

On Presence

When we say certain people have “real presence,” we don’t just mean that they physically occupy space, but that they somehow manage to animate the air around them merely by being present. When you meet someone of this wattage you know instantly something is different, an elusive element more felt than observed, an ineffable and presumably non-transferrable quality of radiance.

What is this special quality we call “presence,” what does it mean and how can I get some? It begins, like all great ideas, with a simple notion: “presence” is the awareness of where one is in space/time. It’s the natural ownership and full possession of the space one occupies. It is more than anything an ability to always be present, to be *here* (space coordinate) *now* (time coordinate).

The careless thinker might imagine that everyone meets this humble criterion, but very nearly the opposite is true, as human experience demonstrates daily. Very few people even seem to care that they are so rarely present. Their waking hours are filled with the ceaseless buzz of one form of static or another. Our busy little minds don’t like to play by themselves so even if they have nothing to do they manage to stay active. It’s worth noting that people with the most powerful presence aren’t noisy. If they don’t revel in their obvious achievements it’s because they know their ability to achieve was a gift.

People who have presence aren’t leaping around in time, or wondering what to say next, or regretting the choice of pistachio instead of butter pecan. They are right here. What we feel in their presence is the force of someone who is 100% here. When we experience that flash of unspoken recognition of special energy, in that moment we are literally stunned. We come out of the moment as if awakening from hypnosis. That’s the power of total presence.

If this were so easy to achieve, everyone would be doing it all the time. We’re just not that easy to re-wire. But everyone can be 100% present for short periods of time if they are in the right environment and willing to put themselves into the right frame of mind.

Skiing big mountains provides a unique context where the mind at least has a better opportunity to function with some clarity. When you stand on the brink of a couloir surrounding by swirling winds knowing that anything less than total commitment is a big mistake, it's wise to be 100% present. All hands on deck. No distractions. No noise. Focus on the details of *where you are*. Be present. Ask for the mountain's permission to go. The only way you can possibly hear the message it sends back is if you're present.

And herein lies the secret. The mountain honors those who are present. There's no question the White World rewards presence. I suspect this phenomenon is related to the mountain's own energy field and our ability to connect with it; we align better, more efficiently, when we are utterly present. Stepping into the present is like unkinking a tightly coiled garden hose: when we eliminate the things we do to ourselves that block us, we open a channel of communication that otherwise is inoperable.

The next time you face a serious challenge on the slopes, focus all your energy on being present. You'll find the more you are present, the less ego will interfere with the operation of your body. The more you *are* here and *in* the now, the stronger the self becomes and – oh, rich with irony - the more it disappears. Even the persistent arrogance of thought can be beaten into silence by the power of presence.

When all your are is present, you have everything you need to ski the greatest run of your life. Over and over again.

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