

# Prayers for a Rolling-Stone

**Harnessing the natural rhythms of our being for emerging out of stuck spaces**

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Once, there was an age when stones could move. An old man, wrinkles of a mouth that had many smiles, and the first sentence that the old teacher uttered. There they sat in a circle, students and their teacher, the wind and the waves and a cliff, overlooking the most beautiful Zen rock garden. It was a special garden, as it installed and instilled harmony in everybody that looked at it. After a very short while everybody started breathing in the same pace, the same rhythm. And the teacher, he told them that this is the only rock garden, which is not an artefact, the only one with which man had nothing to do; it was created solely by nature.

You look at the body of somebody who is stuck, where thesis and antithesis have yet to find a joined rhythm; breathing is yet to form a continuation whereupon in-breath and out-breath are perspectives of the same thing, are merged. I know these cycles, as I too find myself there every once in while; down-spiralling into persistent rock bottom, how can I safely emerge?

I was sitting with a friend, watching the river Thames and a cormorant was insistently diving for fish. For long seconds it disappeared, the face of the river smoothed to swallow the bird, only to surface in a most unexpected space.

And he sat there and looked. How old was he? Eighty? One hundred? Three hundred and seventeen years old? An old man; yet his eyes still so clear and his smile as empowering as ever: “I have been told this story by my teacher, many years ago, as we sat with him just like you do, now,” just like you, the first sentence heard was this. Once, there was an age when stones could move. And how far back does the story go nobody knows – perhaps forever. This is the story of this garden, at which no-one could look with indifference; its harmony turns oblivion into serenity and anxiety into curiosity, its order invites our thousandfold lotus to blossom in our hearts.

Once there was an age when stones could move. In fact, at that time the rocks that could move, couldn't but move. There were two types of stones – the dynamic stones, which were forever rolling, restlessly exploring different lands and landscapes, oceans and islands. They had the gift of the explorer and they sensed the three-dimensional quality of the earth, the multi-dimensional nature of the universe. The dynamic stones were forever in motion, never resting for a second, recklessly exploring, restlessly rolling, always in the move. They never stopped to think, to reflect or to understand; but oh the beauties they have seen! Oh, the wonders they have found! Oh the treasures they have witnessed. And the other type of stones, they were static stones, very much like the stones we know today. They never moved; they never changed position. Paralysed they observed the world with its wonders and beauties, absorbing as much as they could from the limited, two-dimensional landscape they were born into. They spent their days and nights reflecting, thinking, processing the information they have gathered. The static stones spent most of their lives trying to make sense of the world as they saw it. They never started moving, exploring the uncharted territories of the universe; but oh the depth of their understanding! Oh the length of their reflections! Oh the beauty of their insights!

So while the dynamic stones had the gift of exploration and movement, the static ones had the gift of reflection and understanding, and neither group had the talent of the other.

A hand on the belly, another against the heart; watch the patterns. Are they friends or foes? Are they one? Hear the undercurrent movement drawing patterns of connection; you know the story, yet it is a fascinating one, of the sort that brings tears to your eyes, of the sort that challenges laws of nature.

And it was known to all, that if you were born a moving rock you will forever move without thought, and if you were born static – then never in your life will you know movement, and you are destined to a life of meditation.

But one small rock, a young stone, was pretentious and stubborn enough to challenge the laws of nature. As she was born static, she had many hundreds of years to reflect

on her destiny and decided that it didn't suit her. "I can do more than this," she thought, "I want to move despite the rules of nature."

And so were the laws of nature, and she wanted to move. How do you will yourself to move? With will! "Just imagine how the world would open up before me as I move with understanding, with reflection!"

She thought about all that is happening inside her, about all the thoughts, sensations and feelings. "If there is so much movement inside," she thought, "why couldn't I have movement outside too? Why wouldn't it be possible for me to move outside too? What an amazing life it could be if the power of reflection and the gift of understanding could be joined to exploring the world."

For decades she willed herself to move, single-pointedly focusing on movement, on being in movement. Her entire focus was about making a change, making the slightest of movements, was about being in movement. She was as dedicated as dedication can reach and as disciplined as discipline can possibly go. Until one day, after some hundreds of years of trying so hard, she moved. It was the slightest of movements, nothing monumental in size. If you wouldn't have paid close attention to it, you might have easily missed it. But she moved; a tiny movement; the slightest of moves. It was so powerful; it was amazing. And if stones could shed tears of happiness, this is where she would cry.

