

Journey of Finding Integrity in Oneself

By Haidi Song

I have been doubtful in my purposes in my journey of achieving a doctoral degree when I experienced so many adversities: the first time I was treated unequally because of my race and country of origin; the first time spending all days and nights in reading but can barely complete assignments; the first time worrying about graduation and money income as a 28-year-old woman without meeting the expectations of parents: getting married or having a stable job; and the first time struggling so deeply with my own belief but expelled from the fellowship group because I was considered so sinful. I have never met a life period that I come across such intense frustration, discrimination and sadness. I wanted to shout at those who picked on my race and nationality, but I also had to remind myself I don't treat people in the way they treated me and become someone I hate so much. I wanted to isolate and escape from my work and from the environment filled with racism, sexism, xenophobia, and ignorant hatred; but there were so many uncontrollable things keep me moving forward and outside to get in touch with others.

During the days I internalized voices of doubt and shame, during the days I am confused with what I learned about therapy and intervention, something turned into my conscious awareness and knowledge that I would not pay attention to in the past. Until one day, my advisor looked at me and said, I am sorry that you are in such deep pain, but maybe it will make you a better therapist; until one day, my another advisor who is teaching our practicum said, isn't pain the best gift of a relationship so that we know we had cared a person so much; until one day, I took a class on health disparity and inequity and truly understood some of the concepts and wished to do something about it. It is such an exciting and enlightening moment and I finally found my research interest in cultural and diversity issues, which took years, besides the fact that this area could be my lifetime career goal! I realized maybe there is a reason why I moved to deep south and experienced microaggressions; and until one day I looked back on my early years in the doctoral program and found the connection between my passion and endeavor on training and supervision and the negative experiences I had in supervision. I found myself being more understanding to marginalized populations as a minority, more insightful and thoughtful of American cultures as an international student, and more respectful and grateful to my own culture as a Chinese. I know I wouldn't have gained these great qualities if I have not experienced these struggles at this life time. If I have not had deep struggles in my belief, I wouldn't have known the truth in my Believer or how strong my faith could be. There are reasons leading me to this journey. I would not have met so many people that meant so much in my life, being my teachers, mentors, friends and colleagues. Sometimes it is easy to get lost when I was embedded in an emotional moment and hard to think beyond five days or a semester.

This is not an easy journey; we all want to give up at some point. But the experiences we have are meaningful in many ways, and we will finally get more power when we complete the degree. It is more than a degree; it is an acknowledgment of our efforts. And when we have more

power, we will remember how to use it to empower more people, but not to abuse it. Maybe we will have the power to even change things we would like to change and have an influence on things we were negatively impacted. This is also a journey to find the integrity in ourselves: to know what we should do and avoid things we should not do. We don't have to be influenced by the adversity, to be numb to others or to adapt to the power system or adverse environment, but to protect our honesty, kindness and wise heart; because there is a better place that deserves all these qualities and we don't want to waste these gifted talents. I am also grateful that because of the struggles I had, I had met people who gave me support, who shared laughter, tears and dreams with me. In many ways we were deeply connected along the journey. I am not grateful for the people who hurt me or the ignorance running around them; but I am grateful for the transformation people and my Believer brought to me and the strengths I was given. Now at the 4th year in my doctoral career, I finally know that I will build confidence and competence one day. I have a sense of how to do great therapy. I discovered a true interest in research areas that is coming from life and reality. And there are many ways I can connect to others and help people who like me in the past.

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