

“Now, Here, This”

Most religious people I’ve met—from sincere laypeople to priests and nuns—still imagine God to be elsewhere. Before you can take the “**now**” seriously, you must shift from thinking of God as “out there” to also knowing God “in **here**.” In fact, that is the best access point! Only inner experience can bring about a healing of the human-divine split.

Transformation comes by realizing your **union with God right here, right now**—regardless of any performance or achievement on your part. That is the core meaning of grace. But you have to *know* this for yourself. No one can do this knowing for you. I could tell you that God is not elsewhere, and heaven is not later, but until you come to personally and regularly experience that, you will not believe it.

Jesus teaches and is himself a message of **now-ness**, **here-ness**, concreteness, and **this-ness**. The only time Jesus talks about future time is when he tells us not to worry about it (see Matthew 6:25-34). Don’t worry about times and seasons, don’t worry about when God will return, don’t worry about tomorrow. Thinking about the future keeps us in our heads, far from presence. Jesus talks about the past in terms of forgiving it. Some say forgiveness is central to his whole message. Jesus tells us to hand the past over to the mercy and action of God. We do not need to keep replaying the past, atoning for it, or agonizing about it.

Yet, as practitioners of meditation have discovered, the mind can only do two things: replay the past and plan or worry about the future. The mind is always bored in the present. So, it must be trained to stop running backward and forward. This is the role of contemplation.

Unitive, **non-dual consciousness** opens our hearts, minds, and bodies to actually experience God in the **now**. Ultimate Reality cannot be seen with any dualistic operation of the mind, where we divide the field of the moment and eliminate anything mysterious, confusing, unfamiliar, or outside our comfort zone. Dualistic thinking is highly controlled and permits only limited seeing. It protects the status quo and allows the ego to feel like it’s in control. This way of filtering reality is the opposite of pure presence.

We learn the dualistic pattern of thinking at an early age, and it helps us survive and succeed in practical ways. But it can get us only so far. That’s why all religions at the more mature levels have discovered another “software” for processing the really big questions like death, love, infinity, suffering, the mysterious nature of sexuality, and whoever God or the Divine is. Many of us call this access “contemplation” or simply “prayer.” It is a **non-dualistic way of living in the moment**. Don’t think, just look (contemplate).

Non-dual knowing is learning how to live satisfied in the naked now, “the sacrament of the present moment.” This consciousness will teach us how to actually experience our experiences, whether good, bad, or ugly, and how to let them transform us. **Words by themselves divide and judge the moment;** pure

presence lets it be what it is, as it is. Words and thoughts are invariably dualistic; pure experience is always non-dualistic.

As long as you can deal with life as a set of universal abstractions, you can pretend that the binary system is true. But once you deal with concrete reality—with yourself, with someone you love, with actual moments—you find that reality is a mixture of good and bad, dark and light, life and death. Reality requires more a both/and approach than either/or differentiation. The non-dual mind is open to everything. It is capable of listening to the other, to the body, to the heart, to all the senses. It begins with a radical yes to each moment.

When you can be present in this way, you will know the Real Presence. I promise you this is true. You will still need and use your dualistic mind, but now it is in service to the greater whole rather than just the small self.

One Thing

So much of religion involves teaching people this and that, an accumulation of facts and imperatives that is somehow supposed to add up to salvation. The great wisdom teachers know that one major change is needed: *how we do the moment*. Then all the this-and-that's will fall into line.

“Only one thing is necessary,” Jesus says to Martha (Luke 10:42). If you are present, you will be able to know what you need to know. Truly seeing is both that simple and that hard.

Pure Presence

Wisdom is the freedom to be truly present to what is right in front of you. Presence is pretty much the same as wisdom! Presence is the one thing necessary to attain wisdom, and in many ways, it is the hardest thing of all. Just try to keep your heart open and soft, your mind receptive without division or resistance, and your body aware of where it is and its deepest level of feeling. Presence is when all three centers are awake at the same time! Most religions decided it was easier to believe doctrines—and obey often arbitrary laws—than undertake the truly converting work of being present.

The presence of God is infinite, everywhere, always, and forever. You cannot not be in the presence of God. There's no other place to be. It is we who are not present to Presence. We'll make any excuse to be somewhere else than right here. Right here, right now never seems enough. It actually is, but it is we who are not aware enough yet.

All spiritual teaching—this is not an oversimplification—is about how to be present to the moment. When you're present, you will experience the Presence. But the problem is, we're almost always somewhere else: reliving the past or worrying about the future.

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