From then onwards she spent years amplifying and perfecting that which was a beginning, taking this small movement and building on it, spending every second of her life perfecting the movement, learning to roll. It was easier because she knew she could do it; it was easier because she knew she had it in her.

And so, after much effort, she did; her movement increased by the day.

After a few years, a few decades of practice – she started rolling, leaving the place where she was born, being looked at by the stones around her with disbelief and fear. She moved and rolled over a world that was unexplored by her, seeing the world for the first time as a three-dimensional one. Her body wasn't accustomed to such movement, so it was painful at times, and yet – uncharted territories opened up before

her, exciting, just waiting for her. The little stone dared not stop and rest. Her years of reflexive understanding found no outlet in her frantic lifestyle, yet the magical universe was tempting her to go on, “how can I ever risk the beauties that I was given? How could I risk giving such a precious gift away?” to keep on rolling.

The small fist of a baby clings on to his mother’s hair, body; you shall not leave me. And the cries of a baby are the howling of a lonesome wolf – marking the end of the world; never again, the baby fears, would my mother hold me in her arms, never again will I be safe. So you open up to touch, so you stay in touch and watch the attachment grows, never ever leave me, never ever change. But life flows.

She explored amazing mountains, rolling uphill and snakelike valleys downhill, moving along costal flatlands and inside woods, in the plateaus of the seas and in swamps – and never stopping. Down the sea, allowing the different currents to explore her as well, it was a nice, albeit unknown feeling. Sometimes the sea breathed in tandem with her. She saw so many colours. She saw the earth when it was fertile, and the earth when it was barren. And she knew emotions she had never known before. However, reflection and understanding had no place in her constant movement, as she never stopped. She knew that as soon as she stopped, she will never again move, this was the law of nature, and having broken the law once and seen all the beauty and wonder the world had to offer her – she didn’t want to miss it.

And then one day, she was on her way to somewhere else when she noticed a beautiful hill. Without thinking she started rolling uphill, ever so slightly resisting the pressure of gravity as she ascends. It was very sandy and quite steep and yet she rolled, slowly paving her way up.

There she was.

For the first time in many years she stopped breathing, because she saw the most beautiful thing in her life. There she was, with her white foams violently breaking against the black rocks; with her pale pinkish-greens overcasting the corals and fish; and deeper the blues, yellows, and deeper the greens and turquoises, and deeper still into the black purples – there was the ocean. And she was looking with hungry eyes at her, and the ocean was looking at her at the same pace – slowly. The gentle surface

danced without moving and stayed still rhythmically. There she was, the ocean; the most awesome and incomprehensible of beings in the universe. And she looked at the ocean with great awe, surprised, hypnotised, mesmerised by her pace... she just looked. So much movement and yet, at the same time, everything was so still. Motion without movement, rhythmically still. It is so strange, realising the depth of what is happening in here, that by looking you take part, you participate, and daring to go there; and daring to breathe deeper. Fascinated, for days she was just looking.

You are just looking, an onlooker has sometimes the illusion of non-participating, but you watch. You breathe and your breath moves with what you see, with what you hear, with what you feel. Your breathe and your breath moves with you and with the world, and it calls for touch, as it yearns to embody – to become what is possible for a soul, for breath, for you to become.

It was only after three or four days when she realised that for the last few days she ceased from moving. She wasn't moving. She was merely looking, appreciating. There she stayed on the cliff down looking the ocean, and a great fear started to grow in her heart; great fear. "Surely once I've stopped, never again will I be able to move," she thought, and a tremendous pain and sorrow burned in her heart. It was frightening. It was so frightening for her, that from this moment of anxiety and panic she started shaking, rocking, something in her started to move anxiously, and she was anxious, and she was anxious, and she was anxious, and then she started moving. And she started to move, in circles, circling, round and round, round and round circling around herself. And the quicker she circled, the deeper she dug herself in the sand, and the deeper she dug herself in the sand, the more anxious she became; and the more anxious she became – the quicker she circled herself. And so, after a few weeks there was very little of her left outside, a tiny piece of rock that could be seen from the surface, and even if she tried – she could no longer move, what a paralysing feeling. She was almost totally buried; and if stones cried of despair, if rocks could shed a tear of sadness – well, I guess this would be the time for her to cry.

