

*The great gifts of life can only be experienced through opening our hearts to “what is”.  
“Never confuse the ‘is-ness’ of an old order with the ‘ought-ness’ of a new order”*

## **Celebrating and Mourning**

**Russell Delman June 2, 2020**

I am grateful for the many responses to my recent writing titled: “*Screaming and Bowing*”. In this reflection, I will respond to two of the frequent questions that arose:

*As an economically and socially privileged, white person, I feel guilty if I enjoy my life while there is so much suffering and inequity. Any advice?*

*When you say “bow to what is”, are you implying a pacifistic acceptance of current social and planetary conditions? You also evoke MLK who said we need to stand for the “oughtness” and not settle for the “isness”. Please explain.*

Thank you for highlighting these challenges for modern humanity. We live in paradox! For the first time in history, we have access, in real time, to many of the tragically painful situations that are happening, at every moment, throughout our planet. It seems right and important for our hearts to break, hopefully break-open, as we hear and see these events. Simultaneously, what is a well-lived life, if we do not know Love, Beauty, Joy, Peace and Gratitude? Almost all authentic spiritual practices and deeply felt human moments, bring the transcendent experience of our interconnection with and celebration of the gift of Life.

At this moment, I experience so much beauty. Taking in the sunlit shadows coming through the window, sensing the gift of this breath, seeing the colors and hearing the sounds of life, I want to say “thank you”, just for being alive. When Einstein said, “either everything is a miracle or nothing is”. I wonder if he might have been looking freshly at the shape of a leaf or the stars or noticing the kindness and caring of someone for a stranger. Is it too trite to say, “Life is a miracle”? Do I need to say “no” to wonder and gratitude, when also deeply troubled, even enraged, by what is occurring in the world?

*Awareness* is the ability to experience the moment AND know that we are experiencing it. We are the place – perhaps the only or, certainly one of the few places, that life becomes conscious of itself. For me this brings awe, wonder and a bow of gratitude.

We are vast, capable of experiencing many diverse feelings simultaneously. While pain might be in the foreground, joy and peace are in the background or vice versa. Our experience is multi-layered. Covid-19 or ugly human actions do not require us to close our minds and hearts to the ever-present goodness in this moment. Learning to shift our attention to include the multifarious expressions of a given moment seems essential to grow our capacity for love. As we stand up against “wrongness” with empathic caring, can we also sense and allow the unbridled joy of being alive.

Do I have a right, as a person who has benefited so much from the social order (white, male, able-bodied, economically stable, well-educated), to say that beauty, peace, joy, etc. are always present, either in the foreground or background?

So many of my heroes who have suffered greatly in prisons, concentration camps or other horrific circumstance and somehow discovered the essential goodness of life are from

oppressed groups. Is it somehow wrong to use these rare examples of the few as models of the potential of the many?

Might it be unhelpful but actually a dishonoring of the gift of life to ONLY feel the sorrow of a given situation? How do we expand enough, in our bodies, minds and hearts to give enough space for joy and sorrow, for the celebrating and the mourning?

In this moment, people just like you and me are suffering from individual and systemic acts of cruelty. We live in unfair, social systems in which right NOW children are hungry, women are being abused and many in power are making decisions that generate more and more suffering.

Can we celebrate a flower; really letting its beauty into our hearts AND at the same time, stand up for life, against all that is anti-life? If evil exists, it is no small thing that this word is “live” spelled backwards.

A worthy path - opening wider and wider to goodness and beauty, celebrating the gifts of life, as we commit wholeheartedly to a more just, sustainable, and loving world.

This commitment includes the powerful act of imagination, as all change begins with a newly imagined future. It also includes an intention to live deeply into the unique gift of this present moment. Further, it asks for actions, even small acts, that move in that direction.

My hope is that: engaging in conversations like this, making donations to relevant, reliable organizations and finding actions that can contribute to the “oughtness”, as we wholeheartedly celebrate the “isness”, will make a difference in our shared world.

Celebrating and mourning together, I thank you for reading and engaging in these subjects.

Russell