

More about Now

There are plenty of voices these days reminding us to “Be Here Now.” Ram Dass has a book by that title. There’s also Eckhart Tolle’s “The Power of Now,” Niel Fiore’s “The Now Habit,” and a host of other titles embracing presence and the moment.

Now is an old idea.

This past weekend, I led a conversation in Sufi mystic poets, including Rabia, Rumi, Hafiz and Kabir. Imagine. Eight hundred years ago, they were talking about now.

Of course that was then.

But no contemporary writer could possibly say it better than Jalaludin Rumi, who “haiku-ed it” in this excerpt from “That Lives In Us,” translated by Daniel Ladinsky:

*When the moment cracks open
ecstasy leaps out and devours space;
love goes mad with the blessings.*

Later in the poem, Rumi asks us to consider, “Why lay yourself on the torturer’s rack of the past and future? The mind that tries to shape tomorrow beyond its capacities will find no rest.”

All weekend we tried to define what now might really be. Webster would say, “at the present moment.”

But Einstein had a hard time with that one. According to his [Special Theory of Relativity](#), there is no such thing as objective simultaneity. Movement and distance get in the way. What is present here is not necessarily happening in the present somewhere else.

Take our perceptions of the stars, for instance. As “Wikipedia” points out in its definition of “now,” we “visually perceive [stars](#) to be where they were when the [light](#) now reaching our eyes was emitted, because even though light travels at approximately [3 x 10⁸ m/s](#) it takes many years to reach us.”

Now isn’t the same for both of us if you’re on Rigel and I’m in Telluride.

Though modern physics has not yet explained what we normally understand by “now,” my toddler seems to know darn well what it means.

“Mommy, can we do it noooooow?” he will ask me.

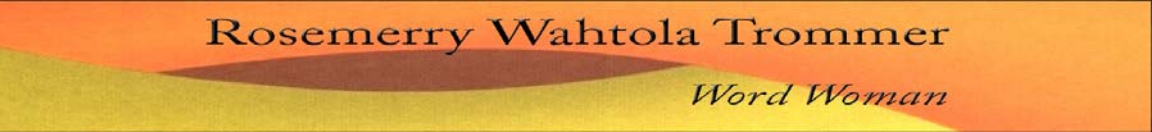
“No honey, we can do it tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow is today,” he says.

Where do they get this stuff? Of course tomorrow is today in that the only way we will ever get to the future is through the present moment.

I had a great example of this last weekend. I was late to get to the class I was teaching and stopped anyway to get a cup of coffee for the organizer and myself. Instead of fretting about being late, frittering away the minutes, torturing myself on the rack of time, berating myself for my procrastination, I decided to pay attention to what was happening in the moment. I noticed the smile on the barrista. Smelled the coffee. Overheard the old men chatting about how things used to be. Watched the impatient woman walk from the line to her bag to the line to the row of books, back to the line.

It turned out to be a fabulous five minutes that somehow tucked into the accordion folds of now. Because miraculously, as if by paying attention to the moment instead of trying to rush it, I didn’t arrive late at all.



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A miracle?

Perhaps. Miracles abound. As Rumi wrote in another poem, "On a day when the wind is perfect, the sail just needs to open and the love starts. Today is such a day."

How to open the sail? Pay attention.

Now. And now. And now.

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