known, we shall realize that he is more strict and exact than the external one. If we are fully confident in the purity of our motivation and have no reason to feel ashamed in regard to this inner witness, this is a certain sign that we are truly following the teachings. However, if our practice is superficial and we deceive others into thinking we are sincere, we shall be concerned that the outer witness will see through our pretension. In this case we have convinced one witness, but not the most important one. Both should be present and undecieved.

The most essential thing is actually to practice by applying the truth of the teachings to every aspect of our life. Although learning Dharma is virtuous conduct, it is insufficient. We must meditate and cultivate the awakening mind continually. The Dharma is like food: we gain no benefit from merely looking at it. To receive its full value we must digest it through meditation and integration into our lives.

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Rely on the Better of the Two Witnesses

If we have succeeded in making a sufficiently good impression of ourselves that others say, 'This person has practiced Bodhicitta very well,' then this may be regarded as one kind of testimony. But if we think about it, we can see that unless such people have the ability to read our minds, our mental processes are hidden from them; they cannot know whether or not we have applied all the antidotes. Therefore we should examine ourselves, to see whether in fact we are less angry, less attached to ego, and whether we have been able to practice the exchange of happiness and suffering. That is the main testimony we should rely on. We should live in such a way that we always have a clear conscience.

Milarepa said 'My religion is to have nothing to be ashamed of when I die'. But the majority of people do not give any importance to this way of thinking. We pretend to be very calm and subdued and are full of sweet words, so that ordinary people, not knowing our thoughts, say, 'This is a real Bodhisattva.' But it is only our outward behavior that they see.

The important thing is not to do anything that we might have to regret later on. Therefore we should examine ourselves honestly. Unfortunately, our ego-clinging is so gross that, even if we do possess some small quality, we think that we are wonderful. On the other hand, if we have some great defect, we do not even notice it. There is a saying that, 'On the peak of pride the water of good qualities does not stay.' So, we should be very meticulous. If, after thoroughly examining ourselves, we can put our hands on our hearts and honestly think, 'My actions are all right,' then that is a sign that we are getting some experience in Mind Training.

From Enlightened Courage, by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.