

EMBODIED LIVES

*Reflections on the Influence of
Suprpto Suryodarmo and Amerta Movement*



Edited by: Katya Bloom, Margit Galanter and Sandra Reeve

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Chapter 10

I Always Do Three Things

Shantam Zohar

Edited by:

Katya Bloom, Margit Galanter and Sandra Reeve

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A Balinese Saying

Ilmu Padi (a lesson from the rice plant)

semakin tua semakin berisi, dan semakin merunduk
(the older, the fuller, and the more it bows)



CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	x
INTRODUCTION	1
1. PRESENCE	9
Beate Stühm (Germany)	
2. AMERTA MOVEMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGY	18
Keith Miller (UK)	
3. CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE MOVEMENT WORK	28
Christina Stelzer (Germany)	
4. AMERTA AND TIBETAN BUDDHISM	35
Monika Förster (Germany/Holland)	
5. THE EYE OF THE HAND	43
Steve Hopkins (UK)	
6. A DOG PRACTICING ‘TALKING BODY’	55
José Mulder van de Graaf (Bolivia)	
7. “MAKE LESS THE HOPING”	64
Sandra Reeve (UK)	
8. TOUCHING FORGOTTEN REALITIES	72
Bettina Mainz (Germany)	
9. THE ECHO OF LIFE	83
Daniela Coronelli (Italy/UK)	
10. I ALWAYS DO THREE THINGS	92
Shantam Zohar (Israel)	

11. A PRESENCING DIAL	98
Margit Galanter (USA)	
12. AMERTA MOVEMENT AND SOMATICCOSTUME	108
Sally E. Dean (USA/UK)	
13. CRYSTALLIZATION-PERFORMANCE	122
Lise Lavelle (Denmark)	
14. BEING AND DOING IN THE WILD GARDEN	132
Susanne Tümpel (Germany)	
15. 'MANTRA GERAK' / MOVEMENT MANTRA	142
Agus Bima Prayitna (Indonesia)	
16. THE MUSICAL PORTAL	152
Tim Jones (UK)	
17. NEAR THE UNKNOWN	160
Franca Fubini (Italy)	
18. FAMILY	170
Una Nicholson (UK)	
19. THE INFANT'S LANGUAGE	179
Katya Bloom (USA/UK)	
20. "GOING OUT OF THE SITUATION" AND "STOP, DON'T FOLLOW THAT, WALK!"	189
Regula Nell (Switzerland)	
21. AMERTA MOVEMENT AND AUTISM	201
Sean Williams (UK)	

22. "FIND YOUR POSITION"	211
Susan Bauer (USA)	
23. "BODY BODY"	221
Helen Poynor (UK)	
24. EVER-SPEAKING BEING	231
Michael Dick (Germany)	
25. MOVING IN THE LAW	241
Simon Slidders (UK)	
26. THE BREATHING EYE	249
Andrea Morein (Germany)	
27. JOY	263
Anita Lüdke (Germany/Bolivia)	
28. "RE-MEMBERING" BUTTERFLY BEACH	276
Melinda Buckwalter (USA)	
29. I WILL TRACE THE CONSTELLATION OF MY STARS WITH MY FINGERS	283
Ellin Krinsly (USA/Australia/Mexico/Ethiopia)	
30. AWAKENING ART AND DHARMA NATURE TIME	295
Diane Butler (USA/Indonesia)	
AFTERWORD: A PRAPTO COMPANION	306

10. I ALWAYS DO THREE THINGS

Shantam Zohar (Israel)

Two years ago, we all went away to *Nachsholim* to celebrate my father's 85th birthday. We took rooms at the seaside village and, on the day in question, skwooched around a very long table in a secluded area of the public dining room to share our festive meal. We are a merry family, and my father is the merriest of us all. Soon he stood up and, with some effort, we all fell silent to make room for his words.

From his seat at the head of the table, my father looked out over his four children, fourteen grandchildren and six great grandchildren. "I cannot count my blessings," he said. Then, wiping a tear, he added, "Thank you all for coming here today." Yitzchak, for that is his name, said to us, "Perhaps you think that I am an old man of 85, and that I am close to the end of my life. And Agam," he pointed towards my newborn son and his fourteenth grandchild, "is a very young man, close to the beginning of his life. But the truth is," he banged on the table, "that we are both smack in the middle of it." Yitzchak raised his glass of red wine. "To life," he roared, "Lechayim!"

