



Presencing Issue 42

Philosophy of the Intrinsic: What Lies Within

Presencing Now: First let me say that I have been revisiting all of my *Presencing* newsletters because I am planning to publish them in a book with appropriate additions and images. The whole project began with my attempt to understand presencing and how it relates to the body and to consciousness, to treatment modalities, and to our work as caregivers. In the beginning and throughout this venture I have chosen to write from my own lived experiences and from a kind of guidance I have received inside. I hope in this issue to touch on various examples of why I use the concept intrinsic to mean something that exists inside of each of us from birth. In *Advaita Vedanta*, a very ancient spiritual philosophy from India it is averred that there is a level of *Being* inside of each person from the beginning to the end of each lifetime. Through certain practices we become aware of that Being inside. In Christianity it is called the Holy Spirit, in Buddhism it is called Buddha Mind. I am using the term intrinsic, knowing that I am stepping on the toes of ethicists that have used that term to mean that a sense of ethics and appropriate behavior is inherent in all human beings. I am using the term intrinsic to point out that from the beginning of our lives we are never alone.



Beginning now: In *Presencing Issue 7*, I speak about my own discovery of the state of presence during a meditation in which I heard the voice of a friend who had just died saying the word "now," over and over. I had no idea at that time what was happening. I realized that every time she said the word "now," I felt a wave of sensation spread through my body as a feeling of this moment now. As I had more and more of these moments I started to feel a continuity of unbroken "nows" as a steady but growing wave of presence. I came out of that experience realizing that I had been given a gift, a new way of feeling and participating in life. I had been

searching for an understanding of various concepts I was reading about in spiritual literature about living in the moment, and coming into a real relationship with an inner teacher. Now I knew that there was a way to access the moment, but what did it mean? The word "now" it turns out was a gentle introduction to a concept I had been pursuing for some time. The concept existed in *A Course in Miracles (ACIM)* as the "holy instant." My first knowing experience of this concept was the recognition that the waves of sensation I was experiencing were taking me into *now*: starts a place where time stands still because it has been replaced by the eternal moment. In this moment all phenomena, all consciousness, all Being, is happening eternally. I had a small taste of passing out of sequential time into all-time. And shortly thereafter I was able to share that state with a friend of mine as a "shared holy instant."

Coming to Pain: As a Trager practitioner I had learned to enter into a state of presence, called "hookup." For me it felt like a meditative state I had sometimes experienced in my years of *vipassana* meditation. I would spend hours at a time paying attention to the sensations in my body as various themes were playing themselves out in my mind. At that time the main sensations I was noticing were those of pain. I was doing my best to create inner experiences in which I would not go into pain. Once pain showed up my mind would become dominated by finding ways I could escape the pain.



Escape became an obsession and took over every thought in my mind. Little did I know at that time that the pain signal(s) themselves were the key to free me from the prison cell of suffering. So here I was working as a bodyworker trying to release my clients from their pain and their infirmities, and being tantalized by my own experience of presence. In my continual practice of meditation and study of *ACIM*, I was asking inside for deeper understandings of where these repeated experiences were leading.



Desert stillness: I went for a retreat to the deserts of New Mexico. I would hike out into the wilderness practicing presence and also forgetting to practice presence. I was exploring everything around me and at the same time I was noticing when I would come into presence, and then notice when I was no longer in the moment. I would catch my mind wandering through a desert of memories while my intention was to experience a special place of continual now. As I was having these experiences I was asking for help from some one who was accompanying me inside. A few days after my desert wanderings I described a recurring dream I was having to a New Mexico friend, in which I would find myself in a rose garden surrounded by adobe walls which I sensed was in the center of a monastery. She was convinced that I was seeing Christ in the Desert Benedictine monastery in Abiquiu New Mexico. I decided to go. Getting there was fascinating. While driving, I kept seeing *Pedernal Mesa*, I felt that I was entering a Georgia O'Keeffe painting. Many remarkable things happened while I was staying at the monastery. I was clearly in the place of my recurrent dreams, a rose garden, a place of silence, stillness, and immanent presence.