We all know that place well, we all know because we all spent some time there, and we can always go back there. But stop. Wait. Do you really want to do it again?

And she stayed, because she had no choice. She stayed. Things bubbled out inside her and some came out while some remained untouched, concealed; she stayed. Once again, she started noticing all the movements that were happening inside here. So there she was, disappointed, depleted, anxious and exhausted. And she stayed there in that mood; in the rock bottom of the sand, very awkward time and place to be in. She stayed there and waited, since she had no other choice.

After a week, she was there – she wasn't even thinking, just breathing, when something unexpected happened – she heard something breathing with her. Heard the sound of someone breathing with her. Perhaps it was always there, but she couldn't tell.

She could feel the breath over her cheek and it was the wind; the wind's breeze was breathing with her, just like that, and it was an enjoyable experience; it is such a relief to know that someone is breathing with you. You are no longer alone, someone is listening, someone shares your being.

And she breathed in tandem with the breeze and felt that something unusual is happening. The breeze blew some sand over her face, and a tiny tiny gap between the rock and the sand underneath her was created, and at that moment – breathing rhythmically, the rock, very naturally, withdrew a fraction to the back, and the sand very naturally came and filled the gap that was created by the rock's movement. And the rock realised that, miraculously, she was a few millimetres out, slightly closer to the surface than she was.

She started to reflect upon the different processes she went through when she was there, the different learnings she had, and she waited. And she waited, and surely enough after not many days the wind came again, or perhaps it was always there, stroking her cheek, and when the stone's cheek was stroked, touching her core, opening a tiny place – she moved. She could feel that the wind blew some sand away beneath her and she withdrew, fraction to the back – only to allow the sand to come and fill the gap; and the stone allowed herself to get unstuck. She stayed there, slightly closer to the surface. From her new position, she could even see a little bit of the ocean. And so, she waited. And this time it was sooner than she'd expected when

the breeze came, stroking the rock's cheek, creating that space, which allowed her out – breathing in tandem. In and out, and the stone is quick to take advantage of the space and withdraw, and the sand is quick to take advantage of the space and fill the gap. Day after day she waited, patiently.

And after a year's time of breathing in tandem with the wind, the moment came when the stone was free again; she was out – beautiful, strong, elegant. Knowing the power of movement and the strength of stillness, her entire body was out of the sand and she stood there, patiently, silently. And she stood there patiently and silently and enjoyed the wind and the sand. And she looked at the world with awe.

A hand on the belly, another against the heart; watch the patterns. Where is your centre? Watch the breath, hear the undercurrent movements of what wishes to become, of what is in the process of becoming; of what is. Feel the patterns of connection; you know the story, you have always known it. So let it be known, let yourself be known, say it allowed: I am here.

It is said that at that moment the rock made a small circle and started rolling up to the climax again, and when she reached the very top of the hill – looking at the beauties of the ocean, she stopped, and stayed there. “And I have heard”, the old man said, “I have heard that the story of the stone was carried through and by the waves of the oceans, through and by the strokes of the wind, through and by the sand of many seas, through and by the gossipy seagulls, through and by the sun and its beams, through and by the many formations of clouds. It is said that many stones around the world, were encouraged by it; and few courageous stones and rocks dared to challenge the destiny they were given and started making for their journeys, changing their destiny; and over the decades they joined the moving stone to create that space in which we sit, a space of perfect harmony; a perfect Zen rock garden, a space at which one cannot look with indifference; a space that tells the story of creation; a space at which one can look forever; the harmony of which turns oblivion into serenity and anxiety into curiosity; the order of which allows the thousandfold lotus of your heart, to blossom”.

I was sitting with a friend, watching the river Thames and telling her this story. The cormorant was still diving for fish, and surfacing in a most unexpected place; and it was unexpected only because we weren't witnessing the underwater; from there – from underwater – it was probably the most natural of dances. It is with breath that we can discover that journey; it is with touch that we can transform oblivion into serenity and anxiety into curiosity; it is with breath and touch that we can invite our thousandfold lotus to blossom in our hearts.