

Attention, Awareness and Devotion

“Direct knowledge of the true nature of reality and permanent liberation from suffering describes the only genuinely satisfactory goal of the spiritual path. A mind with this type of Insight experiences life, and death, as a great adventure, with the clear purpose of manifesting love and compassion toward all beings.” From “The Mind Illuminated”, by Culadasa

What Culadasa calls “a mind with this type of insight,” I call the quality of my presence. Can I walk into a world that is filled with suffering and injustice, and still remain centered, while reaching out in compassion and love? Can I know my life, and death, as a great adventure in the midst of all the turmoil and tumult?

Psalm 138:7 says, “Even though I walk in the midst of trouble, You are giving me Life!” And there’s the key to my practice of presence. In each moment I can turn to the One who gives me Life. In that moment of opening, I let go of my story; I become curious; I connect with inner and outer resources that were always there; I reignite my enthusiasm for the journey. And as I consistently re-engage with the adventure of Life, I acknowledge my own suffering and call forth compassion for my predicament and love for my precious life. When I can cherish my life, I can stand on the kind of firm footing that will allow me to turn towards others without losing my balance.

In cultivating the quality of presence that can weather the storms of this world, and keep me from jumping ship in the midst of trouble, I am deliberately working with three aspects of presence- Attention, Awareness and Devotion.

I cultivate Attention by learning how to focus, by engaging my curiosity, by staying true to this moment of experience, whether it is pleasure or constriction. As my mind wanders, I learn to keep doing *Teshuvah*, returning again and again, fueling my attention with patience, persistence and joy.

I cultivate Awareness by first coming to stillness, to center... and then expanding out in wonder, disregarding the fixed and conditioned boundaries of "self." In the process of expanding awareness, I get a glimpse; I have an experience of the awareness of awareness itself ...and in that moment I am One with Source. That moment opens my heart so wide.

And then I cultivate Devotion through the moment-to-moment loving Attention to what is set before me, and my Awareness of the larger context- the wide and inclusive universe of my heart.

Joel Goldsmith says,

"Once we are united with our Source, we discover that our life is really the life of the Life-stream, the life of the Source of life which is now flowing as our life. We are being fed by the Stream, by the Waters falling from the clouds above, by a Source greater than ourselves which is now flowing as our life."

Devotion is the aspect of presence that allows me to surrender fully and continually to the Life-stream that is flowing through me AS my life. In cultivating Devotion, I am saying YES to what is and clearing the obstructions that impede the God-stream. I am fully embracing my own experience, and surrendering to the Divine embrace. I am choosing to live in relationship to all Creation in a way that lets me shine with humor, reverence and wonder.

Tomorrow, when we hear the blast of the Shofar, may we let that primal sound call us to attention, clear away the distractions that keep us from a full awareness of the miracle of Life, and shatter the defenses that we have built around our tender hearts.