

## Reflective Presence: What is Being “Present”? Donna Martin

The great Tibetan teacher, Patrul Rinpoche, when asked to sum up the teachings about how to become enlightened, offered four instructions:

1. Don't prolong the past.
2. Don't invite the future.
3. Don't fear appearances. And
4. Don't alter your innate wakefulness.

I once shared these in a workshop and was asked, why are they all negative instructions? At the time I answered that it was because there really is nothing to do. Enlightenment is our innate nature, according to Tibetan teachers. I also realize now that the four instructions could be put this way, in the affirmative:

1. Stay present.
2. Stay present.
3. Stay present.
4. Stay present.

This is a simple instruction: stay present for whatever is happening right now... just notice... no striving... no preference... no judgement... just notice what is happening in your experience in this moment... this is what is meant by “staying present”.

In his inspiring book, *Beyond Survival*, former POW Jerry Coffee writes: *“Life is everywhere... how little we understand through mere words; how much more is possible through opening all of our senses... opening new dimensions through which we behold beauty, experience awe, and express love.”*

Here is an excerpt from my book *Getting Unstressed from the Inside Out* (soon to be available here as an e-book). This is a way of practising how to stay present using what is called “sensory awareness”.

Anytime you can take a few minutes to simply be aware of the whole sensory experience you are having – during a quiet meal, or sitting in nature, or even for a minute or so in any situation whatsoever – you will begin to cultivate a habit of staying present. You’ll notice that doing this seems to change how you feel and alter something about your state of mind.

Here is the practice called Sensory Awareness:

### Sensory Awareness

Just begin to become aware of the visual details, the colours and shapes of whatever is around you, as if you were about to paint a picture from memory.

Close your eyes and begin to listen to all the sounds around you. Move your listening awareness out farther and farther to listen to sounds that are far away. Then bring your listening attention in close to hear even the sound of your own breathing.

For a moment, just listen to your breath and feel the sensations of the breath moving into and out of your body. Notice the parts of your body involved with this movement of the breath.

Expand your awareness into other parts of your body, feeling places where your body touches itself or your clothing or your chair or the floor. Feel textures and sensations of warmth or coolness...

Are there any smells or fragrances you're aware of... what is the taste in your mouth? Let all of your senses awaken and simply notice your experience.

Practice sensory awareness when possible while eating, and notice how different the experience of eating becomes and how much your enjoyment is enhanced.

### JUST NOTICING

*By Donna Martin*

*When I need some balance,  
the sound of silence sings its song,  
and carries me so gently to  
a land beyond "it's right or wrong".*

*When I need an insight,  
the whispers of the old wise ones  
can penetrate the fog of thoughts  
and bring a light that's like a sun.*

*And when I need uplifting,  
to rise above heart heaviness,  
a sense of joyful gratitude  
can bring a smile of happiness.*

*But when I am too weary  
to hear the song of silence sing,  
when whispers stop, no smile, no joy,  
I rest into just noticing.*

*Just noticing whatever's there,  
a breath comes in, a breath goes out,  
surrounded by and filled with air,  
just noticing becomes my prayer.*