Last year I had an accident. I fell on my hip. There it was … a broken hip. I am eighty years old now, so I guess it comes with the territory. But that broken hip was my own fault. I am in a wheelchair much of the time, and that day I was transferring from an armchair to the wheelchair. I did not focus carefully, that is I did not bring my full awareness to bear on what I was doing, so I fell.

This is a dilemma for me. If I pay attention to my body full time, even when I am transferring, then my consciousness does not get to be with my soul because I am attending to my body as most people do.

So I am in the hospital getting my hip repaired. Hospitals are body-oriented. It is the body shop. To most of the hospital staff I am the old guy in Room 322 with a broken hip. That is who I am in their minds. They are the nurses and doctors, they’re the professionals and they must know, right?

But, don’t we also have a spiritual identity? Aren’t we also souls? The overwhelming mindset of the hospital is, no, we are not souls, we’re just bodies. Now, my view is that I am in this incarnation to learn about my true self, to learn about my soul. Along the way I’ve also learned a lot about strokes and broken hips. I’ve found you can think about them in many different ways.

These bodies really capture our attention. As our parents impressed upon us, you better watch out or you’re going to hurt yourself if you do not attend to your body! But from another point of view, the workings of the body are grist for the mill to get to the soul. And it is tough work. If you think learning to swim is hard, it ain’t nothin’ compared to this.

The body is out there and the soul, the “I”, is in here. To get into my soul I must turn my attention inward instead of outward. But I have to turn it selectively inward, because at the same time the body is demanding attention and I better decide where my foot should go, otherwise I am going to get myself killed. So, I attend to my body when it’s time and the rest of the time I work on being a soul.

A good analogy for body and soul is a coach with horses and a coachman, and a rider inside the coach. The horses are desires. The coachman is the ego, the
“I” that controls the desires and looks where he is going (and makes sure the foot does not go in the wrong place). But who is the passenger riding in the coach? It’s our soul. “Coachman, would you stop please?” “Coachman, you’re going a little too fast.”

I am riding in my coach, and now and then my coach needs a grease job or a new bearing or a joint replaced. I was just at a coach shop for a hip joint, and they know everything about coaches. But that is not who I am, because I am inside the coach riding along, merrily, merrily, merrily….

On the outside I am recovering from a hip replacement operation, but inside I am dancing. I look like an old fart but I am dancing inside. And what a joyful, joyful dance. In India it is called the \( \textit{li}la \), the dance or the play of the soul. And you can join in anytime, because it is always going on here in this moment and it never stops.

Did I lose my soul in the hospital? Well, maybe I lost my connection with my soul for awhile, but I did not lose my soul. Where could it go? I’m still here. I have a new hip. I’m even hipper than I was.

**BEING STROKED**

In 1997 I had a stroke. I was stroked and I almost died. I became a strokee. That’s how I came by the wheelchair.

At the time I had a lot of people surrounding me, doctors and nurses and friends and relatives. They all had long faces and they kept saying, “Oh, you poor guy, you have had a stroke!” And by absorbing their mind-sets, I started to think I was a “poor guy,” just another stroke victim. The whole view of a stroke as a medical disaster was projected onto me. It was coming from almost everybody – except for the cleaning woman. Whenever she came in my room she was totally present with me. She knew.

I got very depressed after the stroke. My faith was shaking like a leaf in a high wind. I would look at the picture of my guru on the hospital wall and say, “Where were you when I had this stroke? Were you out to lunch or something?”

And then it began to shift. I started thinking about it in a different way. I said, “Well, maybe I had this stroke so my soul will learn from it. What if this is a blessing in disguise?”

I started to get into that. I looked at the effects of the stroke and there were few that could not also be seen as positive. Even my aphasia, my hesitant speech and searching for words, made me quiet a lot more of the time. Meditators think it is good to quiet the mind. Ah, ha! The stroke had made my mind quiet. Good.

I learned about dependency. Years ago I wrote a book about service with Paul Gorman called, “How Can I Help?” Now I would have to call it, “How Can
You Help Me?” I used to take pride in driving my car, but now someone else drives and I enjoy looking at the trees and the sunset and I do not have to look at the road.

After the stroke I would give a talk and I’d be stumbling a lot over words. Afterwards people would come up and say, “That was such a wonderful talk. It was so spacious. It gave me time to think about each thing you said.” Ah, hah!

The more I thought about it, I realized that the stroke was just a stroke. But my reaction to the stroke was something else. The saving grace was being able to see it from the soul perspective. Instead of saying, “Oh no, I have had a stroke!” I got around to, “Well, let us see what is graceful in this stroke?” I began to treat it as what was happening in the moment. And I’ve found contentment in the stroke just being with it. I mean, I would not wish for a stroke, but here it is.

