

Giving Way to Passion

I had some misgivings about sharing this practice. Passion is such an over-used word that I am afraid it would attract a *déjà vu* response from you all. But here goes.

The Eighth Practice of **Giving Way to Passion** first suggests that we often do the opposite. We hold back and put a barrier, possibly deemed a protective barrier, between the self we know and manage in self-contained fashion, and the uncertainty of events out there.

There is no surprise to read that the Zanders want you to do the opposite. They propose two steps :

1. The first step is to notice where you are holding back and let go. Release those barriers of self that keep you separate and in control, and let the vital energy of passion surge through you, connecting you to all beyond.
2. The second step is to participate wholly. Allow yourself to be a channel to shape the stream of passion into a new expression for the world.

We need order and predictability in our world – it supports us to get on with the things that matter, like leading a school, starting a new programme, guiding our students and our own children. But sometimes the guidelines we put up also become the boundaries that 'keep us in a state of separateness' where we do not allow ourselves to fully participate in what is happening.

Roz Zander talks about her feelings when faced with a waterfall, "titanic triangles of green ice stood straight in the air, as the raving waters split the frozen surface, piling jagged ice sections one upon another. The river roared like mad, its waters roiling by with incessant energy. The abandon was outrageous, confrontational." And she was in a swaying suspension bridge over this scene, taking it all in, not running back to a safer part of the river bank.

What do we have in Singapore that comes anywhere near this? We have no tumultuous wild. And even if you've been to Niagara Falls, it's not the same – the folks there have made it almost too accessible and certainly very safe. You are even provided with a disposable rain coat to keep yourself dry from the shower of the waterfall. Does this mean we can never experience raw energy?

Ben Zander describes how he mentored a technically competent violinist till he could play from his heart and not just with his fingers. It was wonderful to read the emotions the performance evoked from the audience. But not many of us can play an instrument to simulate the same experience.

However we do have our times when intense feelings are roiling with intense energy. Think about a critical school match where your team is evenly pitched against the opponent's and you are part of the roar of the school when a goal is made or missed, a penalty is awarded, the anguished mental countdown as the last minutes of the game close in. I used to dread those matches and wish for the time when I would not need to feel so stressed. My hands would be trembling so much that I would not even be able to type a message on the phone. I would say to the principal of the other school, "Let's just withdraw and have a civilised cup of tea and come back when it's all over." I am glad my invitation was never taken up.

Giving way to passion – the delirious joy when your team just pips the other to win, the bitter disappointment when they lost – makes you truly a part of the school.

And isn't this why we want to make these occasions a school event so every student can feel it too? I know one high-achieving student who wanted to complain about the inadequacies of his teacher and changed his mind after being at a school match. He had given way to passion and it changed his perspective about what school was about.

That's exactly what giving way to passion is for. "Life flows when we put our attention on the larger patterns of which we are a part. Life takes on shape and meaning when a person is able to transcend the barriers of personal survival and become a unique conduit for its vital energy."