

# LOVING PRESENCE

by **Ron Kurtz**

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*Vocal communication between a mammal and offspring is universal. Remove a mother from her litter of kittens or puppies and they begin an incessant yowling—the separation cry—whose shrill distress drills into the ear of any normal human being. But take a baby Komodo dragon away from its scaly progenitor, and it stays quiet. Immature Komodos do not broadcast their presence because Komodo adults are avid cannibals. A lifesaving vacuum of silence stretches between a reptilian mother and young. Advertising vulnerability makes sense only for those animals whose brains can conceive of a parental protector.<sup>1</sup>*

Loving presence is easy to recognize. Imagine a happy and contented mother looking at the sweet face of her peaceful newborn baby. She is calm, loving, and attentive. Unhurried and undistracted, the two of them seem to be outside of time... simply being. Gently held within a field of love and life's wisdom, they are as present with each other as any two could be.

When someone maintains loving presence with another, it has a powerful effect. Possibly without even noticing it, the other feels safer, cared for and even understood. When this happens in a therapeutic relationship, healing has already begun.

Loving presence is a state of being. It is pleasant, good for your health, rewarding in and of itself. It's a state in which you feel open-hearted and well-intentioned. In its purest form, it is spiritually nourishing and sensitive to subtleties. It is the best state to be in when you are offering emotional support. One look around will tell you that this kind of support is needed everywhere. A healthy emotional life requires a safe place to express feelings and someone loving to bear witness. It requires the release of old hurts and an opening to new paths to happiness. Loving presence is emotional support and it is an important part of relating to others. It can make a big difference in our lives. In psychotherapy, it is essential.

People learn about relating through experience. Our earliest experiences create templates for the kinds of relationships we will be capable of. If the early experiences lacked real love and care, we're not likely to enjoy that later in life, unless we do something to change this early programming, unless we discover new ways of connecting.

Loving presence is first of all about being in the present, showing up. It's about being

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<sup>1</sup> *A General Theory of Love* by Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, Richard Lannon, pg 26

focused on what is happening in the moment on both your own experience and the experiences of the one you're with. It is an opening and an exchange. It is not grounded in ideas or even words. It is an emotional connection made between the nervous systems of two people that asks us to surrender.<sup>2</sup>

Here's a quote from Da Free John:

*There is no compassion without humor;*

*no love without pleasure<sup>3</sup>*

*no freedom without enlightenment.*

*No love without pleasure.* If we want to be in loving presence, we need to find pleasure in being with people. How do we do that? How do we get pleasure from being with someone? We have to search for it. We have to deliberately take the time to search for what there is about this person we're with that makes us feel good. We have to search for what there is about this person that inspires us. This searching and finding has to become a habit and our first priority.

It helps if we have to stay calm. Being calm allows us to take our time, not get busy doing something else, not get pulled into worrying or solving problems. We have to be sitting pretty squarely in the middle of non-achievement. We cannot be trying to accomplish anything. We need to avoid straining. We have to look out for pride and need for approval, recognition or perfection. We have to be able to slow down. Being calm helps us to be sensitive and open to enjoyment.

It can be esthetic pleasure. We may be able to see the people we're with as beautiful, like a wonderful painting. When we start to see them that way, the whole space we share with them starts to change. Or we can sense their strength of character, their integrity, their intelligence or sense of humor. There can be pleasure in each of those.

Or we can start with very simple pleasures, like interest and curiosity. From there we can move on to the fun of working with the mystery and complexity of human behavior. Then we may become aware of the honor and privilege of being present with and part of someone's powerful inner work. And there's also the beauty and courage of the human spirit.

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<sup>2</sup> General Theory of Love, by Thomas Lewis, et al, Chapter 9,. "Because our minds seek one another through limbic resonance, because our physiologic rhythms answer to the call of limbic regulation, because we change one another's brains through limbic revision—what we do inside relationships matters more than any other aspect of human life." P 192

<sup>3</sup> On an audio tape of his talks.

In loving presence we move from ego-centric to non-egocentric pleasures. We move away from how important and wonderful we are to loving the other. We learn to drift with someone into a loving place? Sometimes, that's all we have to do to give someone the emotional support they need. It's as if we simply offer our love to people and they start to heal. It all just unfolds right in front of us!

It is easy to be present, if we're not busy doing something else. Most of the time, however, we're not only busy doing something else, we're doing a lot of it automatically, habitually, and unconsciously. Typically, as helping professionals, especially counselors and psychotherapists, we believe we are helping others solve their problems. We're task-oriented. We want to make something happen for our clients. As a result, we work too hard. This focus on doing and making things happen draws us away from loving presence.

We might need to explore how our self-image gets in the way. The kind of pleasure and nourishment we're talking about here is not nourishment for the ego. It's nourishment for something deeper, something much older. We need to find something bigger in ourselves. In order to be helpful to anyone, whether as a therapist or just as a friend, loving presence is the best place to start. When we are compassionate, present, sensitive and appreciative, good things start to happen. It's true. There are things to do. We want good things to happen for our clients. Loving presence, in spite of its quiet, seeming inactivity, provides the very best context for that.

The pleasure one can get out of being in the role of helper is the pleasure of comforting, of being close, of seeing clearly, being real, understanding and helping someone else understand, helping someone become more alive and more free.

*The vocation of psychotherapy confers a few unexpected fringe benefits on its practitioners... it impels participation in a process that our modern world has all but forgotten: sitting in a room with another person for hours at a time with no purpose in mind but attending. As you do so, another world expands and comes alive to your senses...<sup>4</sup>*

Love and presence are about finding joy in this work. It's the best reason for doing it.

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<sup>4</sup> Lewis, Thomas (Author), Amini, Fari (Author), Lannon, Richard(Author), (2001). *A General Theory of Love*. New York: Vintage Books.