

Clowning as a Spiritual Path

-- Shobi Dobi

Rachel Naomi Remen, MD writes:

"Years ago, I was at a workshop with mythologist Joseph Campbell, and he was showing us pictures of the sacred. He showed us this wonderful bronze statue of the god Shiva, dancing. Inside a ring of flame the god was dancing. He had one foot in the air, and the other foot resting on the back of little man, who was crouched down in the dust, giving his full, absorbed attention to something he was holding between his hands. I asked Joseph Campbell, "What is that? What is that little guy doing down there?" Campbell said, "That's a little man who is so caught up in the study of the material world that he does not notice that the living god is dancing on his back."

"That little man is a health professional. That little man is the whole health care system. Our medical system has become overly focused on the body and the state of the body, but we are not our bodies. We have bodies, but we are not our bodies.

". . . What is the task of the medical system? Our modern view of disease is that disease is centered in the body. The older view of disease is that it is soul loss, a loss of connection, of meaning, of purpose, of essence. If this is so, the real tasks of the medical system is to heal soul loss, to aid in the retrieval of the soul. The entire culture is ill with soul loss.

". . . What is needed is not to bring spirit into our work, to develop more of a spiritual practice or to go to church more. Our task is to recognize that we are always on sacred ground, that there is no split between the sacred and secular. That the living god is dancing on our back. That there is no task that is not sacred in nature and no relationship that is not sacred in nature. Life is a spiritual practice. Health care, which serves life, is a spiritual practice."

As we enter the new millennium, there is a shift to the spiritual. Many will say "but look at all the corruption, extravagance, and waste." The Hindus call this an age of Kali Yuga – a time where the world will experience many catastrophes, and yet experience a great emergence of the spiritual. The time of the life of Christ was such an age. If you took the Roman togas off the politicians in A.D. by Robert Graves and put them in suits it would read like a contemporary novel!

We are rediscovering our connection with the earth and realizing that a lot more exists in our world than what we see with our eyes or hear with our ears. We are leaving that age where anything you cannot see in the light is called dark and evil. Consider the news from contemporary astronomers that 90% of the universe is what they call "dark matter" -- out in space it has cause and effect, but we do not know what it is as we do not have the receivers to perceive it. (e.g., if we don't have a radio receiver, we cannot pick up the radio waves and hear the music)

We are shifting from a vertical view to an expansive horizontal view of the worlds. Team is a big word in business today, even if many are still thinking vertical (boss), the trend is going to horizontal (team player). With this expanding view of our society we are exposing ourselves to infinite possibilities, not confining ourselves by categorizing or judging. This brings with it a shift from religious to spiritual, from categorizing and name calling to exploring possibilities and experiencing processes.

The Statement of Purpose of this newsletter states: "We recognize there are as many ways of being a caring clown as there are clown characters." We as clowns are given many "hats" to wear – Entertainer, Chaplain, Friend, Protagonist, Healer, Therapist, Clown Child Life Worker, Clown Aerobics, Clown Educators, Clown Firemen. The world is catching on that Clowns can teach, clowns can minister, and clowns can participate in healing. A hospital clown can go from one room as a chaplain, to another room to entertain, to another room as a friend, to the x-ray room to alleviate fear, to another room to just put a smile on a face or hold a frail hand. All this is clowning in our new age.

This is a plea to stop the old age forces of categorizing and naming. Lets be open to each other and respect all the work we do. Lets be aware of the cage of ideas and roles that will trap us into a limited view of clowning. That is one old hat we can put in the trash!

Laughter is like a cool, refreshing breeze passing through the source of all things.

--Yuan-Wo

There are many rivers in our hearts. There is a river of grief that runs through our lives and right next to it is a river of joy. When we are young and inexperienced in loss our river of joy is deep, wide and warm. The child plays, fantasies and splashes constantly in this river of joy. As we age, and experience loss, our river of grief becomes deeper. When we are preoccupied with loss, we stay in our river of grief. And often we forget our river of joy. It becomes shallow, dried up. But the river of joy is always there in everyone – joy is our heritage, joy is our birth right. The clown's responsibility is to remind us of our river of joy – to take us over to it and help us play in it.

There is such a great need for our services in the world today. People are ready. The new age is upon us. We only need to be present in whatever form we take. But let it be from our spirit and our rivers of joy that we respond.

Become a Master of Laughter

Every little piece of clowning we put out into the world strengthens the global river of joy. If it's making balloons at a hospital or being a highly trained CCU clown doctor or a Clown Child Life Therapist, we are clowns first. As clowns we belong to traditions that go back as far as man. Man is different from all other species because we can laugh! Laughter puts us back into our river of joy. Become a master of laughter. Let's not let the hats be our only point of identity, but our hearts.

Well, every spiritual path needs a few practices. If you are reading this newsletter, you are probably already practicing *Service*. If you have read the past newsletters, hopefully you are practicing "soft belly." It's not complicated. It is exactly what it says. Try softening your belly before you go into every challenge (like a hospital room). But how about getting up every morning and laughing out loud for five minutes. I've been trying this and it is amazing. I laugh so easily now at just about anything. That is, if I see something amusing, I just don't simply smile and my mind records "funny," my body actual belly laughs. I can't believe what a difference this has made in my life -- nothing like "practicing what we preach!"