

With Deep Gratitude: Remembering Ram Das

Russell Delman December 2019

My friend and icon of the New Age, Ram Das, *aka* Dr. Richard Alpert, died last week. He strongly influenced two eras of my life. In 1971, when I read his generation inspiring treatise “Be Here Now”, I found a language and framework for the transformations I was experiencing. Having started a regular Zen meditation practice the previous year without a guide, I found myself intuitively devoted to a practice for which I had little conceptual understanding. Something in me knew it was right yet I could not articulate why. Reading this book, I realized I was learning about “the art of Being”. After his stroke in 1997, I had the unique privilege of giving him Feldenkrais lessons for about two years. Also, each New Year’s eve for many years, we would spend an hour or two alone in his house, experiencing a profound sense of being-ness together. I am ever grateful for his encouragement for my teachings and modeling the naturalness and generosity of just being.

Being and Becoming: The Generative Power of Intentionality

In This Moment
We are the
Being
Of Yesterdays
Becoming

In This Moment
We are the
Becoming
Of tomorrows
Being

Learning to be more and more present in this moment empowers all our actions and brings many instances of joy and fulfillment. This is the art Being.

Learning to acknowledge our disappointments and inadequacies as we envision the qualities and actions we wish to cultivate is the art of Becoming.

The Art of Being

Zen is often called “the art of Being”. Intimacy with the present moment through sitting quietly, while sensing deeply into one’s body, feelings and thoughts is the simple, profound practice of this art. Dedication to the living moment is then practiced in everyday life. As most of us can attest, learning to “be here now”, is not easy.

For the first years of my meditation practice, I struggled earnestly, often forcefully, to return to the present moment. Rarely could I last longer than a few seconds without being drawn into an inner conversation or story. I kept bullying my mind, waiting for it to get quiet. A surprising realization arose out of this frustration. I discovered that the present moment is NOT a narrow, short instance of time that needs to be grasped tightly; it actually emerges from timelessness, which, paradoxically, includes the entire past and future. This may sound esoteric but actually, it is obvious. Rather than being *short*, the present moment is *deep*. One can give attention to the noisy waves on the surface, which is the habit of most folks, or plunge into the silent depths, both are there in any moment.

Both the enjoyment of life and the effectiveness of our actions are enhanced by the art of Being, as expressed in our Presence:

- Think of your most satisfying moments, whether they come through the arts, nature or interactions with others. Is it true that the most fulfilling moments come when you are present?
- Think of the most effectual people in both your personal life and the larger world. Is it true that they have a kind of Presence that empowers their vision?

The Art of Becoming

Because the past, present and future are not separate, the art of Being actually includes the art of Becoming.

*In This Moment
We are the
Being
Of Yesterdays*

Becoming

Who and how we are right now emerges from many causes, most importantly from who we were in our many yesterdays. Our thoughts, words and actions have potent influence in determining our present moment experience; this is especially true of behaviors done intentionally.

In This Moment

We are the

Becoming

Of tomorrows

Being

Right now, we are creating the ground of how we will experience life tomorrow, next month and even next year. We are always practicing certain qualities, whether intentionally or not; this is how we form our character and attitudes. An important aspect of taking responsibility for our lives is to cultivate intentions that are aligned with the values and gifts we would like to manifest and see manifesting in the world.

For example, would you like to live in a kinder, more caring world? Are you willing to cultivate caring and empathy, even toward those who are difficult to care for? We all have the opportunity to grow these qualities through deeper listening to the needs of others, even as we learn to listen to our own needs and callings. Having this intention makes a huge difference in the energy that we emanate into the world.

Giving our Gifts to the World

For me, the ending of one year and beginning of the next elicits feelings of bountiful gratitude and a kind of disappointed sadness. The gratitude comes easily, watered by the years of intentional cultivation I have devoted to this quality.

The disappointing sadness comes as I reflect on all the ways I have fallen short of my ideals and intentions. Thankfully, I have learned to intentionally bring a warm-hearted caring to the sad places, as I sense them in my body. From this presencing of the feelings, I can then listen and learn from them. Rather than self-recrimination, mostly I practice receiving the gift that is

hidden in the disappointment. This “being with” and “learning from” are the keys to healing the past and freeing our energies for the future.

This is a potent time for envisioning the qualities and actions we would like to cultivate. In my family, long ago, my wife introduced a practice of reviewing the year backwards to glean a key learning from each month. I recommend finding your way to consciously invite the learning of the past year into a vision for the new one. Creative energy is tangible this time of year.

Each Unique Person

We each have specific gifts and a unique blend of human qualities. These gifts and qualities are connected to the blessings we have been given, as well as the intentions we have consciously enacted. To live faithfully and in alignment with our one precious life, we need to use everyday situations as opportunities for sharing our gifts. Intentionality is the magical yeast for this process.

Learning to be present empowers our capacity for joy and effectiveness; this is the art of Being.

Mobilizing this Presence forward, through intentionality, and bringing our gifts into life is the art of Becoming.

This is the great dance of Being and Becoming.

Wishing you a New Year filled with moments of fulfillment and joy as you manifest your unique gifts.

Peace Throughout the World and Many Blessings to us all...Russell