Touching now: On the last day I discovered a small section of books in their store on practicing presence. I chose three that brought me into contact with past seekers who were obsessed with presence. I consumed these books quickly and what I recognized was that each seeker had a mantra he would practice over and over to link himself to God, spirit, or Jesus. They would pass a rosary bead with each mantra. This added a tactile body sensation. I tried the same thing on my own with a yam rosary the monks had made. The rosary beads and the "nows" of my first experience of presencing had bodily sensations in common. A profound realization flooded in: All body sensations only exist now, because the body itself only exists now. Each time I flipped a bead I could experience this moment. Thus, if we can train our minds to focus on the sensations we could use them to experience a continuous presence. This also meant that the key to transformation that *vipassana* promises has to do with learning to attend to the presence of sensations. This is confirmed in the Buddha's *Satipatthana Sutra*. It also could mean that the pain signals I so dreaded were also occurring in the present moment. Wonder of wonders! When I used the pain as a "now" signal, I entered a state of presence, a state of no pain, a state of no fear, a state of deep parasympathetic ease.



Entering NOW: As I said above, the body only exists in the present moment. If we want to cross over into the presence of eternity one way is to train ourselves to use the body signals that are continuously accompanying every moment; the sensations of our aliveness or sentience. We can refer to those body sensations as the ontological basis of proprioception. One writer refers to proprioception as the way the brain feels the body. This may now be underscored by the discovery that microscopic glial cells vastly outnumber the neurons in our brains and are now suspected of playing a sensory role in mediating consciousness. We have carefully trained our minds to overlay each moment with memory. We discern where we are by where we've been: "Where am I, with how did I get here." When we make plans for the future, we pay close attention to the past. We continually carry our past with us, along with our expectations, trepidations, hopes and regrets.



Next step: putting body NOW into practice and learning words and new forms of physical and verbal interaction. Here are some surprising observations of sensory systems and their role in creating a direct connection between our conscious awareness and tissue sentience. In end-of-life patients with extreme pain due to cancerous tumors, the practitioner can palpate the tumor region and the patient can propriocept the practitioner's hands by breathing into or by bringing touch awareness right into those hands. The practitioner can feel a warming and enlivening flow in her hands; the patient can feel an immediate diminishment of pain and a loss of fear.

Paralytics with loss of motor nerve function can feel and interact with their sensory nerves and bring a feeling of warming and flow into the practitioner's hands. As their sensory awareness becomes more conscious they can will themselves to bring motor functioning to those areas and use sensory nows to reduce the pains of muscle spasming. A byproduct of this development is that they feel empowered to affect their own healing. A patient with MS who has been suffering falls from undependable muscle coordination can learn to use her increased proprioceptive awareness in parallel with her intention to move without falling and to feel much less fearful. Finally another surprising effect of clients' interactions with their body states is that when they verbally describe what they are feeling where the practitioner is creating tactile sensations in a painful or movement restricted body part, both persons can feel the tissue enliven and become articulate and pain free.

Surmising now: Perhaps these surprising effects are the result of client and practitioner bringing their shared awareness into the present moment by focusing on body sensations that are occurring now, with the intention on both their parts to interact together. I would add that in each of the above situations the practitioner experienced concomitant changes to the client. I started this *Presencing* issue with the notion that a deeper level of *Being* is available and indeed intrinsic to each one of us. I am convinced that that level of being is intrinsic to all life and that in moments of presence, what Abraham Maslow called peak experiences, we encounter that Being. When we chose to practice presencing, using our body-now sensations we discover that we are in-formed by that Being, that we all share together. Perhaps that is the true essence of healing.

"Come to Me empty handed."
Respectfully submitted: Jack Blackburn 2015



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