Roles to Souls

In our consciousness these are two different points of view. There is the ego and there is the soul, our spiritual self. They are two different planes of consciousness. From the spiritual vantage point we’re all souls who have come into these incarnations. You take birth and this is your incarnation. Here you are. You are an individual being.

When I would travel back and forth from America to India, I’d land in New Delhi and take a bus up to this village in the mountains. The people in that village knew they were souls. One was sweeping the road and another was the governor. The governor was not just a governor and the sweeper was not just busy being a sweeper. They had that role for this incarnation but they also identified themselves as souls. I’d get back on the plane, and when they opened the door in New York everybody thought they were their roles. It was just back and forth, roles to souls, souls to roles.

We get so deeply into our roles because of the pull of the incarnation that we forget we’re souls. All the sensations, emotions and complications of being in a body, and we forget. We think, “I am a man, I am a woman, I am from California, I am a mother, a father, a widow, a child,” a something. I have got to be something, don’t I?

Think of all the ways you identify yourself with what you do: “I am a teacher. I am a doctor, I’m a scientist. I’m a cook, a Jew, a Christian, a Moslem, a stockbroker. I’m an achiever. I am a spiritual seeker (that one can carry you for years). I am retired.”

All that is the ego. The ego is who we think we are. It’s a thought. Your ego is a cluster of thoughts about how you identify yourself, thoughts about different roles that you play in society.
When we meet someone we ask, “How do you do? What do you do?” Is what you do the same as who you are? Every one of our roles is just a thought-form. We confuse our souls with our roles. You don’t see me as a soul, you see me as a body, you see me as Ram Dass, a role. What does it matter whether I am a cellist, or a pilot or a teacher? When you strip away the roles this outer form is just the body. Who I am is just here. Instead of “How do you do?” how about, “How do you be?” Our inner being is beyond form.

When you live in your soul and your heart is open you can awaken other souls. You go into a grocery store and it’s like a temple. They are all souls. Some of them think they are customers, some think they are workers. You get to the checkout person and your eyes lock for an instant – Are you here? I’m here. Wow, a fellow soul!

If you have children, your children are souls. They’re just in the role of children and you’re in the role of mother or father.

When you’re with a dying person and you see them as a soul, that transition from body to spirit is one that is easy to make. If a caregiver is identified with their soul it is easy to see the dying person as a soul and to ease their transition.

**Remember, Be Here Now**

When we plumb the moment, this moment, not back then, not the future, but this moment, we get deeper and deeper and deeper into the universal heart of being. Finally, it blossoms into everything and nothing. It’s all in this moment. This moment is always here. Now is eternal.

It’s so extraordinary how near people are to their deeper being. It’s just a thought away. And the thoughts that take us away create so much suffering. The thought, “I am this body,” is also suffering. I might think, “Well my body used to be able to do this, my hair did not use to be gray, I used to be stronger, I used to be thinner, I used to be … whatever.” That is suffering because the body is what it is. We do everything we can think of to stay safe and healthy but illness, age and accidents still affect us. The body is in time. If we live in the moment we are not in time.

**No Age**

In this culture aging is a dirty word. Youth is the thing. Old people make themselves up to look like young people. You think you have to do it because youth is what is “in.” It is all about social roles in our cultural context. Still, it is a fact of nature that the body inevitably ages. How you think about it is up to you. How we perceive aging deeply affects our psyche and our sense of well-being.

I was visiting an old friend in India who I think of as a very loving person. He looked at me and said, “Ram Dass, you look so old!” I was so offended I was
ready to fight him on the spot, because I come from a culture where age is shame. But he was complimenting me, really complimenting me, because in India age brings wisdom and respect. Old age in India is the time to go on pilgrimage and finish your spiritual work.

**THE TIME BIND**

If you say, “I’m a retired person, I’ve retired from my role,” you are looking back at your life. It’s retrospective, it’s life in the rear view mirror. That is called time binding. It causes us to focus on the past and, of course, to worry about what comes next. Thinking backwards and forwards, being caught in the past and worrying about the future is a form of self-imposed suffering.

Aging is not a culmination. It’s not the end of the line, a time to look back. It’s a time to just be present. The present is ageless. Being in the moment, just being here with what is, is timeless.

In the moment there is just presence, there’s no future or past, we’re just here, happy to be here in the moment. If you’re not time binding, you don’t have to do anything, you don’t have to go anywhere, you’re just here.

A monk is being pursued by a tiger in the jungle. The tiger chases him off a cliff. Another tiger is below. The monk grabs onto a bush with one hand. Next to the bush he spies a wild strawberry growing out of the cliff. With his free hand he plucks the wild strawberry. How sweet that wild strawberry!