So many airline tickets, I thought, recollecting my fifteen years of lofty spiritual migration.... Had he known this all along, or was it something that dawned on him as he faced his blood at this grand event?

My father's father, Alex, didn't do very well as a self-employed electrician. He moved too slowly, and by the time his state-of-the-art results neared completion, there were inevitably impatient clients breathing down his neck to get the damn job done.

Seeing this, I believe, Yitzchak took a big step away from physical labor, turning to become an engineer. As such, he rested in relative safety at the drawing table, still required to get jobs done, but

merrily employed with plenty of pension and time to philosophize over lunch. And if things weren't ready on time, clients could just turn to his boss.

Seeing this, I imagine, and just to take it one step further, my older brother dedicated his career to the refined study of philosophy. He took refuge in the mighty volumes of eternal time so as to be pestered by no one but eager students and wicked members of the academic promotion committee.

And fearing this, yet still seeking an authentic place in my somatically distilled male lineage, I made a grand attempt at the most arduous of all detached careers, that of a Himalayan yogi.

The goal of yoga is disappearance. One *uses*, please note this verb, the body, to attain the sixteen states of *Samadhi*. Just as Lahiri Mahasaya once came home from the Ganges, banged his hand and did not even know it was bleeding, so you, oh great yogi, should be detached from your physical body. In the West, led by the United States of America, this truth has been turned on its head and twisted around to become, quite cunningly, the opposite. The goal has become the body. But my guru was clear on this matter. He said, "Forget about health and wealth at least for a long time." And where do health and wealth reside, if not in the body?

Hence, mind you, this chapter is about the body and what moves within the body during so called 'spiritual practice'. And specifically, it is about a profoundly simple display of acute awareness of states of mind, or attitudes towards being alive in a moving body; what it actually means to habitually inhabit a space in time immediately, at once and always. It is, in fact, about mindfulness, freedom and art, responsibility, celebratory madness, discipline, devotion and full-hearted bliss. For these have all come to conscious manifestation, at least from my own privileged point of view, through the iconic presence of one Indonesian man.

At any rate, after several years of dedicated spiritual practice in the Himalayas, I resurfaced at Naropa University. And at this majestic gateway between the destitute East and the hectic West, I was practically awarded a certificate for being a 'Spiritual – Bypasser' par excellence. For that crowd is well versed in recognizing one who may have transcended, but that certainly did not include the mastery of personal matters. So I had to sign up for therapy and rework my limbic system and it was even suggested that I join an eight day Amerta Movement workshop with Prapto, which is where the following dialogue with another participant took place:

Q: “Prapto, in thinking about your practice, or discipline, what do you actually do when you enter the space?”

A: *“I always do three things: flowering, channeling and semadi. In semadi, I pay attention to everything, my toe, my foot, the air. Oh,”* (gesturing up towards his moving palm) *“my hand. In channeling, just letting in whatever; and in flowering, expression, emotions, feeling. But most of the time, maybe ninety percent, I am doing semadi.”*

Q: “Why do you do *semadi* so much of the time?”

A: *“Well, because in channeling I am afraid what might come in through me; and in flowering, I am thinking: maybe I am not pure enough.”*

Thus spoke Prapto at the Arapahoe Campus of Naropa University, in Boulder, CO, USA, 80301, on a date I shall not reconstruct, to avoid the now and then fugue of romantic recollection. Rather, I’d like to tiptoe our way directly towards the essential relationship between the practice of *semadi*, the artistic process of flowering, and the mystical experience of channeling. And I’d like to do so in interview form.

SE (Someone Else): having read what you have written so far, do you think that the words of Prapto need further interpretation, or do they stand alone?

SZ: Both are true. They certainly stand alone, but, as in the case of many great oral texts, there is room for interpretation.

SE: If you had to select one word or concept that would characterize Prapto’s above teaching, what would it be?

SZ: Responsibility.

SE: And why is that?

SZ: Though not present in the teaching itself, one may wonder what might happen if, through channeling, something “wrong” came in, or if the buds flowering proved to be “not pure enough.” I think that it is safe to assume that the results would entail harm to self or other, which is what we tend to fear and describe as impure.

When Prapto explains that he spends ninety percent of his time in a state of discernment, I think he is doing so out of responsibility towards himself and others; that it might be more fun to just flower and let things flow through.

SE: Prapto is an Indonesian teacher speaking to a primarily Western audience. To what extent does this influence your understanding of his words?

