



On Being in the Here and Now

By Suzanne Retzinger

We often travel in the fast lane, but illness, grief, and old age slow us down. It brings us in tune with nature, which is slow to medium. To attune ourselves we need to slow down, be in the here and now. 'Stop and smell the roses' has wisdom in it.

We cannot be present for 'what is' when we travel in the fast lane. Covid-19 has slowed many of us down, and is an opportunity to connect in new ways. The present moment is the only place we truly are. It's a matter of tuning our awareness to what is.

In his book Island, Aldous Huxley wrote: "Here and now, boys... shouted the bird. ...That's what you always forget, isn't it? I mean, you forget to pay attention to what's happening. And that's the same as not being here and now."

Two characteristic ways we avoid the here and now is being in the past or future in our minds. Most of us spend much of our day 'time traveling'. In grief people live in these space zones, wanting what was in the past, or living in the future waiting for the other shoe to drop. Often, we create horror stories of the future, as though we were fortune tellers. We can feel the effects of time travel in anxiety or panic.

It takes practice to keep awareness in the here and now. We need to 'come to your senses'. What we can touch, hear, see, taste, smell is one of the best tools to bring us back to the present.

Feel your feet on the floor pressing down. Ask "am I noticing colors or shapes, textures, sounds and smells, pleasant and unpleasant, fully tasting my food, tasting every morsel, sensations of chewing and swallowing?"

Throughout the day pause right in the middle of your life and practice awareness of a sense. Allow its full experience without adding stories, explanations or judgment.

What is your relationship to each sense? Are you averse to what is? Do you want more of certain experiences? Just notice, there is no right or wrong way. It is simply about opening greater awareness, without getting lost in thought. Pause, see, touch, hear, smell, taste.

Practice keeping at least 50% of your attention in your senses and sensations rather than in thought. Notice what interferes with your being at home in your senses. Notice any tendency to hurry the process or to extend it.

Pay attention to thoughts that come up. Do they wander to the past or future? When you're thinking, be aware of thinking; notice where it goes. The awareness of this, in itself, is the here and now.

Pay attention and you'll find yourselves, gradually or suddenly, becoming aware....And all the time you're chewing you pay attention to the flavor of the food, to its consistency and temperature, to the pressures on your teeth and the feel of the muscles in your jaws.".....Attention to the experience of something given, something you haven't invented, not the memory of a form of words addressed to somebody in your imagination." She looked round the table. "Shall we begin?" (Aldous Huxley).