

on friendship



I remember my Zen teacher, Otis Bronson, in 1974, with his weathered face and sharp eyes, looking at a room full of his fresh faced students. He was speaking about the spontaneous “no mind” of Zen. He assured us, with a somewhat weary old salty soul sort of a sigh, that we should acquire some thoughts to liberate; that it is experience which fuels meaningful intuitive expression. One must know what it is that one believes in the first place. (Or that is how the filter of time brings the gist of it to my mind----I wish I could remember his exact words.)

30 years, and then some more years went by, and well, now I am older, and in my mind I have been compiling a list of things I believe. It's a long list---it starts out with, “I believe in compost. To give back and regenerate; to nurture the earth even in some small way; to gain an elastic rapport with this incomprehensible richness...” and the list of loving (or believing) continues from there.

But for the last year and a month and a day, I've mostly been thinking about friends I have known---since friends have left behind their bones and been mourned and that mourning has made the hearts of those left behind more tender with exquisite awareness of the impermanent changing nature of life.

As I look over my life and remember the friends that still ring in my heart, whether they live embodied as I re-call, or have passed into some configuration unknown, one thing only has said, “This is a true friend.” And by that same measure, I know when I have had the capacity. It's a simple thing, so easy to take for granted. It is no matter how individual changes touch& spur & shock & bemuse one another---drifting away,



losing touch, question mark, falling out, coming too close or not close enough, silent withdrawals, falling apart, even maybe some yelling or wrestling might occur...& then if one is lucky or crazy or both or neither, circling around to say hello again, maybe for moment of perfect empathy.

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Throughout all of our digressions, one thing remains the same: a simple affection that wishes the best of all things for one's friend.

To put this into words is perchance a little strange because it's so self evident, isn't it? But being weathered now into my own skin, in love with solitude, and having seen many of the obscured things I just didn't want to see...I find memory that ghost which haunts this dream of life, reminds me that we are changing every moment and sometimes shadow baggage tumbles to the front. To hold love first, and hold back self interest, may not after all, be as easy as it first sounded, even in the best of circumstances. I've heard that the Buddha once said, "Do no harm; perfect all virtue; completely tame the mind: this is the teaching of the Buddha." (Or something along those lines.) Harmlessness is a wonderful thought---&since appearances at some mythically material level seem to suggest that it might be impossible to stay alive and be such, one turns to examining one's intention in every expression of life.

So I begin to recollect or re-discover the particulars of affection. To laugh, of course. To see one's friend, to be seen, in a reflection that feels undistorted. Claiming the best way we know how our own veil of ghosts [carried from previous incarnations: all those myriad mothers,



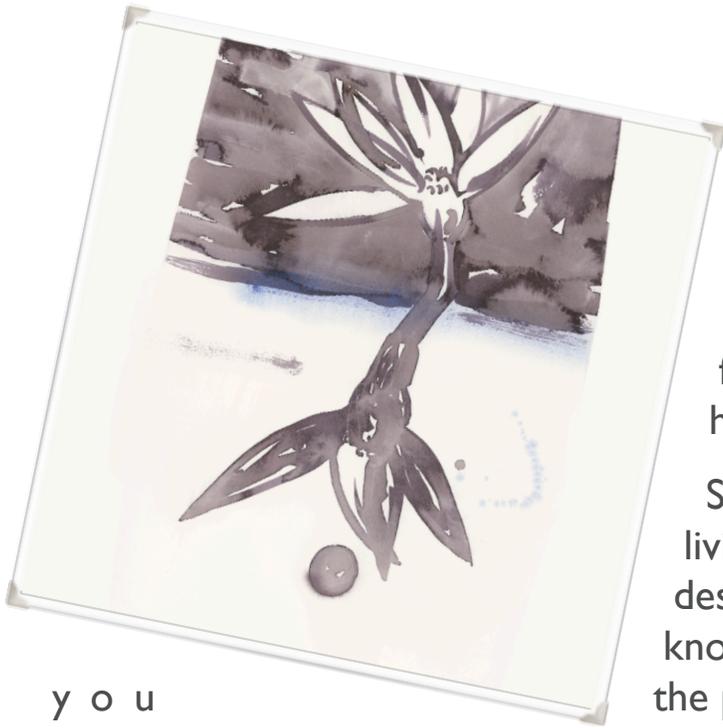
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silence. The ability for showing up at the right time, giving straight from the heart. Optimism. Sometimes friendship requires a joyous fierceness.

brothers, sisters, and fathers....rattling along with our every move]...claiming our own, because we wish to see that other there before us, our friend, fresh. Being kind, and involved enough, to volunteer one's truth, while still listening---the delicate art conversation. Times of unpretentious

But it seems, there is no need to come off especially squeaky clean about whether or not our conceptual whirls synch up, if one is simply holding the feeling. Even if it is an affection held close inside that no one else is witness to but the person feeling it. It is waiting, like a cicada, to break to the surface at the perfect moment and sing it's sunlit song. By simply feeling this, we are friends. And so, you know, sometimes I can be having this most vivid sense of disagreement with a friend; and at the same moment be completely in love---with the shape of an ear, the color and vibrant expression of the eyes, the tonality of voice--and in the long run, that is what i will remember: something adorable about my friend. Because underneath, it is the heart's affection that is running the sub-text.

I am so fortunate to have had such friends, true & changing, (and to have had as well friendships not so true). Those that have taught me these things I believe--even as limiting as conceptual thought might be. Today I think, i will add a line to my list of loving and believing...something like this: It is worthwhile, no matter how fleeting the moment, or small the



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gesture, in some way to be a friend to any creature that happens by the way.

So thank you Otis, I know you are living still, out in that bright deep desert light where first we met---I know you are loved, and wish for the perfect fruition.