

The Pause that Refreshes **September 2008 newsletter**

Do you know that feeling of being lost in mental chatter, going from one thought to another while revisiting unsatisfying, often negative, old stories? Sometimes conversations or situations will repeat and repeat- perhaps a way for what is alternately called the "substitute" self, "virtual" self or "false" self to reaffirm its shaky existence.

Most people can identify with the sense that their "mind has a mind of its own". Many people feel relief when they realize that they are not alone in being so lost in their unconscious inner dialogue. There is an unspoken, collective embarrassment about this human habit. Some inner wisdom knows that this attachment to an "image of a 'me'" is central to our dissatisfaction and angst. Dealing skillfully with this habit is central to our authenticity and connection to Being.

Riding the train of thought
Entranced within the cultural mind
A brakeless train hurtling down the mountain road

Momentum!
One thought into the next
How to return to.....
.....the living moment?

Our true livingness
Is connected to That ancient longing

Craving the One Taste of living
How do we stop this habit?
It begins with the Pause.....

At root we are 'one with life', this is our nature and can never be otherwise. Just as your heart beats, cells metabolize, ears hear, tongue tastes the salt and the sour without any effort so does Life live itself through us from moment to moment. Please take a moment to experience this thought- "life is living itself through me right now". Sitting here, writing this, noticing the contact and pressure as bottom meets cushion, birds chirping in the distance, breath going in and out, fingers moving, the seeking of words, a feeling of hopefulness with the intention to communicate, all of this is Life living itself at this moment. When awareness is functioning there is harmony- harmony between body and mind, between self and world, between what is often called the inner life and the outer life. When awareness is functioning "inner life" and "outer life" become "Life", "one Life" or "one with Life".

When lost in thought without awareness we lose this intimacy with life, this sense of at-onement. This separation is heartbreaking and is the essential cause of our anxiety, depression and suffering. When lost in the momentum of unconscious thought we identify with the 'false self'- that image created by thought that we protect at all cost. How can we return to the Truth that is always right there before/within/surrounding our unconscious thinking/feeling patterns? We start with the radical act of pausing.

Pausing means to shift your attention to the living moment. Beginning with the physical sensations of weight, pressure and grounding then moving into contact with breathing, sounds and color is often the most tangible way of breaking the spell of the 'substitute self'. From there we can use awareness to notice the thoughts, sensations and feelings that are alive in the moment. This kind of attention is central to the experience of embodied living.

Next we want to invite a relationship to these "selves" that is welcoming. Without energizing

these "selves", through judgment, fighting, identification or denial, we uncover a way of being present with the whole thing- a unique integration named by Eugene Gendlin 'the felt sense'. When we hear terms like "false self", "substitute self" or "mental chatter" it is tempting to approach these experiences with strong judgments. It is helpful to remember that as everything arises from Oneness and returns to Oneness there really are no enemies. Rather, there are skillful (freedom enhancing) and unskillful (pain enhancing) ways of being with the events that arise in the moment. Our work is to bring a gentle, kind attention to these phenomena.

All of "The Embodied Life" practices are dedicated to cultivating this kind of attention:

- *Through mediation we cultivate the dual capacities of Awareness: being with "what is" while simultaneously witnessing the moment;
- *Through conscious movement we cultivate the capacity for sensing our self as a totality;
- *Through our inquiry/focusing practice we learn to be with feelings/situations in a bodily way.

Collectively these practices invite more and more moments of spontaneous awareness that we sometimes call Presence.

Some of us in America remember when cigarettes were advertised on television. There was a famous slogan for Salem cigarettes- "the pause that refreshes". These menthol butts with their green packaging were always connected to the fresh, Cool of snow- a new day full of promise, of life, freshness and possibility.

How ironic that these advertisers were in touch with the deep craving for authentic living that is just under the skin of our cultural mind. And how accurate the intuition that satisfying that need begins with PAUSING? Some of us who stopped smoking can remember how difficult it was to give up that nicotine induced moment of reflective pausing- this was probably the hardest experience to replicate without cigarettes. People giving up alcohol and other addictions often speak of the same thing- the longing for that initial moment of freedom that comes in the form of the pause.

Returning to presence begins with the radical act of pausing. It is radical both personally and socially: personally because it means going through the temporary discomfort that arises as one returns to the living moment and socially because one is stepping out of the cultural trance. Is there a greater gift we can give to each other or to ourselves?