

The Case of Memory Gone Missing, Other Tragedies and How to Come Home

Irini Rockwell

Where We Find Ourselves

We live in the information age. With the internet as a vast resource, anything we want to know is available to us with a few clicks on our keyboard. We are connected to the events in a global community by a world-wide network of media. With our technological advancements, any daily task is made more efficient and more things are more possible. With an ever-increasing abundance of material goods, with a well-paying job, we can live extremely well. We know more, own more, have more leisure time, and accomplish more. We live in a land of opportunity.

Because there is so much available to us and we want to take advantage of every opportunity, we move through our lives with great speed. We are all multi-tasking, meeting piling on meeting and task on task. Demands on our time and energy are often out of proportion to what we can handle. We are confused as to how to prioritize the day's activities, not knowing what to accept and reject. The dis-ease of stress is a daily occurrence.

One of the things emerging as a problem in our day-to-day functioning is memory loss, and not only for those having "senior moments." Memory is the problem because the overwhelm is real. The director of a large multi-faceted organization with whom I correspond never remembers what we have said from one email to the next. He is someone with an enormous amount of drive who runs the organization practically single-handedly. There is no way that he can possibly remember the details of each transaction.

"Remember" is an interesting word. To "re-member" is to put flesh on something that happened in the past. Stories help us remember because they contain vivid imagery. We can also remember if we are truly present and fully engaged in what we are doing. What we remember has a lot to do with how much impact something has had in our life. Very vivid in my mind is the scene when, as a young girl, I was caught in the

current of a fast flowing river and being swept downstream when my father came to my aid. On the other hand, I am always amazed when my daughter recounts a scene in vivid detail when we were both there, of which I have no memory. For her it was significant and she was fully present. For me, it was a passing incident. Being fully present seems to be key in remembering.

We cannot stay in the present moment because we are preoccupied by what went before and what lies ahead. We revisit decisions because we literally can't remember we made them before. For instance, this happens when I am launching on a writing project. I make a list of random notes that I want to integrate into the piece of writing. The thing is, I often have a "new" insight that I had before.

We are indeed fortunate to live in a time and place of tremendous opportunity. At the same time, we need to pay attention to how we navigate this, at times, seemingly overwhelming amount of stimulation and information. We can't turn back the clock to a time when there was a slower pace of life. We need to work with what we have. How do we do this?

Coming Home

If we all stopped to think about what we really want, I think without a doubt we would say that we want to be happy. The question is, how can we make that come about? Habitually we think of something external to ourselves that will give us the happiness we dream of: more money, a better car or house, a vacation. However, our desire for external objects of gratification ultimately will never be sated. Our wanting will never end. Sought after this way, happiness will always elude us. But we can go deeper than this. Perhaps we need to pay attention to the wanter.

If we go deeper we will probably see that what has made us really happy in the past are the times when we have felt truly relaxed and deeply satisfied for no real reason at all. We have felt a sense of timelessness and spaciousness. We have felt a warmth and clarity that has arisen spontaneously. Yes, we might say that it was because we were on a vacation far away from the worries of our daily life. But in remembering these moments, we miss the point. We think it is because of the external circumstances, not acknowledging that these qualities of being actually exist within us.

So how can we cultivate these qualities without going to that tropical isle of our dreams? We could come home, come home to ourselves. Rather than always focusing outward, we can cultivate ways of just being with ourselves. We can find a sense of spaciousness, relaxation and warmth within us, wherever we are, whatever we are doing. This is something we all long for, yet it seems elusive. As a seven year old, my daughter sometimes played having a tea party with me. She liked to make up the names of the teas. One afternoon I could hardly contain myself with laughter as she offered me “Peace and Quiet” tea. She got what I most wanted.

Training ourselves to come home is not that hard. We can set aside some time each day, even ten minutes, to practice fully being present and self-aware. Self-awareness requires attending to the present moment by observing what is happening.

Attentiveness—also called mindfulness—and awareness are the basic components of sitting meditation practice. Through this practice we can stabilize our minds, which, in turn, brings mental clarity and an inherent strength. As well, sitting meditation acts like a lightning rod. It grounds overly volatile energy in the simplicity of just being here. Attentiveness and awareness are the most basic tools for working with both our inner thoughts and emotions and the outer circumstances of people, places, situations.

