

For More Exploration**Books**

- *Present Moment Wonderful Moment*, by Thich Nhat Hanh
- *Silence: The Mystery of Wholeness*, by Robert Sardello
- *Parenting with Presence: Practices for Raising Conscious, Confident, Caring Kids*, by Susan Stiefelman

Movies

- *Other People* (UR), 2016
- *The Eighth Day (Le Huitième Jour)* (NR), 1996

Videos & Podcasts

- [Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are](#), a TED talk by Amy Cuddy
- [Mysterious Ways](#), a talk by Rev. Michael Tino about the influence of cell phones on our ability to be present
- [In the Presence of Elephants and Whales](#)—On Being Podcast with Katy Payne, who was one of the first discoverers that whales are composers of song

Children's Books

- *The Three Questions*, by Jon J. Muth
- *The Lemonade Hurricane: A Story of Mindfulness and Meditation*, by Licia Morelli (4-6 yo)
- *Peaceful Piggy Meditation*, by Kerry Lee MacLean (7-9)
- *A Handful of Quiet: Happiness in Four Pebbles*, by Thich Nhat Hanh

December Theme

Presence: The Practice of Being

December 2016

In the midst of the whirling day,
 In the hectic rush to be doing,
 In the frantic pace of life,
 Pause here for a moment.
 Catch your breath; Relax your body;
 Loosen your grip on life.
 Consider that our lives are always unfinished business;
 Imagine that the picture of our being is never complete;
 Allow your life to be a work in progress.
 Do not hurry to mold the masterpiece;
 Do not rush to finish the picture;
 Do not be impatient to complete the drawing.
 From beckoning birth to dawning death we are in process,
 And always there is more to be done.
 Do not let the incompleteness weigh on your spirit;
 Do not despair that imperfection marks your every day;
 Do not fear that we are still in the making.
 Let us instead be grateful that the world is still to be created;
 Let us give thanks that we can be more than we are;
 Let us celebrate the power of the incomplete;
 For life is always unfinished business.
 ~ **Rev. Richard S. Gilbert**

This is the first, the wildest and the wisest thing I know: that the soul exists and is built entirely out of attentiveness. ~ **Mary Oliver**

Presence is removing judgment, walls, and masks so as to create a true and deep connection with people or experiences, ~ **Amy Cuddy**

Learn me slowly: be patient with my pages.
 ~ **Pavana**

When you love someone, the best thing you can offer is your presence. How can you love if you are not there? The most precious gift we can offer others is our presence. When mindfulness embraces those we love, they will bloom like flowers. ~ **Thich Nhat Hanh**

Light is to darkness what love is to fear; in the presence of one the other disappears.
 ~ **Marianne Williamson**

At the center of the world and in each breath this is the holy temple, the birthing moment: giving and receiving love. That is all. This is the sacred point, the love in you meeting the love in the world. However broken or weary you are, bring yourself here, in love, now. ~ **Steve Garnaas-Holmes**

Realize deeply that the present moment is all you ever have. What a liberation to realize that the 'voice in my head' is not who I am. Who am I then? The one who sees that. Life is the dancer and you are the dance. ~ **Eckhart Tolle**



The ability to be fully aware of the present moment is also the ability to be 'non-discriminating' between the experiences we like (because they are pleasant) and the experiences we don't like (because they are unpleasant). Awareness is non-discriminating because awareness does not want to get and does not want to reject, it is just aware, and accepting of everything that manifests. ~ **Chan Dao Lu**



Isn't it true that
when we are
most present, a
powerful
presence
emerges?

What Does It Mean To Be A Community of Presence?

Spiritually, presence can mean two radically different things. On the one hand, contemplatives talk of "being present." Presence from this perspective is all about awareness and remembering to "live in the moment." On the other hand, theologians tend to come at presence from the perspective of "otherness." Their concern is not just that we pay attention to the present moment, but that we notice a transcendent Presence that is woven through all moments.

This month, we refuse to take sides. Attentiveness or otherness? Who says we have to choose? Isn't it true that, more often than not, they dance together more than they compete? Isn't it true that when we are most present, a powerful presence emerges? Pay attention to your child and slowly a confidence and unique self unfolds. Pay attention to the flow of your breathing or the flow of the ocean and something bigger than yourself enters the scene. Look for a long time at a singular tree and eventually it presents itself to you as a world in and unto itself.

The underlying message here is that the world is full of unnoticed gifts and grace. It's a message perfectly fit for this month that so often celebrates presents over presence. In the face of commercials and billboards that tell us our lives will finally be complete if we stuff them with a few more shiny objects or plastic gadgets, our spiritual traditions come along and remind us that our lives are already complete. Their message: The greatest gift of the holidays is noticing the many gifts that have been sitting there all along.

So how will you engage this dance? What powerful and meaningful presence is waiting for you to be present to it? What gift is waiting and wanting to emerge? What will your awareness bring into being this month?

