

MESSAGE

NOVEMBER 2, 2025

OPENING WORDS

MEDITATION

The dark moments we are handed in life give us the chance to dig deeper into ourselves as human beings, to turn our lives away from separation and into compassion and interconnection. Ram Dass

EVERYTHING IS FOR ME, NOTHING IS ABOUT ME

I offer this morning's talk with the belief that regardless of our age, we are here in this lifetime to bring ourselves closer and closer to the pure, intelligent, and knowing beings we are capable of being. That we are here to learn from our life experiences whether we have judged those experiences as good, bad, or indifferent. So, instead of becoming entangled in the polarities of today's world, I find myself stepping back and reminding myself of this: Everything is for Me, Nothing is about Me. When I am able to remember this, I give up judging myself and others as stupid and naïve and wonder instead how I/we got here either personally or collectively? How did I come to believe that everyone in my family would share the same values? How did I come to assume that all my friends and respected teachers would share the same view of our nation as I? How did I come to believe that everyone believed in small "d" democracy?

I would guess that others of you may share some of these same dilemmas. This is not easy work. I have had to look at my cherished beliefs about who I thought I was, about who we are as a people, about what it means to be an American, about who I am as a citizen of the world, and about our

common humanity. Though not easy, this is what it means to be an ever-evolving human being. This morning, I plan to explore this in three dimensions – the personal, the interpersonal, and as a citizen.

Cherished beliefs are those deep ideas we hold about ourselves, the important people in our lives, our country, the planet, and humanity, in general. They are the foundation of who I say I am and what I believe about others. I ask, “What can we do when our cherished beliefs are shown to be false beliefs, beliefs not grounded in the reality of today?” I know we have choices of response when we find our cherished beliefs falling apart.

One is to shut down and withdraw. Another is to go to our ego and become caught up in disbelief, anger, blame, and judgment. This is an easy place to escape to because we feel fearful and threatened and it is always easier to point our finger at someone else rather than questioning our own beliefs. We can find ourselves making comments like: “How can they believe that?” “How did I miss that about them?” “How stupid can they be?” “Don’t they care about what is going to happen?”

All these kinds of questions come from the ego and prevent us from asking deeper and harder questions. Remember the ego feels safest when it is in control. The ego is focused on self-interest, not self-reflection. I want to make it clear here that I am not giving ego a bad rap. A healthy ego is critical to building self-esteem, self-awareness and self-confidence, but its unhealthy aspects emerge when our ego feels threatened and knocked out of its comfort zone; in other words, when our cherished beliefs are threatened.

I want to take us to a third choice when our cherished beliefs are under attack. I want to return to today’s title: Everything is for Me, Nothing is about Me. When I make what is going on about Me then I am caught up in

my ego. What if I go deeper to my soul self, the core of who I am? What if I ask, "What is this experience teaching me about who I am and my core beliefs?" What if I become curious about my responses (my anger, my disbelief, my judgments) and ask, "Is this who I am?" "Is this who I want to be?" "Does this fit with who I think I am?"

I hope you can see how this changes my perspective from focusing on "out there" to "in here" to the essence of who I am. I thought I was a person of humility and acceptance; instead, I am running headlong into my arrogance! I run into my ego and not the healthiest parts of my ego. And I wonder if you find yourselves experiencing the same?

I want to continue to expand on our experiences and how we go about meeting an experience. Every experience implies a relationship - a relationship with oneself, a relationship with others, a relationship with the environment around us. We can assess these experiences as good, bad, or indifferent. But what if I do not judge them but instead consider each as just an experience - an experience **for** me but **not** about me?

I do not know your approach to experiences. When I look back at my history, I can clearly see my approach. Being anxious and unsure of myself and often agreeing to experiences over my head, I would say to myself, "OK, this will all be over in an hour," as a way to endure. I would assign some time factor to the experience. And sometimes I would simply volunteer to be first just to get the experience over. Post-experience, I would have various judgments about myself and the experience, in general. There were no reflections or thoughts about what I learned or could learn for the future, just judgments about myself and whether I would do that experience again. Often, it was just another semi-traumatic experience endured.

I did not understand until I took the time to process, reflect, and integrate the learning, often years later. Now I choose to engage in experiences with compassion and empathy, doing no harm and without judgment. This is what is meant when I say, “Everything is for me, Nothing is about Me.” I think it may be helpful if I put hands and feet to this with two very different examples.

I do not know about your early experiences. For me, those experiences were filled with messages about not being good enough. For example, if I brought home a report card with 5 A's, two of which were A+, I was asked why the other three were not A+. As a child with a fragile ego, I took it personally and redoubled my efforts. In childhood we get messages from many directions that we are not good enough. The result is an internalized negative definition of self. It took me a long time to realize that the messages about not being good enough were **not** about me but reflected something about the person sending the messages. How freeing it was to find my definition of self, not “out there,” but “in here.” The message was never about me but said a lot about the other person.

