



A few years ago, my boys came home from a morning walk and handed me a book that they'd found in a free pile. At that time I didn't see how a book on aging and dying applied to my life, so I said thanks and put the book on the shelf. Well, recently I read and reviewed two books by [Ram Dass](#)

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[Be Here Now](#)

and

[Be Love Now](#)

(click on the book titles to read those reviews), and after that I just wanted to keep reading

[Ram Dass](#)

, so I pulled that old dusty free book off the shelf and I was delighted to discover what a gem it is!

[Still Here: Embracing Aging, Changing, and Dying](#), by [Ram Dass](#), is a very inspiring and encouraging book for people of all ages. Ram Dass wrote most of this book before having a major debilitating stroke, but then he went back and re-worked it with all that he's learned from the experience of the stroke. It is beautifully written, deeply touching, and incredibly potent in its delivery of elder wisdom.

A how-to manual for conscious aging, changing, and dying, this really is a must-read for all earnest spiritual seekers. As [Ram Dass](#) points out, every spiritual tradition agrees that preparation for death is the single most important spiritual practice. Indeed, when I was leading the weekly Radiance Rising Circles, I went through a phase in which we focused on death for about eight Monday evenings in a row! At that time, I read aloud many stories from an amazing book that I highly recommend, [Graceful Exits: How Great Beings Die](#), by Sushila Blackman.

This morning, as I went back through [Still Here](#), reading and re-reading the parts I had highlighted with big stars in the margins, what struck me the most was the way

[Ram Dass](#)

brings everything to the Soul level. Here are a few examples:

“The Soul is here to learn... We have to be here to learn; otherwise our difficulties are truly meaningless.”

“As our minds begin to quiet down, we notice that the thoughts and feelings associated with meaninglessness come and go, and that there exists, in the space between these arisings, a way of being that is not affected by these mind-states. The Soul, we discover, seeks no meaning; it's “meaning,” to borrow that Ego-concept, is self-evident. A flower does not question its meaning or right to exist; it simply *is*, and its purpose is joy.”

“I tried to go the renunciate's way, to forget the needs of the body in order to avoid the suffering of the Ego. But the Soul depends on the Ego's drama for its teachings. We have to be in the world to learn from it.”

“The Soul has no trouble with mystery at all. Mystery is the Soul's element... we begin to rest in the mysterious present and let the future unfold as it will.”

Another poignant teaching in [Still Here](#) has to do with staying open to whatever pains come our way in life. [Ram Dass](#) explains that suffering often points the way to where our work is. He writes:

“Just as physical pain alerts us to troubles in the body, mental pain alerts us to where we need to be more conscious. In other words, our frustrations, anger, delusions, and so on become our greatest helpers in freeing ourselves from suffering. They point to where our Ego is trapped, and remind us to begin to shift our identity to the Soul level. They show where we are resisting change, where we are time-bound, and where we need to grow beyond past conditioning.”

As a regular practitioner of Cultivating the Witness, I particularly liked the way Ram Dass describes working with intense pain:

“The only solution is to be on two planes at once: you have to enter the pain fully, and yet be in the Soul level at the same time. That's fierce! You feel the full intensity of the pain, and at the same time you transcend it by being in the Witness state. Pain demands that you establish

yourself simultaneously in Ego and Soul. What an incredible teacher it is.”

And what an incredible teacher [Ram Dass](#) is. As I am still here, sitting on my red couch sipping hot tea and reading spiritual teachings (after almost 8 years of that practice!), I am super grateful for all that Ram Dass has given, and continues to give, to help raise the consciousness of the human species.

May all beings rise above and beyond their pains, to rest in the level of the Soul.

Om Shanti (Peace),

Yogini Tejaswini

Photo of Teja (still here on the red couch) with [Still Here](#) by [Ram Dass](#) , taken by Teja Shankara.