

Presence

Being present with what is, is one of the core practices in the frameworks such as mindfulness and many meditation techniques. Mindfulness was initially introduced to the west from the Zen lineages (Hanh 1999). The practice of being present and being in the now has also been emphasized by awakening teachers (Tolle 2010). These practices draw attention to the current moment, which opens the way deeper into the being.

Yet, there's another aspect to presence that can be referred to as "ABIDING IN PRESENCE" instead of using the framework of practicing presence. I don't consider this a practice because it is about natural dropping into the layer of pure Presence, which is the underlying substratum where both, being present and not being present, reside.

I remember years ago when this was more consciously activated in my being. It was an "aha" moment of recognizing some particular subtle richness that has never been absent but maybe just not noticed. It was nothing new but rather something obvious and seen as ever-present, now accompanied by wondering how it's possible that I haven't noticed it before. So simple and natural, and actually nothing special.

It seems appropriate to refer to this as resting in Presence or abiding in Presence. It reveals the unnecessary striving for being mindful or having no thoughts (or only some preferred thoughts), as all thoughts only appear as they are: fleeting clouds on the vast sky of Presence. Abiding in Presence feels more like a solid knowingness about the ever-present sun behind the clouds—even if the sun is momentarily entirely covered by clouds (such as thoughts), it is never not being there.

The story of a conversation between a Zen master and a Confucian scholar beautifully expresses this quality of being (Suzuki and Jaffe 2014):

The Confucian scholar asked a Zen master: "What is the ultimate secret of Zen?"

The Zen teacher replied: "You have a fine saying in your teachings: I have nothing to hide from you. So has Zen nothing to hide from you."

“I cannot understand,” said the scholar.

Later, they were walking in the mountains, with wild laurel blossoming all around.

The Zen master asked: “Do you smell the fragrance of the flowering tree?”

The scholar responded, “Yes, I do.”

“Then,” declared the master, “I have nothing to hide from you.”

