

Gratitude and Awe

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“So happy just to be alive, underneath this sky of blue.”
-- Bob Dylan, “New Morning”

Gratitude is what we naturally feel when our heart is open.

In my life long interest for opening my heart/mind I have explored many different and varied paths to wholeness. For a few months a number of years ago, I practiced Tibetan Buddhism. Each morning, I would arise and sit in meditation for a few minutes to get centered in myself, and then I would contemplate the precious opportunity I had to engage in a spiritual practice that had the potential for liberating my being. The contemplation took a very specific form: I reflected on my place in the universe and on how difficult and rare it is to be born as a human being in the vast reaches of space and time. I imagined a sea turtle swimming in the ocean, and coming up for air only once every 100 years. And on the surface of the ocean was a small white ring, just large enough for the sea turtle to poke his head through. Then I appreciated the fact that the chances of being born as a human being and having the possibility of awakening to my True Nature – the unbounded, innate joy, freedom, clarity, and spontaneity of the enlightened mind latent within us all -- were less than the chances of that sea turtle poking his head through that ring. This vision of human birth as a rare and special opportunity awakened a deep feeling of being very grateful just to be alive in a time and place where I can have this most precious experience.

As a human being, I not only have the opportunity to realize my True Nature – to know God – but I also have the rare opportunity to share love with another human being, to know the exquisite tenderness, sweetness, and joy of loving and being loved. I can choose to develop myself, both personally and spiritually – to access and embody the essential qualities of being human – awareness, curiosity and openness, love and compassion, wisdom and discrimination, intuition, inspiration and vision, will/power, courage, determination, vulnerability, willingness to risk, authenticity, spontaneity and creativity, passion and aliveness, forgiveness, joy, peace, and faith (in oneself and God/the Universe) – the “full catastrophe,” as Zorba the Greek put it. I can experience

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the full range of human emotion, opening fully to love, joy, sorrow, fear and anger. I have the opportunity to experience the joy of healing on all levels – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. (All too often have I observed how inattention to healing on any of these levels leads to imbalances in the body-mind that eventually manifest on the physical level in the form of some dis-ease.) And I can give to the world the gifts I came here to give.

I consider it a great blessing in my life to be actively involved in liberating myself from the delusive beliefs that keep me bound in suffering. (The most fundamental delusion is that “I” am a self separate from others and the world around me.) I also am blessed in being able to help others in their quest of free themselves of the causes of their suffering. I do this in one-on-one and group sessions with students of Heartwork. I also do this in the public and private Heartwork weekends, intensives, and retreats that I facilitate. Here, my job is to work both with individuals in their struggle to get free, and, at the same time, to orchestrate the group energy for the maximum benefit of all present. In workshops, by a combination of focus of attention, personal effort, and group energy, personal transformations of consciousness are often much more rapid and sometimes dramatic.

In an Intensive, where the openings are the most dramatic, each participant arrives with answers to three questions:

1. Why are you here?/ What do you want?/ What is your intention for yourself for the Intensive?
2. What do you need to do to fulfill your intention?
3. How can the group support you in your efforts?

On the first evening, participants share their answers to these questions, and then break up into small groups – ideally of four people all of whom feel they can support and be supported by each other in their quests to fulfill their intentions. It is primarily in these small groups that the deep healing work occurs – where people access those places in themselves where they split from themselves long ago (because something occurred in their life that was too painful or frightening to fully experience at the time), and reintegrate the split-off part, regaining their wholeness in that place in themselves.

The following morning, I tell the participants that behind their intentions is a deep yearning for freedom, wholeness, love, peace, truth, etc. – the “yellow brick road” back home to themselves. All they have to do is to surrender into that yearning and let it carry them back home to themselves. And then I orchestrate.

We work together, in a unified effort to get free of the mental and emotional chains of delusive beliefs and the distressing emotions that result from these beliefs, which, together, keep us in bondage. (The most fundamental delusion is that “I” am a self separate from others and the Universe, all other beliefs – like I’m a bad or worthless or unlovable person, or I have to struggle to get what I need in life, or the world is a harsh place – about who I am and what life is about following from this. Pain, fear, and anger

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are the disturbing emotions that follow from these beliefs.) My work is to meet the intensity of each participant's efforts with an equal or greater intensity of my own. One by one each expression is allowed and we all merge in a spirit of trust and loving acceptance that welcomes the opening our hearts and minds together. It is the most beautiful thing I have ever witnessed – and I'm privileged to witness it over and over again.

One person will break through their chains and get free emotionally, mentally and/or spiritually (to one degree or another), and will then naturally want to help others get free. A kind of domino effect expands as people feel safe opening to themselves and others and helping each other get what they came for, and so much more.

And I get to watch the unfolding of the human spirit right before my eyes. It is truly awesome. And I am always filled with gratitude, both because I have this most precious opportunity, but also because my heart/mind is opening along with theirs. At the end of an Intensive the group is awakened to a renewed expression of love, freedom and gratitude with and for all with whom they shared this awakening and they feel ready to approach life with new joy, enthusiasm and commitment.

If you feel a sense of loss of gratefulness in your life, here's a little exercise that may help you to regain the some of what you've lost or improve what you have. See if you can remember a time in your life when you experienced gratitude. Go back into that experience as completely as you possibly can: see who and what were there around you, hear the sounds, smell the smells, sense the sensations.... Let go into this memory and dwell there for a while. Then ask yourself, "What's in the way of my living in this state of being?" Notice what you can see about what prevents you from dwelling in this state. Once you see how you take yourself out of this pure state of being, you become free to choose how you want to live.

*Ten thousand flowers in spring,
the moon in autumn,
a cool breeze in summer,
snow in winter.*

*If your mind isn't clouded
by unnecessary things,
this is the best season of your life.*

Wu-Men

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