

Avanless Peterson  
*The Way of Kings*

“If I should die,” Dalinar said, “then I would do so having lived my life right. It is not the destination that matters, but how one arrives there.”

As a young adult, Dalinar was a ruthless war hero, bent on seeking retribution for the assassination of his brother, the King. While part of his ferocity could be blamed on a dark power manipulating his thoughts, a matured Dalinar learns to take accountability for his past self.

At the start of the series, *Way of Kings* (by Brandon Sanderson), Dalinar contemplates upon his past through flashbacks and introspection. He recognizes a change within him—a change of heart and a desire to be an upright, peaceful, moral man. He wonders how he can live up to his own expectations, as well as others. Every time he tries to do something right—tries to be a better man—he faces the discouragement of others, including many who label him a hypocrite for trying. Others recall his past with fondness, looking upon his new-found tranquility and sensitivity with disgust.

Eventually, Dalinar learns to let go of his past and embrace authenticity. He realizes that he can take accountability without self-hatred, and makes steps toward improvement without fear of hypocrisy or failure. In doing so, he finds peace in a world fraught with darkness and uncertainty.

Last year was fraught with darkness and uncertainty for me: News stories detailing the tail end of a global pandemic, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the Uvalde school shooting, women’s loss of rights in Afghanistan, a humanitarian crisis in Yemen. I struggled to stay afloat in my own life after experiencing postpartum depression and anxiety, as well as loneliness and isolation after a challenging international move. I faced feelings of self-doubt and insecurity, not knowing how to balance my new role as a mother with my educational dreams. And, in the middle of it all, certain experiences resurfaced past mistakes, making me wonder if I could ever escape their hold on me and live up to expectations—especially my own. Does the good I do now even matter?

Dalinar taught me to find simple virtues at the center of dichotomic vices. It hardly matters who you were but, rather, where you are heading. There will always be naysayers and cynics who want to remind you of your past or make you feel insignificant or absurd for living your values. There will always be tragedy and reason to fear. But, in the end, we get to choose the person we want to be. We get to choose the life we hope to live. We have more control over ourselves and our destinies than we think. And, ultimately, it will hardly matter where we end up. Seeking authenticity and integrity has helped me become a better individual than I was at the start of last year. It has allowed me to look back upon the journey and exclaim with confidence,

*I did my best. I did enough. I lived it right.*