

# POWER AND VULNERABILITY

by Stewart Blackburn

Having just been dealing with some serious infections and all that goes into healing them, I have been focused recently on my own vulnerability. As a student of consciousness and power, I am confronted by the fact that no set of techniques or knowledge will fully protect me from the challenges of life. Sometimes I deeply want to master life so well that these vulnerabilities disappear.

Upon deeper reflection, however, it is these vulnerabilities, and all the others we encounter in life, that form the basis for our existence. We often perceive vulnerabilities as risks and jeopardies that threaten our peace and safety. They are weaknesses in our defense against the dark forces of life. Vulnerabilities are the places in our lives where we can be hurt, both physically and emotionally. But, without vulnerabilities we would have no challenges, no new growth, no exploration of who we are. The vulnerabilities are the context in which we learn about our power.

Power is the ability to get things done. It is about choosing the most effective path to fulfill our desires. And it is the accumulation of wisdom, the understanding of what works and what doesn't work. Sometimes power involves knowing how to use energies in useful ways. Sometimes it revolves around patience and acceptance. And sometimes power is just the will to keep going, despite conditions that would impede us.

We use our power to deal with the inevitable challenges that beset us. These challenges are there because of our vulnerabilities. Some part of our life is threatened. It might simply be that our comfort is.

We don't use our power to eliminate all challenges. We can't, and we don't really want to. The urge to surmount all our vulnerabilities is certainly natural enough; how nice it would be to live lives of ease and comfort. However, the existential imperative to grow and explore could never be suppressed so much that we could ignore it totally.

While we may get used to the idea that we need some challenges in our lives, there is the temptation to view power as the way to reduce our vulnerability to next to

nothing. We seek power to make our lives more secure and less scary. We work to gain power over the natural world like a cosmic insurance policy.

What this view of power misses is the nature of what frightens us. Our bodies may be in jeopardy in some fashion. One crucial factor is the choices we made to be where we are now. When we are afraid of what might happen to us, we are saying to ourselves that we don't trust our ability to handle things that might come up. We are saying that we aren't capable of dealing with the reality that we have put ourselves in.

This mistrust of our own abilities is an inner fear, a fear of the deeper parts of our being. We are very capable beings in general and have the capacity to deal with most anything. But when we are frightened on the inside, we typically project that danger to whatever is outside of us. We frame our situation as vulnerability to the physical world.

However, recognizing that what we fear most is who we are, we can face our inner fears and use our immense power to take care of whatever problems may seem to be oversetting us. It is these seeming vulnerabilities that show us where to look to increase our real power – the power to handle what confronts us, not to eliminate the vulnerabilities. When we use the vulnerabilities as a call to a deeper understanding of ourselves, we grow and develop in ways that lead to other powers, many of which we find with new vulnerabilities to learn from.

Some of the powers that are most useful to us come in the form of accepting the changing conditions in our lives. The power to accept change is an often overlooked one that deserves more attention. Resisting change is not real power, it is very much a false one. There is no real way to avoid change; resistance is futile. But, understanding how to choose from and organize the new probabilities is a great power indeed!

The power to choose what probabilities we would prefer, *in advance*, is one that is easy to forget in the midst of actually taking care of business. It is the power of asking a "parking angel" to make available a good space for us to park in. It is the power of expecting to have a good time at a party or to have a successful sales presentation. It is the power of loving ourselves so much that others can't help but love us too. These powers don't fight against vulnerability; they work within the context of vulnerability. We allow ourselves to acknowledge the vulnerability of life and proceed as best we can in spite of it.

I will probably get infections again in my life, and they may cause me to slow down even more. But I embrace these vulnerabilities for what they teach me about myself, especially about my own power. Thank you, vulnerability!

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