

Power and Presence

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Abstract: Presence requires us to be in the here and now physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually, and in such a state we have greater access to our personal power. This article provides some examples and methods of becoming more present and more powerful/

My body is unfamiliar with exercise. As a teenager I was very fit, engaging in cycling, hiking, martial arts, and other active pursuits. Not so as an adult. I have spent the best part of several decades inactive behind a desk. I expected my body to participate when called on without any preparation. Aches and pains I experienced were ignored until they got the better of me, and then lots of therapeutic massage became important. In September I jumped at the opportunity to participate in the Oxfam Trailwalker Challenge; a walk of 100 kilometres (62 miles) to be completed in total by a team of four, not as a relay, within 36 hours. I was surprised with my own instant excitement for this challenge. I knew it would not be easy. If I stop and think about it that is a long way to walk.

I started training immediately and after my first walk of a mere 3kms my body was complaining loudly, or so I interpreted it. It ached. I was tired. Recovery was slow, especially when reflecting on how many more sets of this distance I would have to sustain to achieve the challenge. As I trained further my feet got very grumpy. I bought some proper walking shoes. My lower legs totally rebelled several times which saw me hobbling to the end of short walks and having to rest for days as I recovered. Physiotherapy became important. However, even now, only a couple of months into preparation I interpret the aches, pains and rebellions differently. Now I interpret them as my body letting me know what it needs, or does not need, rather than as complaints. It needs me to treat it with respect, to care for it, and treat it fairly. It needs rest. It also needs me to pace myself. This week I learned to slow down and in doing so I achieved greater distance. I am now much more present in my body and open to the messages it is attempting to share with me, and more powerful for it.

Presence means more than listening to our body. It covers our awareness of and attention to messages we receive in the moment from our physical, emotional and mental aspects, and recognising their significance relative to our spiritual self. It extends also into messages from outside ourselves, for example being present to our relationships and the meaning they possess and seek to share with us.

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Power is our ability to create results or make the difference that we want or need in a situation. The more aware of our own state, and the strengths and weaknesses we have, the greater our capacity and capability to apply ourselves with effectiveness to the situation at hand.

Attend is the strategic response to a circumstance where we choose to engage and work for a resolution. It is the opposite of the tactical, fear-based reaction of 'flight'. Attend requires that we remain present, alert to all the information we have available, offering us the opportunity to make sensible and creative choices and apply actions for greatest benefit.

Physical presence requires that we have an honest, open and symbiotic relationship with our bodies. My already stated long-term attitude of mistreatment of my body was an entirely wrong approach. Physical presence requires we listen to our bodies, recognise and honour their needs (that could be a challenge with the Christmas season upon us) and understand those messages from our bodies, and take positive action in response. That may require visits to the doctor when pains arise or persist rather than roughing them out, or to find out what they mean. Our bodies are the last line of defence for our emotional, mental and spiritual self. If we have not listened to messages contained and sent by those aspects they eventually seek our attention through our body. There is a reason that metaphysical proponents are able to identify in fairly clear terms the issues we have that relate to particular physical ailments. My own attitude with my body, as I have indicated, is changing. Rather than becoming angry with it for hurting and preventing me from achieving what I want, I am learning to be more open and trusting of my body, and genuinely ask it what it needs. Sometimes the message comes to me directly, other times through friends, but either way my walk in April is increasingly possible; my body is supporting me very well. Together we will succeed.

Emotional presence is being aware of how we feel, and then allowing that feeling to pass and the next to arrive, when it is ready. Emotionally checking out is one way of disengaging from our emotions and taking flight. That is an unhelpful approach I am familiar with. I tend to block my emotions. I do know what the emotion will be, may not like it, so I will not let it enter the stage. That is great from a control (fear) perspective. I delude myself into believing I am in charge. The problem is that those dammed emotions will slop out into the spillway in totally unexpected ways, and the result is a far stronger emotional reaction than if I could have been present to each emotion as it was ready to appear, and deal with it then.

The second tendency is to have an emotion and hold on to and magnify it. An example of how this works is "I feel angry. Why do I feel angry? I feel angry because [person] did that to me. He also did this and that. [Anger grows] What else is he going to do? What might he encourage others to do?" The emotion is a feeling that can motivate action (motion). When we play with the initial feeling and fail to recognise, acknowledge and let it go, we make the feeling more than it is or deserves to be. We are no longer present. We are stuck in the past (about the source) and the future (planning our next steps) all based on a feeling that could be fleeting. This

emotional process is actually driven by questions we ask ourselves, the source being the mind, and inappropriate questions can stir up all sort of unnecessary and quite destructive feelings. To resolve a lack of emotional presence, it may be essential that you develop mental presence in parallel.

Mental presence is a tough one in Western society. We are trained to be thinking and creating new ideas. Our ego feels threatened if we take a few moments out to relax and clear our minds. It fears it has no use and it will die. However mental presence requires that we do clear our minds of the clutter of ideas, responses we are forming to feelings, attention we are placing on aches, pains, or pleasures in our bodies, and have a clear easel on which we can build. All worry, depression, anxiety, and fears are turned off. We are not asleep. We are alert. Everything that enters our minds eye is about now, and without all the unnecessary chatter, chatter that our egos rely on for security, we actually gain greater awareness of ourselves and capacity to see problems in new and fresh ways. Presence is about becoming conscious, aware of who we are, what our situation is, what our available resources are, and how best we can apply what we have for the situation at hand. It is so much easier to go to sleep (not the only reason for presence) when we can quieten the unnecessary chatter in our heads. Similarly we are more creative, alert and capable in resolving problems in that state.

Finally, for the sake of this brief intro, emotional presence relates to how well we attend to our relationships. Are we focused on issues and situations that have occurred, frequently revisiting them and bringing them back to the current, or are we focused on the here and now, and what must be done to make now work the best? This is where individual presence crosses into presence involving others. Our ability to achieve relationship presence, where both (all) parties are working together for a common outcome requires them to all be willing, present and contributing from the same place – personal presence.

Power, our ability to get things done, is intrinsically connected to our ability to be present to the situation, present to ourselves, and to harmonise our physical, emotional and mental selves in support of and in congruence with our spiritual purpose – what we choose to create and do with our lives, or the current moment.

When faced with a crucial situation, when what we do can create or destroy so easily, and when we want results but they may seem elusive, consider how present you are to:

- the situation
- who you are
- your strengths and weaknesses
- how you can bring all of who you are to the present to get the absolutely best results possible

Listen to the messages within, all of them including those you might care to ignore, and find a way forward that honours and respects all of yourself, not just the loud, unruly part of you that has the larger voice. Find your power within, which is sometimes to be found in the quiet recesses of the soul, and bring that forward when appropriate. Surprise yourself with the power, passion, and courage you can tap in on and the results you can create in your life and that of others.