

On Becoming Who You Are
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On the home page of this site, I note that my writing is part of my personal quest to live out philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's injunction to become what I am. I wrote that when I began the site, over five-and-a-half years ago at this writing, and considered it to be true of me at that time. This last year it has come home to me just how true that statement was, and is now: it is *really* true of me. Indeed, becoming the person I am is a big part of my writing, and just about everything I do. I just finished reading a biography of the Beatle George Harrison that characterized his life as a search for God.* My life has been a search for myself. Notice that this time I referred to becoming "who I am" rather than "what I am," the way I had phrased it five-and-a-half years ago. The idea is still basically the same, but "who" in contrast to "what" seems more human, more about life, my life, living my life, so I'm using "who" in this thought.

I'm clearer now than at the time I began this site about what becoming who I am entails. It means *creating the best possible version of the unique person I am and being that, doing that, as honestly, as purely, as decently, as effectively, as I can at each moment in the time I have available to me in my life.* Back to the George Harrison comparison, I don't reject the material world or seek to retreat from it. Rather, I affirm and embrace, and seek to be in, the material world, connected to it—that is to say, to my corporal, finite existence, other people, nature, circumstances, possibilities, opportunities, challenges, and accomplishments.

I have a niche theory, I guess it could be called, about human beings. Our niche, our place, in the grand scheme of things is to be ourselves at our very best, or as close to it as we can manage; that's where we best fit, that's where we will be happiest and most fulfilled, that's where we will do others and our contexts the most good. I spent the majority of my life, I realize now, trying to be somebody other than who I am. Things finally started to work for me when I decided to just be who I am, all out, to let that fly. I haven't gotten any academy awards in life's movie coming at things that way; in fact, sticking with the movie metaphor, I have had more than my share of bad reviews. But nevertheless, I feel better about myself than ever before; I'm much more content and at peace now, much

more gratified with my life, with what I'm getting done, with the difference I'm making, and I'm happier than ever.

I had always assumed, mostly at a partial and tacit level, I wasn't completely, consciously, aware of it, that if I were the true me, the authentic me, nobody would like it. Not so. It's turned out that some people actually like and approve of me as I really am. I also thought there'd be big trouble if I got myself into my true slot and lived life full out from there. There has been trouble, but nothing I haven't been able to handle, and the bad outcomes of the trouble have been submerged in the larger experience of pride, self-respect, and personal gratification that comes from living honorably as the person you are.

Playing the right part for us in life's movie, going back to that metaphor, often means having to switch films and directors and work with different actors, and to be sure that can involve upheaval and discomfort; but ultimately, I'm convinced, it is for the best to go through that; or at least it is best often enough to warrant giving serious attention to approaching things from this angle and seeing how it goes and making adjustments accordingly.

To move effectively in the direction of becoming who you are, I suggest it would be helpful that you experience in an immediate, felt, all-of-your-being way that:

- You are alive. You exist. You are a human being. You are you and nobody else, and nobody else is you. You are one of a kind. There has never been another you, and when you are gone there will never be another you. Nobody can do you better than you can. You need to cherish that fact, relish it, live from the basis of this wonderful reality.
- You are mortal. You are going to die. What you have at your disposal is the time between now and that moment. You should be grateful for that opportunity.
- You have worth. You have value. You matter. You count. You really do.

- Your interests and needs deserve to be taken into account by others, and you deserve to be accorded fair and just and decent treatment by them.
- You are volitional. You can think and choose and act.
- You have power—in each situation in your life identify what it is and wield it.
- You are free. You are not bound by the past; you are not determined by it; you are not a function, or product, of your circumstance. Your future isn't fated. You can control your destiny.
- You are responsible for what you become and what you experience and what you do with your life. Not anything else, not anybody else—you.
- You will be most self-respecting and happiest and of most value to your world if you live honorably and with dignity. A big part of that is personal integrity: where your actions in life align with your highest values and commitments. Another big part of that is decency, where you are kind, generous, caring, protective, and supportive in your dealings with other living beings and nature—and, no less crucial, in your dealings with yourself.
- You need to expel from your being any prior socialization, or conditioning, teachings, that have defined you as something other than who you are, pushed you down, deflected you from your path in life, inhibited or immobilized you, or in any other way kept you from moving toward becoming who you are.
- You need to jettison anything about yourself now—ideas, assumptions, patterns of behavior—that gets in your way of becoming yourself at your best. Thrust them out, now. No phase-outs—this second, done, gone.
- You are the sculptor of yourself. It's as if you are approximating in reality a Platonic form: the ideal you, the true you. With all of your intelligence and care, you shape your body, mind, character,

awareness, beliefs and values, purposes, and capability in this direction.

- You need to get around people and circumstances that support you in becoming and being the person you are. And if it turns out that you aren't very successful at doing that, or for all practical purposes fail at it, you need to be, the very best you can, who you are anyway.

- You need to care about everything in your life, not just the so-called big things. It's all important. What you have for lunch is important. Which birthday present you pick out to give someone is important. Which television show or film you watch or book you read or music you listen to is important. How well you clean the kitchen floor is important. Your handwriting is important. Your life, every detail of it, is important.

- You need to do your best with everything you do. That involves dedication, sacrifice, persistence, and really, really, really hard work. You aren't omnipotent, you can't guarantee results, including with this becoming-you undertaking. But you can do your best; that you can control.

- You need to keep your word. If you say you are going to do something, to another person, to yourself, do it, period.

- You need to be tough. You don't wear--accept, let it affect you--every negative or hurtful thing what is said about you or done to you. You don't take things personally--other people's negativity and toward you is their stuff, not yours. At the same time, you don't take crap from anybody--if they take you on, you take them on, no holds barred. You are nobody's punching bag. You don't cave in or back down. You are willing to fight like a wildcat to be in this world as the person you are. And you don't quit. You take stock of your situation and goals and tactics and keep on going.

- You need to be savvy. You need to figure out the rules and strategies of the game that's on your table in life and play it well.

- You need to be courageous, to do the right thing, the honorable thing, the decent thing, in the face of apprehension and fear.

- You need a have a positive mental attitude. Focus on making good things happen rather than explaining, complaining, and blaming. Don't be a cynic, don't try to make do with knowing why you are stuck and nothing is worth doing, and how it's all bigger than you are and/or that if anything good is going to happen at all it won't be until later; get on with achieving positive results now, quit waiting around. And cheer up. Make becoming who you are a good time.

- You need to look for ways to make gifts of hits. Bad things are going to happen to you, things aren't always going to go as you want, you are going to get hit and it's going to hurt and it is going to leave scars. The challenge is to make even that work for you, make you clearer, stronger, more focused, more dedicated, more productive, and happier. Take advantage of the bad in your life: transmute that negative energy, transform that negative event or circumstance, employ it as a prompt, a motivator, to create something good. Commit to finding the gift in every hit.

- You need to notice and commend yourself for any movement toward becoming who you are, no matter how big or how small it may seem. Every tiny step forward in life is a victory. And you don't need to be perfect to be successful at living.

I'll stop here. I hope this thought has been food for thought, and that you work with what I have written here to improve and complete it. As I look over the list of bullet points, it seems long, disparate. Perhaps you can think of a way to collapse these items into three or four categories, somehow make it easier to comprehend and use. Whatever you do with what it's here, I wish you well.

*The book: Gary Tillery, *Working Class Mystic: A Spiritual Biography of George Harrison* (Theosophical Publishing House, 2011).