Here is a second but very different example – one where I got in my own way. I recently spent three weeks in Mongolia wanting to experience the land and the nomadic people. Already, you can see that I had an intention. This can be called frontloading an experience with intentions that can get in the way of fully engaging with the experience. I was looking forward to being in the taiga in northern Mongolia. My mental image was living in a yurt surrounded by the trees that are the last sentinels before the arctic takes over and all trees disappear. What I found instead were massive rolling hills and few trees. By frontloading the experience with expectations, I could not stay open to the experience focusing instead on

what it was not. I want to contrast that to going south to the Gobi Desert. I had not given this part of the trip much thought and so could be open to the experience of desert and sky. I loved the desert – the vistas, the wind, the animal herds, the nomadic people, and the endless sky. I was continually surprised and grateful for the experience. I allowed myself to just experience without expectations.

It is difficult work letting go of expectations and remaining open to an experience. Think about coming here this morning. What were you thinking? What were you expecting? How may that color your experience of what I bring with me this morning – the opening words, words for reflection, these words?

I want to turn now to our relationship with others. Perhaps like you, I have been surprised to find that not all of my family members, friends, and teachers hold the same political views that I hold. Since oneness and finding our common ground are so central to who I am, it has been disheartening to find that people whom I value do not share that same perspective.

To offer an example. There are several teachers with whom I have worked over the years. All have been profoundly helpful as I have sought to find my own path. Recently I learned that one of my present teachers is a full supporter of our President and what he is doing. I was horrified. I could not fathom how her teachings about Oneness could possibly fit into what is occurring in this country. Simply put, it does not and cannot when creating “others” to blame is a hallmark of this administration. But this dilemma is not about me. It is a dilemma which she has free will to address for herself and I hope she will. The question is, “How is this for me?” First, it teaches me to separate the person from the message. If the message, her teachings, have been helpful to me in my own journey then

that is what is important. I can keep separate her political beliefs from the message. Second, it reminds me that we all have clay feet. How often do we put people on pedestals only to find they are no more or less human than we? Though I have learned this before, obviously it is important that I be reminded again. We are all human beings doing the best we can with what we have. And third, it has taught me how easily I have made assumptions about others based on their being family members, friends, teachers, or others that I hold with respect, perhaps admiration. I am reminded again that our experiences are idiosyncratic. Each of us will develop our view of the world based on those experiences. There is no guidebook. Ultimately, each of us can choose to consider how we have gotten to this place and whether it is consistent with our deeper core values. This is what it means to be an evolving human being.

Now, I want to turn to what I have learned as our nation moves away from democracy and towards fascism. At first, I took this very personally and my responses were fueled by my ego. If everything is for me, I had to go beyond my ego and risk asking deeper questions. I had to meet my arrogance. Yes, I believe in small “d” democracy, but the fact of the matter is that it has been a democracy primarily for white people, more specifically, white men. Yes, we can say that strides were being made but that riled others who feared losing their power. Yes, this version of democracy was working for me as a privileged white person, but it was not working for many in our country. I have had to acknowledge that issues of fairness and equality have been simmering below the surface since the founding of this nation. These issues have never been resolved because we have covered them over with patriotic myths, songs, flags, and parades and with complete denial of our colonialism. Our mythical belief in rugged individualism, our efforts to make others like us rather than honoring differences, our hyperfocus on materialism at the cost of all life

on the planet does not serve all that exists here. Perhaps now we may have an opportunity to forge a democracy of liberty and justice for all. But I see that we cannot go back. Though the way ahead is uncertain, we must let go of what we thought we knew of the past, grieve it, so that we can create anew.

There is a powerful dose of humility when you come to think and explore these questions in a deeper way. In the process I found myself remembering times when my ego was stronger than my values, when I forgot about the other, when power was more important, and when I made unnecessary judgments. I am reminded that we are here to learn.

I have repeated often this morning that this is not easy work. We are all here to learn and we each have core issues that will be with us to the end. It is all too easy to feel victimized in this world, to blame others, and to not look inward. The hard work begins when each of us considers how each has contributed to his/her own victimhood. If you are willing to look at every experience as an experience for you, not about you, how might this change your reactivity, your judgment, your paralysis, or your contribution to polarities? What would each of us have to let go of? What must each of us remain true to?

Here are some closing thoughts. Show up with zest for every experience. Drop your judgments and be open to what each experience can teach you about you. We must be willing to examine our cherished beliefs. What are your cherished beliefs about yourself, others, our country, and the world? We must give up the belief that there is only one way or the right way. Where do you hold onto the belief that something has to be done this particular way? In the days ahead, something new will have to be refashioned if we want to have a real democracy of justice. To do that, we will have to acknowledge the violence and unsustainability of greed,

cruelty, and materialism in our society. Most importantly, we must acknowledge our responsibility in that. This is not about us and them; it is about all of us. And we must begin with ourselves first. It is not about judging ourselves and others. It is about acknowledging our responsibility, responsibility we all share in a democracy. We need to look deeply inside, find where our actions or non-actions have let ourselves and others down. Remember “Everything is for me, Nothing is about Me.” We all have work to do. We must trust our durable hearts to find common ground one step at a time. We need to do that for us, for all that lives here on this planet, and for the planet itself.

CLOSING WORDS

You cannot be neutral on a moving train. Howard Zinn

We are on a moving train right now. We cannot allow ourselves to be despairing and fearful. If we want a democracy, we must be willing to go deeply inside ourselves, meet ourselves – the good, the bad, the ugly,- and find our compassion, our oneness with all that lives here, our courage to find our common ground, and our action to build a just, free, and lasting democracy. Go forth with your enduring heart to work for truth and justice and begin with yourself. I release the circle.