

Practicing Presence

Being authentic is all about being present. When we are not present, we are on automatic pilot. When we are on automatic pilot, we are operating from that vast network of interconnected patterns that we call our “Dark Side” – dark as in unconscious, rather than filled with the light of awareness, of presence, of Spiritual Self. Remember, our Dark Side is not mal-intentioned, like some evil alter ego. Having a Dark Side does not mean we are “bad,” it simply means we are human. We began life completely dependent and vulnerable. We needed first to survive, to belong, to get enough connection and love to thrive. Our Dark Side is simply an outdated adaptive strategy that was designed to navigate our early environment. It is reactive, not responsive. It is dedicated to survival and safety, not vision. It recreates life on the known Left Road, pulling us into the past, the old uncomfortably comfortable familiar.

Anything that we want to cultivate requires practice. Presence is no different. Much of our neurobiology is dedicated to survival. However, neuroscience tells us that our brains have tremendous neuroplasticity, that we can “use our brain to change our brain,” changing neuronal pathways to support us in having more resilience, presence, authentic response, gratitude, compassion – all that good stuff! We need to be proactive for this to happen. **We need practice.**

Make your daily practice simple and brief. This will support you in building the habit. Make an appointment with yourself daily, and keep it! You can take anything you already do, and for five minutes of this activity, practice doing it with presence, with mindful awareness. Choose something that you do *in solitude* as a place to begin. It’s just easier! For example, a walk in nature, drinking a cup of coffee or tea, eating a snack, washing the dishes, or anything that you can do by yourself. Come into your senses, your body. Our Body is always present – it doesn’t exist anywhere but here, now! Our thoughts carry us far away from where we are. We are anywhere but where we are, doing what we are doing, when we are “lost” in thought. We can bring exquisite awareness to what we are experiencing and sensing: smelling the tea, feeling the warmth of the cup in our hands, feeling the sensation on the tongue and throat; tasting the variation of flavor as we hold it in the mouth; seeing the steam, the cup, the color; hearing the sounds, and so on. And yes, thoughts will come in. This is the nature of the thinking mind. It is discursive, it “chatters!” No blame, nothing to scold yourself for, just gently bring your attention back, with loving-kindness for yourself, to the present, again and again. Savor the moment. For a more traditional “practice,” you can sit in a relaxed but upright position, and rest your attention on the experience of breath, or the sounds around and within you. Again, bringing

your attention back each time it wanders in thoughts. Set a timer for five minutes, same time, same place.

Meditation teachers tell us that meditation is the act of bringing yourself back. It's not hanging out in perfect presence. It is like building a muscle. We wander off, we come back, we wander off, we come back. It is the dance of being embodied Spirit. Just as we say in the Process, we go into patterns, we come back to authenticity, we go into patterns, we come back to presence. It is just our nature to do this. With practice, we can change the rhythm of that dance and our "practice" can eventually become a more consistent way of being. We can be more often in presence, the only place from which we can act authentically, the only place where we have choice, the only place where the adventure and mystery of life is happening. **Be present for your life, now.**

Mindfulness expert Andy Puddicombe describes the power of simply being mindful and experiencing the present moment in this TED Talk (no incense or sitting in uncomfortable positions required):

- https://www.ted.com/talks/andy_puddicombe_all_it_takes_is_10_mindful_minutes?utm_source=tedcomshare&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=tedsread

"Be here now."
~Ram Dass