Attentiveness is the ability to bring our attention to the present moment. Being in the present moment—the only moment—stabilizes the mind. When we are attentive to the present moment, we are not jumping from one distraction to another, nor are we engrossed in our thoughts or emotions. Instead, we are attentive to what we are doing in the moment that we are doing it—like brushing our teeth. A stabilized mind brings us present into the now. It brings our mind and body together in the precision of moment-to-moment experience. Mindfulness synchronizes mind and body in one-pointed attention. We can remind ourselves to be mindful by bringing our attention back to our breath whenever it occurs to us.

Attentiveness develops precision; awareness develops panoramic vision. Settling the mind by attending to the present moment brings with it a certain relaxation. Relaxation creates the space in which to see clearly what is happening in the moment. As the mind settles and becomes more focused, it naturally expands, and we become more aware of what is around us but without getting lost in it. Most people report that after a session of sitting quietly, they find the world to be much more vivid and alive.

Awareness gives us the freedom to receive the total environment and interact with it attentively. It allows us to develop appreciation for where we are. When we are open in this way, we aren't thrown off by circumstances, because we have the stability of mindfulness. With stillness of mind (attentiveness), the activity of mind can be seen more clearly (awareness).

There is a growing body of evidence that meditation reduces stress. It helps us to learn to "go with the flow." My experience is that when I bring my mind to stillness and hold my seat, whatever happens, I will not get upset. On the other hand, if I become speedy and caught up in the circumstances of a situation, flying all over the place, I react negatively to the slightest inconvenience.

Fundamentally, when we talk about coming back home, we are talking about being more present, being authentically present. This is the genuine me you see here. This potential for how we can relate to our world has to come from within. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "We must become the change we want to see in the world." No one but ourselves can make us more present, more engaged with what we are doing.

When we settle into just being with ourselves, for even a few moments, we touch into our natural resource, or vital energy. Within us is an energy potential as real as uranium. We can touch into that. If we do not have time to do that on a regular basis, we are running out of gas through the day, through the weeks, the months, the years.

In our daily life, to come back to a sense of peace and quiet to recharge, we could take breaks, short moments of self-awareness that bring us "back home." We could just sit and breathe deeply. It could be in the middle of a meeting or sitting at our desk. We could sit and come back to basic being and recharge. These breaks rest the mind so it has a chance to work to the best of its ability.

Our Mix of Colors

Though coming home is an extremely valuable tool for finding more harmony in our life, how can our lives also be rich and full? By paying more attention to ourselves, being more self-reflexive, we will discover that we are all multi-dimensional. We inherently have many facets to our personality. With some parts of ourselves we have a lot of confidence and tend to shine. With other parts we feel stuck and perpetually fall on our face. Others parts of ourselves we may habitually hide. As well, when we are

daily locked into hours and hours of one kind of energy, we become energetically unbalanced. Doing our day with just one focus, one quality of energy can be exhausting.

Aside from the an inner need to rest in basic being and cultivate an authentic presence, we also have the potential for 1) insightful clear thinking, 2) being resourceful and generous, 3) personally engaging and speaking from our heart, and 4) accomplishing our job efficiently. At different times in different circumstances, one or more of these qualities or energies is needed. Each of our energies has the ability to serve us. Knowing ourselves, knowing our potential, is key to being able to interact more harmoniously with others and more effectively in what we do.

To get to know ourselves better, we can ask ourselves some questions: How do we envision ourselves? What motivates us? How do we think, feel, and act in our environment? How do we manage our emotions? Do they get in the way or can we harness them to serve us, giving us intuitive understanding of people, places and situations? Can we balance our energies with all aspects of ourselves engaged? Can we be fully who we are on the job? Are we able to bring our full attention to our task? How can we bring out the best of who we are and take 400% responsibility for our lives?

Our journey of self-discovery can be both exciting and, at times, uncomfortable, but it always makes us feel more alive!

Here are some ways to become more self-aware:

1. The Refresh Button of Our Being: Breathing Energy into Our Life

Stop what you are doing. Tune into your breathing. Is it relaxed or held? Come into some deep gentle breathing for a few minutes. Then return to what you were doing.

2. Balancing Our Energies

Stop what you are doing. Do you feel a balance of energies or are you stuck in one? Your check-point could be your productivity. Are you accomplishing what needs to get done or are you getting sluggish? Perhaps you need to change gears and try another energy.

