

The Delicate Little Flower

On why a private practice stays fragile until it has been used under real conditions — and what changes when it finally goes load-bearing.

When I first came to this work I was a photographer in the newspaper world. I had worked with the same people for years before I found the temple, and I went on working with them afterward. Same desks, same deadlines, same people. The only thing that had changed was everything happening on the inside of me.

And I said nothing about it.

Not because anyone forbade it. Because I didn't trust what would happen if I did. The whole thing — the practices, the reading, the new sense of who I actually was — felt like a delicate little flower I was carrying around in both hands. If someone had laughed, or asked a sharp question, or simply looked at me strangely, I wasn't sure the flower would survive it. So I kept it out of the room.

I've come to understand that this wasn't cowardice. It was accurate.

“It wasn't part of me enough that I knew that I could sort of weather the storm. The roots weren't deep enough and the flowers weren't big enough.”

TIM O. DAVIS

I hadn't yet lived enough life through this new way of seeing to know how I would respond when something came at me. I had the concepts. I did not have the experience of the concepts holding under load. And there is a real difference between believing something and having watched it work.

Here is the part worth noticing, because I see it constantly. In those moments of insecurity about the practice — when it feels unproven and slightly embarrassing — **the ego comes back in strong**. It has to. Something has to protect you, and if the new thing isn't sturdy yet, the old thing steps in. So you get a person who meditates in the morning and is unrecognizable by two in the afternoon. Not a hypocrite. Someone whose roots aren't deep yet.

Almost everyone I work with is running this exact arrangement. They are, by any external measure, doing extremely well. And they have an interior life they have never once mentioned at work. A meditation habit they keep to themselves. A book they've read four times that they would never leave on the desk. A growing suspicion that the way they are using their authority is costing them something they can't name.

They are carrying the flower in both hands, in a building full of people who don't know it's there.

I want to be careful, because the obvious advice is wrong. **The answer is not to announce it.** Walking into a leadership meeting and declaring your spiritual practice is not integration; it is a different kind of ego move, and it usually gets the flower crushed faster. Roots do not deepen because you exposed the plant.

What actually happens is slower and much less dramatic. You keep practicing. You keep bringing awareness to the moments where you get pulled — the email that lands wrong, the person who talks over you, the number that comes in low. You do it privately, ten thousand times, and each time the practice holds you a little, the roots go down a little further. Not because you tried to grow roots. Because you used the thing under real conditions.

Then at some point — and you don't schedule this — someone says something difficult and you notice you didn't flinch. You didn't manage your reaction; there wasn't one to manage. You responded from somewhere quieter, it worked, and the room didn't fall apart. That is a root going down.

Enough of those and something changes. The practice stops being a delicate thing you protect and becomes a thing that protects you. It stops being a compartment. And for anyone who holds real authority, here is why that matters: at that point **it stops costing you anything to be whole**. You are no longer managing two selves, spending energy on the seam between them. The person who meditates and the person who runs the meeting are the same person, and the meeting goes better for it.

That is what I mean when I say wholeness is a strength rather than a virtue. It is not a moral achievement. It is the removal of an enormous, invisible operating expense.

I don't think the goal is to bring your practice to work. I think the goal is to become someone whose practice cannot be left at home. The flower doesn't need to be defended. It needs to be grown. Those are different jobs, and only one of them is yours.

THE PRACTICE

Don't announce the practice. Use it on small things, privately, for a long time — until there is no version of you that operates without it.