

Time Spent with Grandma

Charlie Badenhop

As a foreigner living in Japan for many years and married to a Japanese woman, I've learned a great deal about myself by immersing myself in Japanese culture. In particular I learned a great deal from my wife's grandmother, who passed away several years ago. Through my interactions with grandma, I was led to consider the importance of appreciating our time on earth, and appreciating those we are in relationships with.

My most enduring memory of my wife's grandmother is the first time I went to her house to meet her. She was perhaps 81 years old at the time, and still rather spry. My wife Hiroko rang the bell to her house and grandma called out for us to enter. With perfect timing (something grandma was always impeccable about) just as Hiroko opened the door to the house, grandma was sliding down onto the hardwood floor to her hands and knees,

to bow deeply to me. There was something magical and mysterious about this moment of greeting. Just the slightest glimpse of her serene face as she began to descend in her bow. Next I was left looking at her grey hair immaculately gathered into a bun in the back, as she paused with her face about 8 cm above the floor. It was intriguing to be meeting someone without being able to gaze into their face—to be standing there while a person offers their complete supplication. I couldn't help but wonder who she was and what she was going to look like when we finally got the chance to meet face to face.

Grandma bobbed up from her bow and paused for about 2s, like a diver raising her head above water to get a fresh supply of air before diving down again. While still not actually looking at me, she repeated this up and down process two more times. I very much felt suspended in space and time as I bowed sheepishly and wondered what else I should be doing as I waited for her to finish. In Japanese culture, the person who is most thankful for the good will and kind treatment of their counterpart is the person who bows the deepest and the longest.

Just now I can clearly recall how the words she spoke during this ritual were in perfect timing with her bowing. 'Thank you so much for everything. Thank you for taking such good care of my granddaughter. Thank you so much for being such a kind and wonderful human being. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to come and meet me.' And all of this spoken the very first time we were meeting, and she had little idea of who I *really* was. I realize now she was not making a statement of fact, as much as she was making a humble request for kind treatment in the future.

After meeting grandma a number of times it became rare for her to go down to her hands and knees to bow. Instead, she would now bow while standing. It is interesting for me to think about this now because the first time she bowed while still standing, I worried that I might have done something to lessen her respect for me. In actuality, she remained standing as a way of letting me know she was feeling more at ease around me.



Charlie and Oba-chan
(Author)



A favorite viewing point in Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden during *hanami* (cherry blossom season)
(Author)

Unbeknownst to grandma, I decided I would playfully engage her in a bowing contest. I was determined to bow deeper and longer than her in order to let her know I appreciated all of her kind treatment. The next time we visited I seized my chance. Grandma saw me and bowed deeply as usual, and then just as she was coming up for air, I bowed quite deeply back to her while thanking her for all of her many wonderful qualities. I stayed down in my bow as long as I thought I could without seeming unnatural, and then just as I was coming up, there was grandma going down in the opposite direction, bowing even a bit deeper than the first time, and once again mumbling many wonderful pleasantries. Not to be outdone, I waited patiently and just as she started up a second time, I went down into another bow. I paused interminably at the bottom, and then slowly came back up again only to see her going back down.

I'm not sure how long we did this for. Perhaps five complete rounds. It was as if we were connected to a system of weights and pulleys, with her coming up requiring me to balance this by going down, and vice versa.

It didn't take long for me to feel awkward and out of place. Her bowing had a presence and a power to it that my bowing didn't, and she broke my spirit in just one engagement! One of the main differences being that she was *fully* engaged in bowing and showing respect, while I was only play acting. I was bowing with my body, but I wasn't truly bowing with my heart. I felt embarrassed

and hoped she didn't realize that to some extent I was only fooling around. I vowed to myself to find a way to show her my heartfelt respect and appreciation for all the wonderful things she did for me, and the gifts she often gave me. In the process I feel like she taught me to be more respectful to others as well.



Charlie Badenhop

Mr Badenhop is a coach, bodyworker and hypnotherapist. He has a BA in political science and is a certified instructor of aikido, trainer of NLP and Ericksonian Hypnosis and has extensive training in various forms of massage and bodywork. He has published articles in numerous magazines worldwide. He is co-author of *Walking In Two Worlds: The Relational Self In Theory, Practice, And Community*.