~ *From the Soul Matters Sharing Circle. Author not cited.*

Music can hold great power to bring us into the present and evoke a presence. As can dancing. Or drawing. Or coloring. Or exercising. Or just stopping to take a breath in awareness. Draw a mind map of activities, songs, ideas, etc. that bring you back into awareness and presence when you're feeling overwhelmed or distracted.

When I'm aware, I'm...

When I breathe in, I breathe in peace. When I breathe out, I breathe out love.



Kids' Corner

'Your children need your presence more than your present.' ~ **Jesse Jackson**

Who wants a new shirt when they could have the gift of being seen? You may want a special present from Grandma, but what you will remember is asking Grandma to join you for a Saturday as you go through boxes of old stuff in the attic and hearing stories about the so-called junk.

So...pick at least one person this year and make their holiday present be about presence!

There are so many ways you can do this. Offer your presence by making the gift something you do together. Show them you are present to them and really see them by picking a gift that shows something especially unique about them. Or help them be more present to life by giving them a gift that helps them stay focused on what's important or that helps them step back from the busyness of daily life.

Offer to spend time with them doing something they love. Ask to go for a walk with someone who doesn't usually get to spend time with you and promise not to look at your phone or do anything else. Ask for the present of going somewhere fun together rather than getting a thing.

What other ways can you prioritize presence over presents this holiday season? I bet you can come up with lots!! Do a brainstorm here.



Uncover a World in Itself

"The moment one gives close attention to anything, even a blade of grass, it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself."
~Henry Miller

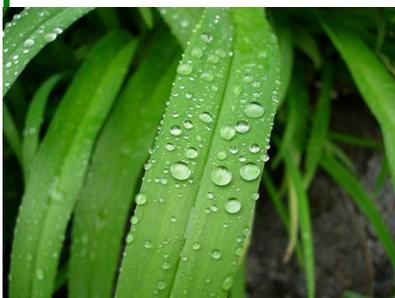
This exercise invites you to tap into Henry Miller's magic. Simply do as Miller suggests:

Pick one place, object or animal and give it your attention and presence until it becomes a world unto itself.

Additionally, figure out your own way of recording the progression from a singular or simple object to an entire world. Maybe you keep a journal and write about something new you notice each time you return to it. Maybe take a new photo of it each time and look back at the photos to see what changes and emerges over time. Maybe just sit with your chosen focus for a whole day and see where it takes you.

Take your time as you choose your focus. Maybe it is a blade of grass or a singular flower. But then again maybe it's that food truck outside your office at lunch time. Or the old toolbox your dad passed on to you whose story and world you've yet to discover.

Consider showing a picture to someone. Seeing your uncovered world, they just might more easily see even more of their own.



Personal Reflection

Don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Pick the one question that "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal of these questions is not to help you analyze what story means in the abstract, but to figure out what a deeper awareness of story means for your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"?



Has the experience of "presence" increased or decreased for you as you've gotten older?

How might tomorrow be an opportunity to "discover presence"?

What absence walks with you more days than not?

Who has gone missing right before your very eyes? ["Sometimes, people can go missing right before our very eyes." -Cecelia Ahern]

Have you lost sight of yourself? [" Sometimes, we lose sight of ourselves when we're not paying enough attention." - Cecelia Ahern]

Would you be more present to your life if you weren't trying to perfect it or win at it? ["Allow your life to be a work in progress. Do not hurry to mold the masterpiece; Always there is more to be done. Life is always unfinished business." ~Richard S. Gilbert"]

When was the last time you created a world in itself? ["The moment one gives close attention to anything, even a blade of grass, it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself." ~Henry Miller]

Where is your chance tomorrow to love someone with your presence? ["At the end of the day: do others feel loved in your presence? This is the spiritual bottom line." - Masin Kipp; "Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity" - Simone Weil]

Whose absence feels most present to you? What can you do tomorrow to feel and honor them more deeply? ["One of the best feelings in the world is knowing that your presence and absence both mean something to someone." - anonymous]

Are you living like you deserve to take up space in the world? ["You deserve to take up space in the world." - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie]

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2672 E Alluvial Ave
Fresno, CA 93720
www.uufresno.org
559.322.6146

Justice Corner

The holidays are often a challenging time for people to be present. There are many reasons for this, but it is compounded by the number of organizations representing causes we care about asking us to contribute financially. Which ones are worthy of our money? How will our money be used? How can we pick and choose among the many we wish to support? Add to this the current political climate and all that we are being called to do to uphold our Unitarian Universalist values in the midst of much hatred, and it's no wonder we feel spread thin and unable to act.

Take a moment here to list some of the values that you hold most dear. What is important to you? What do you wish to see more of in the world? What feels essential to your being? What values most represent who you are and what you believe in?



Unitarian Universalist
Church of Fresno

From this list, make a list of organizations you wish to support or actions you commit to taking to live out these values in the values — put your faith into action.



FAITH
IN ACTION