

Personal Presencing: The Signs of Presence
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The following is excerpted from the Practical Presencing classes I have been teaching in Japan. Developing a personal practice of presencing can be compared to training for an extreme sport. The more we practice presencing the more inner and outer changes show up in our lives. This first article describes some of those changes. It is very challenging to remember to be present throughout the day. The signs of presence bring us evidence that the background phenomena we usually overlook: silence, stillness, no thought, no time, and mu, play a central role in shifting human consciousness.

The Signs of Presence



When we practice presence for a while we start to experience the world and other persons differently. We start to become aware of the qualities or signs of presence that add many dimensions to all of our experiences. We do not try to make them happen. They seem to occur in response to our presencing - they are signs or evidence that we are awakening. What are some of these signs? How do they show up? And what are their effects upon us, and the world?

Silence: One of the signs of presence that takes us into new dimensions is silence. When we experience absolute silence for the first time it is as if a comforting blanket, like snow falling on snow, has fallen over all our cares. In this cocoon of silence we feel deeply safe and restful and we start to become aware that there are new kinds of sounds occurring around us - a kind of music that arises from all sounds. The silence gives us this awareness. It doesn't matter if we are on a train or on Mount Fuji.

Stillness: The next sign of presence is stillness. We start to feel a stillness inside and realize that the stillness, like a peaceful afternoon in the forest, is always there under the surface. We start to realize that in every movement, even the beating of our own heart, there is a stillness at the core. When we feel the stillness, we become aware that all of life is suffused with patterns of movement and the patterns are coordinated and meaningful - like the movements of schools of fishes, or grasses swept by winds, or the movement of water. All of our interactions have these same kinds of patterns when we see with the dimensionality of stillness.



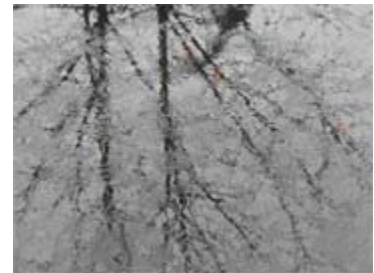
No thought: Another sign of presence is the experience of no thought. When we experience no thought for the first time, it comes as a great surprise. We have all assumed that when conscious thought ceases we are either asleep or dead. And yet the more we practice presence, the more we have experiences of no thought. At these times we become aware of feelings of deep peace and comfort - as if we were totally rested. One of the gifts of bodywork can be long periods of no thought. And no thought adds the dimension of insight. As we sink into the feeling of no thought we realize that thought can arise from a different center - from the heart. And the thoughts that arise from this source are wise and affirming. As we practice presence more and more, no thought takes us into our own true thoughts. We can actually hear a voice inside that is speaking through us. What we hear is as much of a surprise and a gift to us as to those to whom we are speaking.

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No time: Another sign of presence is no time. We have all experienced periods of no time, periods when time just seemed to stand still or disappear entirely. These moments are so unusual that when we speak about them it is with awe. Children experience no time more often than adults. We can feel no time when we are falling in love, doing an activity, like playing music, that we thoroughly enjoy, and also surprisingly, when we are making a great discovery (there are many such stories of no time in the history of science). This experience also seems to accompany insights, powerful conclusions, or seeing something entirely differently. Why is this so? Is it because we have become so absorbed in what we are doing that we forget about time? Or is it that for those moments, presenting is awakening us to the real world.

In presence all times and all places are connected. We are able to experience a convergence of problems and solutions, curiosity and creativity, freedom and playfulness. Perhaps with the awakening of presence, we are able to experience the multidimensionality of all time and all space.



Mu: The last sign or quality of presence I will explore is emptiness or mu. Of all the signs of presence we have dealt with, mu is probably the most fearful. Mu literally means emptiness or nothingness. Mu can take us into experiences where nothing exists, what is sometimes called non-reality. For the first time we became aware that nothing exists in the way we perceive it. The presencer may experience momentary lapses of perception in which everything disappears. This is the great void that has been the origin of awe and mystery to spiritual adepts throughout history. "Everything is nothing, nothing is everything." Thus chants the Zen practitioner while reciting the Diamond Sutra; this is considered the greatest teaching of the Buddha.

The disappearance of everything adds the dimension of not knowing to our experience of reality. Modern physicists tell us that everything that we perceive is either a wave or a particle, flipping back and forth between existence and non-existence, or the potential for existence. It appears now that our very consciousness and that of all living beings is in part a calling for existence. In other words, we are continually creating the reality we experience. The greatest contributor to our experience of multidimensionality and universal connectivity is mu. Everything we perceive, conceive, receive, is both container and contained by mu. Not knowing while we're asleep becomes gnosis, or true knowing when we awaken.



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