SZ: There are two parts to it. First, Prapto is a teacher. Someone sitting in front of him asked him a question. This person had a body: eyes and ears and a heart, and I believe that Prapto answered, first of all, to the person at hand. As I have no recollection of the questioner, I am no good at ascertaining the inter-subjective nature of the response. But of course it was there. These were Prapto's words to a specific person at a specific moment in time; even given the same question asked, he would have to offer one answer to a recklessly expressive person who gallops around the space slamming into people, and another to a grounded Vipassana practitioner, who rests utterly attentive to nothing but breath and sensation. But I certainly took the words as an encouragement to experience myself through paying acute attention to the basics, before waking up the big cats of emotional expression and uninterrupted flow.

SE: What about the cultural part?

SZ: Right. Here I just translated flowering as emotional expression and channeling as uninterrupted flow. But a student of mine went to Indonesia to practice with Prapto. After two or three nights when the lights were left on until daybreak, he turned to Prapto for an explanation. The master answered quite simply that light scared away the evil spirits. So, I think we might assume that channeling signifies the literal entry or passage of distinct entities through one's body self, as opposed to flowering, where one broadcasts latent personal material.

SE: You mentioned a student; where do you teach, and has Prapto's teaching influenced your own?

SZ: I currently serve as co-founder and director of the Mindfulness Based Therapy program at Tel Aviv's Bar Ilan University, where I teach the practices of movement and meditation.

SE: Would you say that mindfulness and *semadi* are one and the same?

SZ: The Indonesian word *semadi* is translated into English as meditation, or to meditate. Given Prapto's account of what he actually does while meditating ("*this is my hand, this is my finger*") I would describe *semadi* here as tracking or mental noting, which are the building blocks of mindfulness practice.

This moment-to-moment noticing nourishes a type of attention that lays the ground for the mindful state of sustained awareness. Hence, the *semadi* mindfulness practice cultivates an underlying state of awareness that can be experienced also in the non-conceptual states of flowering or channeling, where the fruits of discernment are

present, though the practice itself is temporarily tuned down, shut off, or abandoned; however you choose to think about it.

SE: In the dialogue above, the questioner asks Prapto about what he does in 'the space,' and you have mentioned the word 'practice.' In what way are 'the space' and 'practice' related?

SZ: The space, in this context, is where movement practice occurs. But the real space is the world, where, on a daily basis, our miserably heroic and uniquely distinct paths of life intersect and overlap; waking and awakening, together and alone, we sniff to see if practice has stood the test of translation from the precious culture of encapsulated spaces to the all-embracing, messy, breadth and scope of life.

My yoga guru once told me that all people are born as originals, but most people die as copies. I love that sentence, and paradoxically feel that the flowering of this innate originality frequently involves an uninterrupted sharing of meditative space with another human. Prapto has used the word *initiation* to describe such interactions. And initiation kicks off practice within and beyond the boundaries of space, energizing attention and perpetuating the human, 'being signature' through breath and gesture.

SE: Thank you

SZ: Thank you. And, thank you, Prapto.

My father once told me that it is impossible to learn from somebody else's experience, and it is practically impossible to learn from one's own experience. How encouraging, I thought, that it IS somehow possible. But, how?

Once confronted with this 'how' question, Krishnamurti replied, "All you have to do is take the first step, and the first step is the last step and the last step is the only step there is." And by this, I think, K wished to protect us against the useless temptation to follow other people's experience; for the truly risky business of real education is frequently hedged around by preordained conclusions. Having toppled over this hedge, which simply decrees the practically impossible to be impossibility itself, many of us may have attempted to engage K's one-step approach. But Amerta Movement has us treading the practical plateau of practice, before leaping off into the unified abyss of trust and joy. And it is this balanced buffer of integrated personal experience that we nourish by noting, "this is my hand, this is my finger." For here we keep the responsible 'I' in the picture, at least for a long time.

EMBODIED LIVES

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Shantam Zohar received his BA from Naropa University and MA in English Literature and Creative Writing from Bar Ilan University, Tel Aviv, where he currently serves as co-founder and director of the Mindfulness Based Therapy Program. He is the award-winning author of *Kabatiye*, (2002) and *Mideast Tango* (2010). Shantam teaches Authentic Movement as a relational awareness practice and is also co-founder and owner of Green Genius, a social platform designed to create transformative living circumstances fit for the 21st century.

shantamazing@gmail.com

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