

Mission – May 1, 2003

It would be difficult, during the days since the war began, to avoid hearing and seeing information about the war and anything remotely connected to it. One thing that stands out to me each time I hear a briefing from a military leader is focus on and commitment to mission. These leaders do not miss an opportunity to refer to mission and to place the reports of the various actions into the larger context of mission. Initially I smiled to myself as I heard this, having a tendency to dismiss it as justification. But the more I thought about it, I began to realize that this is really what it's all about. Now whether or not you agree with this war and its actions, the principle of staying focused on mission is relevant. Progress of any kind breaks down when focus on mission is lost.

We were painfully reminded of this in Viet Nam when, for various reasons, our soldiers were often left without a clear sense of mission. The effects were at times demoralizing and too often resulted in loss of efficiency, less than complete commitment to the task at hand, and even mutiny amongst the ranks. My Lai is an extreme example of the bewilderment and confusion that takes over in the absence of clear mission. The American Experience says, "A military commission investigating the My Lai massacre found widespread failures of leadership, discipline, and morale among the Army's fighting units." While there were certainly other factors contributing to these failures, loss of focus on mission was surely elemental.

In a recent news briefing regarding the current war, Brigadier General Vincent Brooks said, "There will always be things that occur on the battlefield that are not precisely what you calculated them to be in your design, but the strength of a plan is the ability to adapt it to the realities of the circumstances while still remaining focused on what it is we seek to do." (Italics supplied)

I was struck by the simple truth of that statement, and I was reminded of its relevance to us as we continue to advance the front in the spiritual war in which we are engaged. Are we learning from our day-to-day experiences and are we adapting our methods while remaining focused on our mission? I believe that the ability to remain flexible within the context of mission is essential to spiritual growth and development, both individually and collectively.

It's been said that a mind is like a parachute - it only works when it is open; and that a mind, like a diaper, ought to be changed when that which it contains begins to stink.

What is your mission? Is it more important to you than anything else? Do you constantly review your methods in light of your mission and then adapt where necessary to better accomplish that mission, or are you, as was mentioned last month, doing the same things over and over again and expecting a different result?

When we were young, the substance of what we disliked most in some who were in authority was their apparent intractability - their resolute refusal to consider the possibility that maybe there was an alternate way - that possibly the goal could better be accomplished with more appropriate methods

Now we are the ones in authority. If you could be at once your current self and your teenage self, how would the younger view the older?

Now there's a challenging mission.