

# Juniper

## To Prostrate?

Prostration, the act of bowing all the way to the ground, is a common and important practice in the Buddhist tradition. We have examined whether it is important to continue this practice, or whether its purpose can be accomplished in other ways. Our decision is to not adopt the formal practice of prostration in Juniper's training. We thought we would explain why.

We observe many, many rituals in our day-to-day lives. They serve to ground us and to bring order and harmony to our lives. This is no less true in spiritual practice. Rituals can play an important role in shaping our inner lives and development. We cannot, however, simply copy the rituals of others and expect them to have the same meaning in our own lives.

Prostration is a common ritual among many Buddhist practitioners of the East. It is customary, for example, to prostrate oneself when entering a temple or before a teacher or Buddha statue or image. The practice, however, presents a number of challenges for Westerners. First, as a gesture of humility and respect, it is not one with which we in Western cultures are familiar. We demonstrate respect and humility in other ways. Second, in the West, the act of prostration tends to have a strong connotation of worship or surrender to an external savior. Taking it this way, however, would be contrary to the intention of Buddhist training. The goal of Buddhist training is to unfold our own inner potential and strength by training our minds, not to yield that responsibility to another.

At Juniper, we greatly value the cultivation of respect and humility. These are important aspects of training the mind. To accomplish them, however, it is best to use conventions that we can understand and relate to: a respectful shake of the hand, a slight bow of the head, a word of thanks, allowing another to go first, a follow-up note or small gift, a general concern for another's well-being, and so on. These are subtler, perhaps, but they need be no less meaningful if done with good intention and sincerity.

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