**JUST A MOMENT**

That poignancy, that joy you get from being completely in the moment, brings contentment. Contentment is a practice. It's different from satisfaction. It’s not a feeling of accomplishment from doing something. Contentment is just being complete in the moment.

I’m content with taking a nap, without thinking I should be doing something else. I’m even content to have a broken hip that is healing. It’s part of the body growing old. But I am just here.

When I first traveled to India in 1966 I was just another westerner visiting a foreign country. I was with a friend traveling in a Land Rover. We had canned tuna fish and Vivaldi tapes, beds and all kinds of western amenities. We looked out through the windows at this foreign culture.

Then we came to Benares, the holy city where Hindus go to die. There were people walking the streets with leprosy and all kinds of illnesses, just waiting to die. They each had a pouch, a little bundle of cloth which held the coins for their funeral pyre, to pay for the wood to burn their body.
As we drove through this city I thought, “These people have no hospital, they have no support system, they’re just waiting to die.” These depressing thoughts and the ubiquitous poverty made me feel sick. I went to the hotel and hid under the bed.

Six months later I visited Benares again. It was the same scene, but in those six months I had been living in a Hindu temple up in the Himalayas under the tutelage of a guru. Now, instead of being just a westerner I was maybe a Hind-Jew, maybe a little Buddh-ish. Instead of seeing ‘those poor people’, instead of being overwhelmed and pushing away their pain, I could stop and look in their eyes.

I saw two things. First, they looked at me with compassion as if I were a hungry ghost, a homeless spirit wandering from place to place. And second, they themselves were content.

How could they be content amidst all this suffering? They were content because if a Hindu dies in Benares by the holy river Ganges, Shiva whispers in your ear and liberates you. They were in the right place at the right time. They were dying and where else would a Hindu want to die?

That contentment really got to me. How could they be so content? It conflicted with all my western values. My western life had always been about achievement, wanting, desiring, doing more, getting more. I felt I was always in the wrong place at the wrong time because there must be something better. I was forever collecting the next achievement. But those people in Benares had something I hadn’t been able to collect: contentment.

Contentment is not a high priority in the west. I guess we’re afraid the wheel of progress will grind to a halt if everybody is content. We’ve all pushed and achieved and realized our American dreams. That’s all right. But when we’re older at least we have a chance to be content. We can enjoy just being where we’re. There is a lot to be said for that.

Think of the kinds of experiences that give you a feeling of contentment. Maybe it is being in nature, listening to the birds or the sound of the waves on the shore, or looking at the night sky. Maybe it is listening to music or sinking into a warm bath. Those are experiences of touching your soul.

In the practice of yoga, contentment is one of the mind-sets you use to direct your consciousness toward oneness. Oneness is the name of the game in yoga, which means union. Contentment is an attitude of the soul rather than the ego or personality. You are looking at life from what I call the soul plane. I choose to call that deeper identity inside each of us, where we’re all just here, the soul.

**All You Need Is**

If I am a soul, when I look around at others I see their souls. After that I see the individual differences, men and women, rich and poor, attractive and
unattractive and all that stuff. When we recognize each other as souls, we’re seeing each other as aspects of the One. The emotion of merging, of becoming One, is love. Love is a way of pushing through into the One.

We treat love and hate and the other emotions like they’re all on the same level but they’re not. Hate, fear, lust, greed, jealousy – all that comes from the ego. Only love comes from the soul. When you identify with your soul you live in a loving universe. The soul loves everybody. It’s like the sun. It brings out the beauty in each of us. You can feel it in your heart.

The Author

Ram Dass, aka Richard Alpert, Ph.D., one of America’s most beloved spiritual figures, has made his mark on the world by teaching the path of the heart and promoting service in the areas of socially-conscious business practices and care for the dying. Ram Dass first went to India in 1967. He was still Dr. Richard Alpert, an eminent Harvard psychologist and psychedelic pioneer with Dr. Timothy Leary. In India, he met his guru, Neem Karoli Baba, affectionately known as Maharajji, who gave Ram Dass his name, which means “servant of God.” On his return from India, Ram Dass became a pivotal influence on a culture that has reverberated with the words “Be Here Now” ever since. With Be Love Now (HarperOne) Ram Dass completes his trilogy that began with Be Here Now in 1970 and continued with Still Here in 2004. Ram Dass’ spirit has been a guiding light for four generations, carrying along millions on the journey, helping free them from their bonds as he has worked his way through his own. He now makes his home in Maui.
How to be Content: 1. Do What You Love. Whenever you do what you love, no matter the activity, you find yourself happier. How to be Content With Your Life. To recap, here are some tips to become a more contented person: Do what you love. Translations of the phrase TO BE CONTENT from english to french and examples of the use of “TO BE CONTENT” in a sentence with their translations: We are content to be happy and happy.