

HOLDING LIFE PRECIOUS: The Act of Bowing by Russell Delman From April 2009 newsletter

My friend James has cancer; a shortened life is now predicted. A student named Susan was misdiagnosed, her apparent cancer is gone. Everyday in small and large ways our life moves from circumstances that disappoint us to those that bring relief and joy.

How can we live with this ever-changing reality?

In my seminars and in my life I enjoy, value and even depend on the simple inner/outer gesture of bowing.

The act of bowing is not just a formalized ritual. It is the embodied expression of our intention to place the reality of Life above our hopes, dreams, and desires. This does not mean that we do not have these hopes, dreams, desires- they are also part of the fabric of our life. Bowing means that we place the reality of our life above these hopes/dreams/desires when they are not synchronous. Of course by 'bowing' I mean both the physical act and more importantly, the inner gesture of saying Yes to "what is" without denying ANY of the reactions that arise in relation to what is. This is called living out the reality of our Life/Self. It is also called humility.

Living out the reality of our Life means that EVERYTHING we encounter is our Self, which is exactly the same as saying everything we experience is our Life. Normally we separate out our Life and our Self, as if we have this thing called a Self that lives in encounter with something called "my body" and that this Self meets what we call our Life.

Actually this is a big error and leads to a lot of trouble. Everything you encounter is your Self/Life. You are inseparable from the reality of your Life as it is arising in your personal circumstances. Yet these personal individual circumstances are an expression of Life itself. This can be called UNIVERSAL SELF through which we are all interconnected and yet we each have our individual experiences of this grand interconnectedness.

Please do not think this is abstract philosophy. I am addressing the actual pain, worry, fear, self-judgments, anger and anxiety that arise in our daily life. Just as the weather changes so do our circumstances. This will be true forever. How do we step back and remember the truth of this Self/Life that both includes and is free from these changing circumstances? How do we

enact this larger understanding?

When we bow, our heart is accepting our personal limitations as we simultaneously sense this Universal Self. In the Christian world it is the gesture of saying "Thy will not my will". In the Dharma world it is acknowledging that right here, right now Buddha Nature (Universal Self) is functioning through me. In both cases, even when there is pain or sorrow, there is no sense that something is fundamentally "wrong".

My friend James has cancer. It is virulent and many thoughts/feelings arise from this diagnosis. A student named Susan recently heard that a cancer diagnosis was inaccurate; her tests were confused with those of another person. Clearly, we who love them feel sadness, concern, relief and elation in connection with the differing circumstances. YET, beyond positive/negative and heaven/hell is the overwhelming truth that each is living the reality of Life/Self. We do not need to downplay our feeling responses in order to ALSO place reality above our preferences. At a fundamental level, Love-Peace-Truth-Joy are alive within all these circumstances. This is the cutting edge of the awakening life! We bow to Life itself!

Heaven or Hell, love or hate  
No matter where I turn  
I meet myself. Ho  
Holding life precious is  
Just living with all intensity  
Holding life precious.

-Kosho Uchiyama Roshi