

The Embodied Life™ School Freedom through Awareness



The following four writings from Russell's Embodied Life School newsletter were written during and after The Zen Peacemaker Auschwitz Retreat, November 2016.

At this time in the world, the lessons from Auschwitz are extremely relevant and profound. The fascistic impulse toward domination and violent oppression is alive in and around us. We must bring these dark forces, this destructive consciousness, into the inextinguishable light of our true "I".

Love will trump hate in the heart of humanity!

First letter from the Zen Peacemaker Auschwitz-Birkenau Retreat: "Intentions"

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you from Krakow, Poland.

I arrived here two hours ago after a month of seminars and retreats in France and Germany, plus the start of a new ELMP in Switzerland. My wife Linda and I shared the joy of a month traveling and teaching together. The sincerity of the students who are committed to cultivating awareness through the Embodied Life practices and teachings fills me with joy. Also, I extend great thanks to all those who supported us, from the cooks to the cleaners, to the spouses/partners and families who made these journeys possible. Every moment of this life we are supported in known and usually unknown ways. Many deep bows.....

Upon hearing of this retreat at Auschwitz-Birkenau, many people asked me: "why are you going there"? "What is the purpose of a retreat in this place"? Such a challenging and important question!

The most accurate answer is "I don't know". As a great Zen master once said, *"I don't know' is the most intimate"*. Although "not-knowing" is the clearest, most accurate answer we can give to almost any deep, existential question, it also can feel like a cop out, an avoidance. As another Zen master said "you MUST say something". So with a quivering sense of uncertainty, I will try to answer the question.

Immediately, I notice how this question links to other questions: why did I feel compelled to go to Rwanda for the retreat commemorating the genocide there? Why was I drawn to the San Francisco Street retreat, where we lived and slept on the streets for three days without money? Each of these potent and unique experiences were created by Bernie Glassman, the Zen teacher who is the founder of the Zen Peacemakers. Each event is distinct yet similar? Now, for the first time, I am consciously living with the question, what are my deepest intentions?

For Zen students the most important question at any moment is- WHAT IS IT? This question implies- "what is its essence"?, "what is it to be alive at this moment"? and "who am I at the moment of experiencing IT"? These are direct ways of investigating, "who am I"? In my opinion these are profoundly human questions not only Zen questions- we are experientially exploring "what is it **really**"?

Beyond "I don't know", so far, I can say:

Something in me wonders, who would I be and how would I act in these situations?

If in Rwanda, would I be one of the few Hutus to shelter the Tutsi's or would I be consumed by the group psychosis and join the killings? Like the father of the young Hutu man who told me that his father was killed by Hutu neighbors because he gave shelter to a Tutsi friend.

In Auschwitz, would I be one of the very rare, courageous, guards who offered help? Would I be one of those unusual prisoners who was not solely consumed with his own survival and shared his bread and heart with others, one who becomes a lighthouse for his fellow prisoners? For example, I think of my current hero, Catholic priest, Maximillian Kolbe who offered his life so that another man who was condemned to death, a father and husband, might survive (which he did)!

Observing the utterly consistent and intolerable violence against women, witnessed in these genocides and seen in almost every culture on our planet, how can I influence this travesty in the world that we share?

And- how do all these questions help me to open my understanding and my care to the people perpetuating violence in the world today? How can I love the sinner and hate the sin? Who do I cast out of my heart? With our incredibly polarized political world, can I remember that everyone is a human being trying to get their perceived needs met? Do I need to hate ANYONE?

And this leads me to- what is my response-ability as an affluent, white, American, male in the world today who has been blessed by authentic, transformative, liberating

teachings from a young age? These are the questions I have been living with for many years, and I see now that these are a major part of my coming here.

I hope to write more about this investigation. Your reading helps me go deeper and get more precise. On my own, I might just stay with the ultimate accuracy of "I don't know" or linger with other, more superficial, observations.

Just writing that a new truth comes- In addition to the questions above, I am here to learn what I do not already know about my relationship to this precious life! You inspire me. I will write again either during or after the retreat. Thank you for your presence.

Sending Blessings and love.....Russell