

Intimacy

Copyright © 1995 A-Hameed Ali ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The trees are silent,
The mountain is still, and
The man is gone.

Late afternoon, just back from my office, after a full day of eventful teaching sessions with students. I lie down in bed, mildly tired. I can feel the psychic layers that I have taken on from students peeling off, one by one. As each layer peels away, it reveals its content—emotions, thoughts, images, physical tensions. This process leaves me clearer and lighter. The lightness opens further, revealing spaciousness. Consciousness manifests as empty, transparent space, light and clean.

In this spaciousness my own thoughts and feelings appear: a constellation of thoughts and subtle feelings, all related to images and impressions about my identity, about who I am. This psychic cluster, like a cloud in the spaciousness of mind, provides the mind with the familiar feeling of identity, an identity totally dependent on memories of my past experience. Contemplating the totality of the cluster, without taking an inner position about it, I recognize that it is a mental phenomenon. On seeing this, I become distinctly aware that it is external to me. The feeling-recognition is: “this is not me.”

The focus of attention spontaneously shifts. The psychic cluster gently fades away, almost imperceptibly, like a cloud slowly dissipating. When it is gone, what is left is simplicity, a clear and simple sense of presence without self-reflection. There are no thoughts about the experience, no feelings about it, only the simplicity of presence. Clarity, space, stillness and lucidity bring a sense of a crisp cloudless sky around a snow-capped mountain top.

The sun is about to set, and the windows open on the East, so the bedroom is somewhat dark. The sun illuminates some of the hillside, while the rest is steadily cooled by the expanding gentle shade. The flowers in the pots outside the room appear bright; the green leaves glisten. Lucidity pervades everything: the flower pots, the trees, the distant clouds, the deep blue sky. All is pristine, undisturbed by wind or thought.

Green grass,
Lemons on the tree,
The vast blue sky.

In the lucidity of space, a question appears, carefree and delighted: “And what is me?” Nothing recognizable by memory. I experience myself, without a feeling of self, as the simplicity of presence, which is now a

simplicity of perception, a bare witnessing. There is no inner dialogue, and no commentary on what is perceived. The perceiving is without a perceiver, awareness without an observer. Without self-reflection, the simplicity of presence is merely the simplicity of witnessing. I am a witness of all in the field of vision, a witness with no inside. The witness is merely the witnessing. The only thing left from familiar experience is the location of witnessing, which seems to be determined by the location of the body. The body is relaxed and clear. The sense of the body is more of luminosity than of sensation, witnessed as part of the environment.

Time does not seem to pass; it has come to a stop. When the psychic constellation that has given me the familiar sense of identifying myself ceases, the sense of the passage of time is gone. In the simplicity of presence, time does not pass, for the sense of the passage of time is simply the continuity of the feeling of the familiar identity.

Simplicity of presence, when it is complete, is timelessness. Timelessness is completely being the simplicity of presence. Timelessness is not an idea, a thought in the mind. It is the fullness of the experience of presence of Being, pure and prior to thought or self-reflection.

A few days later...

Upon waking up in the morning, I find my attention riveted by a feeling of hurt in the heart. The hurt is warm and sad. It feels like the heart is wounded in its very flesh. The hurt leads to a gnawing sensation in the mobius, the subtle center at the sternum. The gnawing is painful; it feels physically grating, but also emotionally difficult. A frustrated feeling has become stuck at the lower part of the chest, turning into a gnawing sensation. I feel all this mixed with the feeling of hurt and sadness.

I contemplate the hurt, the sadness and the physical contraction. Holding all in awareness, while intimately feeling all of the nuances of the ongoing experience. The contemplating awareness embraces the content of experience with a feeling of warm kindness and with an attitude of curiosity, not knowing what the hurt is about, but interested to find out. The gnawing sensation responds to the motiveless inquiry, and begins to soften as the contraction at the mobius center relaxes, revealing an unexpected element to the sadness: loneliness. The hurt turns out to be the pain of feeling lonely. The feeling of loneliness wets the sadness with more tears, and the hurt expands into an emptiness underlying the sadness. Now it is deep, sad loneliness.

But why, why am I feeling lonely?

There does not seem to be any reason for it. I am still in bed, my wife, Marie, lying asleep beside me. I feel my affection for her, but this does not touch the sad loneliness. The loneliness continues even though I am not alone.

I get up, go to the bathroom to wash, the loneliness following me, filling the space of the bathroom with its teary sadness. The question continues to live, while I shave: what is making me feel lonely? Here, memory reminds me of the experience of the last few days, that of the simplicity of presence and witnessing. Reflecting on it, I intuit that there is a connection between the experience of simple presence and the feeling of loneliness. My curiosity intensifies, a throbbing sensation at the forehead begins to luminate.

The throbbing lumination at the forehead reveals itself to be a diamond-clear and colorful presence. The more passionate the naturally curious contemplation is about the loneliness, the more alive and brilliant becomes this presence, manifesting spacious and discerning clarity. I recognize the variegated, scintillating presence as the discriminating intelligence, the true nous, which appears as a presencing of the intensification of consciousness, at the center of the forehead, to reveal the meaning of experience. The intensification of inquiry coincides with a greater and more definite presence of the discriminating intelligence, revealing its exquisite sense of delicate precision.

