

Book Review

Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living Krista Tippett; New York: Penguin, 2017.

Krista Tippett, a graduate of Brown University 20 years after me and host of the National Public Radio show “On Being”, ask deep questions about mystery and life.

In this volume, we are introduced to her path of seeking, learning and more questioning as well as to the many spiritual thinkers of our day whom she has interviewed for her show. As she says, her work (and I’d say her avocation) is to listen deeply – what she calls **generous listening**. At the Ecumenical Institute in Minnesota, she learned to ask questions about lived experience, since folks can disagree with the views of others but never with their experiences.

She discusses the path toward wisdom in terms of five concepts: words, body, love, faith, and hope. This list is novel in its inclusion of body and in the ordering of the concepts and how they build upon each other. For each of these five concepts, her section is followed by segments selected from interviews with specific spiritual leaders.

Words:

The world right now needs the most vivid, transformative universe of words that you and I can muster. And we can begin immediately to start having the conversations we want to be hearing, and telling the story of our time anew.

Generous listening is powered by curiosity, a virtue we can invite and nurture in ourselves to render it instinctive. It involves a kind of vulnerability—a willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity. The listener wants to understand the humanity behind the words of the other, and patiently summons one’s own best self and one’s own best words and questions.

Body:

Rituals are sophisticated ancient intelligence about the body. Kneeling, folding hands in prayer, and breaking bread; liturgies of grieving, gathering, and celebration—such actions create visceral containers of time and posture. They are like physical corollaries to poetry—condensed, economical gestures that carry inordinate meaning and import. Rituals tether emotion in flesh and blood and bone and help re-lease it. They embody memory in communal time.

Love:

Hospitality is a word that shimmers, softly. It offers itself as an accessible entry point to love in action.

Faith:

Any conviction worth its salt has chosen to cohabit with a piece of mystery, and that mystery is at the essence of the vitality and growth of the thing.

Wondering is a useful way to begin to speak of a shared vocabulary of mystery we might embrace across our disciplines, our contrasting certainties, and our doubts.

Hope:

Hope, like every virtue, is a choice that becomes a practice that becomes spiritual muscle memory. It's a renewable resource for moving through life as it is, not as we wish it to be.

I have seen that wisdom emerges precisely through those moments when we have to hold seemingly opposing realities in a creative tension and interplay: power and frailty, birth and death, pain and hope, beauty and brokenness, mystery and conviction, calm and buoyancy, mine and yours.

This is a book to read and then reread at different times in our lives – so many thoughts for us to ponder.

I encourage you to listen to the [free podcasts](#) available for 15 years of great interviews with spiritual and writing leaders of our era and also to [download the Discussion Guide](#).