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Letting Go: Why Dave Stringer Makes Me Sweat. ~ Josh Wise



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Dave Stringer opened the Bali Spirit Festival here in Ubud, Bali a few nights ago. It was between mantras that he began to speak philosophically about the meaning of the next mantra.

I love listening to Dave speak, so I quickly grabbed my phone to record his words.

“This mantra is a little essay on how things arise and they depart. The only thing that causes us anguish is that we’re trying to hold on so hard. But love isn’t asking to hold on, it’s asking us to **let go.**”

As I now listen to my recording and type those words, I realize how ironic it is that I didn’t simply listen to his words and allow their sounds to fade away. Instead I felt compelled to capture them in digital format. I needed the security that I could return to them if I wanted to.

For the most part, it really just highlights to me the fact that I hardly know what it means let go.

That night, as Dave began to chant his next mantra, his words rattled around in my mind. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed that letting go was a completely foreign concept to me. It was as though “**letting go**” became some Sanskrit term that I was hearing for the first time.

And I realized that I don’t really know how to let go.

This troubled me for two reasons:

1. I’ve got plenty of stuff that I should probably let go of.
2. I’m a psychotherapist, and as I sit with people, I find myself encouraging them to explore ways to let go.

I remember sitting with a couple who are deciding to divorce. Their life is changing. Their two young children will now spend their time split between the two of them. The husband and wife are suffering. They share with me their story, their heartache, their loss. They share with me the dreams that they once shared that they now know will not be realized.

I teach them techniques for decreasing intimacy. We discuss separation logistics. Before they leave the session, I remind them:

“**Breathe and let go.**”

But now looking back, I worry: am I oversimplifying life and suffering to prescribe breathing and letting go?

Have I been to too many yoga classes?

Letting go is a concept that gets bandied about in every yoga class I’ve ever been to. “Fold forward and let go.” “Simply allow yourself to let go.” “Exhale and let go.”

I’ve heard the phrase so many times that I’ve become numb to it. But as Dave Stringer sang and the raucous Bali Spirit Festival crowd danced and responded to his call, I realized I needed a clearer understanding of this process of letting go.

How do you let go?

How do you let go of regret? How do you let go of guilt? How do you let go of pain? How do you let go of relationships?

Does it really have something to do with your breath? Does it really have something to do with yoga? Does it really have something to do with your body?

My mind turned and turned over these questions, wondering where my life, my work, and my relationship fit into all of this. What am I clinging to? What am I attached to? What am I not letting go?

My mind carried me further and further away from the **present moment**

And then the music carried me back.

The music lifted me. I sang. I danced.

The rhythm intensified. What once had been a mellow call-and-response [kirtan](#) mantra was now a fast-paced ecstatic rock-n-roll.

Dave Stringer called out, “Jai Jai Shiva!”

The crowd responded, “Jai Jai Shiva!”

I sang louder. I danced faster.

I sweat and sweat and sweat.

The thoughts in my head vanished. My mind was quieted by my simple presence in the movement and rhythms of my body.
And as I wiped sweat from my brow, a deeper understanding of the process of letting go arose within me. The body is the release valve for the mind. The body has physical processes that are designed to let go. We exhale. We sweat. We urinate. We defecate.
These are physical processes of letting go—each of which serves a life-preserving function for the body. In each of these processes, the body takes what it needs for life—oxygen or nutrients—and expels what it does not need.



Photo: [Hielrick Georges Dajon](#)

The body doesn't cling to what it doesn't need. It tries to let go of it in its natural rhythm.

So how does the mind process and release in order to let go?
I believe there are two key aspects to this. Much like food is digested by the digestive system, experience is digested in the mind. Your mind breaks down experience into little bits that make up your story. Your story is your beliefs about yourself and the world around you. It's made up of memories and your interpretations.
Some memories haunt us, causing tremendous suffering. Other memories and our limited interpretations of them cause us to think less of ourselves. These memories and interpretations are stored by the mind. It's important to remember that the mind is more than the brain. There is so much about neuroscience and physiology that we are still just beginning to understand.
One thing is becoming clear, however: memories are not only stored in the brain. Memories are also stored in tissues throughout the body.

This is where I believe that *yoga plays an integral role in the process of letting go.*

Yoga gives us a space to stretch those tissues, to sweat, to breathe, and to be aware of what memories surface. It's the release valve for the mind.
Yoga is the release valve for that which no longer serves.
A yoga practice is an opportunity to wring out the body-mind and allow that which needs healing and releasing to surface. By sitting with the memories that arise and by shining a light on them, letting go can take place.
I didn't come to this realization in my head. These ideas flashed before me as I danced, allowing my heart to sing, and my body to move.
Dripping with sweat at the end of the evening, I closed my eyes and listened to Dave Stringer close the evening with the prayer of the Bodhisatva:
"May the wicked become good,
May the good obtain peace,
May the peaceful be freed from bonds,
May the free set others free."

I started to take out my phone to record those words, but I stopped.
I listened to them.
And let them go.



Josh Wise is, at this very moment, trying to stay present. He practices mindfulness-based psychotherapy, helping individuals and couples develop deeper levels of presence and love. He's based in Ubud, Bali with his wife and two children. You can find his writing and guided meditations at www.mindfulcouples.com.