The experience now is a field of sadness, loneliness and emptiness, combined with the memory of the simplicity of presence, all opening up to the scintillatingly alive presence of the nous. Insights begin to radiate out from the scintillating consciousness. Perceptually, the operation of the nous appears as a multicolored glittering radiance; affectively, it is a delicate and pleasant expansive clarity; cognitively, it is the spontaneous arising of insight. The understanding unfolds: the sense of simplicity in the experience of presence is finding myself as the presence of Being, totally and purely, without thoughts or feelings about it. There is simplicity because there remains only the purity of presence, with no memory and no mind. This absence of mind, in the completeness of being presence, is tantamount to the absence of everything that mind carries. During the experience of the last few days I saw how the mind creates and carries the sense of familiar identity of the self, which it accomplishes through memory and self-reflection. What I did not see then, but was implicit in the experience, is that the mind carries also the sense of the other—of another person—again by using memory.

Here, I remember the insight of the object relation psychologists: the sense of self develops in conjunction with the sense of other, first the mother then all others. The understanding is that the familiar sense of identity develops from early on within a field of object relations, always in relation to another person. This sense of self becomes a felt continuity by the memories of these experiences of oneself coalescing into a fixed structure in the psyche. Hence, this psychic structure also contains the memories of interactions with significant others.*

When I felt the sense of familiar identity disappear I did not see that this also meant the disappearance of all impressions of others. In other words,

as the activity of the mind comes to a stop, all the feelings dependent on the internalized memories disappear. This understanding shows me that the sense of familiar identity always includes, explicitly or implicitly, the feeling of others. The feeling of self swims in an atmosphere of internalized relationships.

This normally ever-present atmosphere of an interpersonal world ceases in the experience of the simplicity of presence, allowing presence to be alone. This aloneness of presence is its simplicity. Recently I have been experiencing it as simplicity, but this experience shows me that I have unconsciously reacted to it as total aloneness.

Here, the feeling of emptiness deepens into a dark abyss, and the loneliness disappears into a singular state of aloneness, existential and fundamental. A hint of sadness remains, in the form of a subtle, warm feeling pervading the deepening emptiness. The throbbing presence at the forehead again scintillates brightly; this time emerald green outshines its other living colors. The sadness reveals associations with the state of aloneness: times in childhood when I was left alone. In the emptiness of the mind float memories of a sad and lonely child, left alone, sometimes forgotten.

Recognizing that the source of the feeling of loneliness is my association of the painful loneliness of the past with the state of aloneness of presence in the present, liberates the sadness, allowing it to evaporate, leaving a sense of transparent depth to the dark abyss, a spacious depth. The feeling is centered in the chest, as if the chest region has become void of everything, except for a subtle lightness which curiously feels deep. Feeling within the chest, inquiring with no goal in mind, I find no sense of solidity. The chest feels empty, but curiously quiet, peaceful and still. I recognize the state as a luminous black spaciousness, which is the unity of stillness and space. There is immaculate, glistening emptiness, but the emptiness has a sense of depth. The depth seems to be the felt aspect of the blackness of space. It is like looking into, and feeling into, starless deep space.

The depth, although void, has a soft texture, an exquisite gentleness. There is a sense of comfort, safety and a carefree trust, as if the vastness of intergalactic space has mysteriously evolved into a gentle and loving medium. It is not a cold space, not an impersonal space, but a space that feels exactly like what the human soul has perennially longed for: the warmth of mother's breasts, the softness of delicate velvet, a quiet shining blissfulness and an endless generosity.

My chest has become an opening into an infinitely deep and dark space, which feels clear and void of all extraneous things. Also, inseparable from the transparent voidness, is the presence of love itself. Now I can taste the pleasurable sweetness of love on my tongue, and throughout the whole chest cavity.

As I proceed to the dining room, I feel myself inseparable from the total stillness of this loving space. The mind is quiet and peaceful, the body relaxed and its movements easy. As I begin breakfast with Marie, the sweet quietness envelopes us. We talk about the practical things of the day, but now I begin to recognize another dimension to the loving void.

At the beginning this seems to be related to our easy and simple conversation, where the peaceful sweetness divulges itself as a delicate contact between us, a subtle intimacy. I like the gentle intimacy, and awareness gently focuses on its exquisite sensation. There are lightness and depth, spaciousness and softness, clarity and sweetness. The feeling of intimacy is not new in my experience. However, I slowly realize that I feel intimate not only with Marie, but also with the food, with the table cloth, with the chairs, even with the walls. I feel intimate with everything I am aware of, in an atmosphere of gentle quiet and relaxed openness. Everything seems to have now this quality of softness and contactfulness. More accurately, everything seems to be bathed in this intimate spaciousness, as if everything is sharing itself, with total generosity and complete openness.

Intimacy discloses itself as an inherent quality of this black inner space. The intimacy is not only a matter of me being intimate with another person, or with the environment. It is not a matter of a subject intimately relating to an object. The chest cavity is pervaded by the essence of intimacy, a black spaciousness inseparable from delicate lovingness. At this point the jewel-like nous at the forehead manifests mostly black radiance, coextensive with the sensation of delicately faceted, satin, liquid energy.

The more I recognize that intimacy is a quality of spacious consciousness, the more distinctly I know it: velvet-fine openness, deep spaciousness, delicate softness, sweet stillness. The chest has become an entrance into an exquisitely heartfelt night sky. All of this distills itself into something unique and utterly human: intimacy. It is as if the space is a refined consciousness intimately in contact with its very nature at each point of its spaciousness. And this total openness and contact becomes an intimacy with everything, totally independent of mind and memory.

No loneliness and no sense of aloneness. Simplicity of Being has ushered me, through the door of aloneness, into its inherent intimacy.