

WALK YOUR TALK

Presence as Practice

Unity on Maui

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March 8, 2026

A CONFESSION

I must begin with an honest confession: before I even made it to church this morning, I had already drifted away from the present moment at least four times. In the shower, I was rehearsing a future conversation. On the drive, I was mentally sorting through unfinished personal tasks. By the time I reached the church door, I was saying good morning while part of me was already somewhere else entirely. But this is not a personal failing. It is part of being human. The mind wanders. It always has. Even the great mystics knew that staying present is not something we master once and for all, but something we return to again and again.

Presence is not about never learning to return.

The goal is never an unbroken, luminous state of perpetual awareness. Every return — no matter how small, no matter how late the practice is. Every return is a victory.

What if the moment you notice you've wandered is not a failure, but the whole point?

FROM WITNESS TO PRACTICE: WITNESS CONSCIOUSNESS

Last week, we discovered the witness consciousness — the quiet observing presence within that can see a thought without being the thought, watch the storm without being the storm. This week, the question becomes: how do we actually live there? Witness consciousness is not a destination arrived at once and possessed forever. It is something we keep choosing — returning to, practicing — not in the sense of mastering a skill, but as a musician practices: showing up again and again because the playing itself is the thing. Presence is not a destination. It is a direction.

THE WISDOM TRADITIONS: ALL PRACTICING THE SAME THING

Across thousands of years and vast cultural distances, the world's contemplative traditions keep arriving at the same place: presence is not a retreat from ordinary life. It is found inside it.

Brother Lawrence (Christianity)

A 17th-century monk who discovered God not in the chapel but at the kitchen sink — peeling potatoes, washing pots. Practicing the presence of God meant doing ordinary work with full love and attention. The sacred is found inside the ordinary.

Thich Nhat Hanh (Buddhism)

His teaching of interbeing recognizes every mundane moment as a complete doorway into presence. Wash the dishes to wash the dishes. Drink the tea to drink the tea. Each ordinary moment is enough.

***"The present moment contains past and future. The secret of transformation lies in how we handle this very moment."* — Thich Nhat Hanh**

Sufism — Islamic Mysticism (dhikr)

The Sufi practice of dhikr — continuous remembrance — weaves a thread of awareness through every waking hour. Not a formal prayer set aside at intervals, but every breath an act of remembering. The heart that has learned to remember cannot forget, even in its busiest hour.

Unity — Affirmative Prayer as Returning

Charles Fillmore, Unity's co-founder, understood prayer not as a petition to a distant God, but as conscious alignment with divine presence already within us. Every affirmation is an act of coming back to what is true beneath the noise. We are not manufacturing a spiritual state we don't have — we are remembering one we do.

NEUROSCIENCE: WHAT CONSISTENT PRACTICE ACTUALLY DOES TO THE BRAIN

The Default Mode Network (DMN) is the brain's storytelling apparatus — the inner screenwriter that runs when we are not focused on an external task. It is the ruminator, the rehearser, the replayer. Mind-wandering is what brains are built to do. Harvard psychologist Matthew Killingsworth tracked over 2,000 people in real time and found that minds wandered nearly 47% of the time — and people were consistently less happy when their minds were elsewhere, even thinking about something neutral or pleasant.

Long-term meditators show measurable increases in gray matter density **in the prefrontal cortex** (attention and regulation) and the **insula** (body awareness and emotional attunement). The physical architecture of presence literally thickens with practice.

The strengthening exercise is not staying. It is the noticing and returning to presence that strengthens the brain.

The moment of noticing that the mind has wandered and gently bringing it back — that moment, repeated thousands of times across a lifetime — is the practice. That is what builds the muscle. The distraction is not the problem. The not-noticing is the problem. Every time you notice and come back, you are doing the work.

THREE SIMPLE PRACTICES

1. Micro-Moments of Awareness

Scatter small anchors through the ordinary day — portals back to the present. The first sip of morning coffee before touching your phone. Three breaths before starting the car: Where am I right now? One breath before answering the phone or entering a meeting. These tiny, consistent portals are not just nice moments — they are literally restructuring how your brain moves through the day. Every return is the practice.

2. The Return as Spiritual Practice, Not Failure

When you notice you've wandered, don't judge the wandering — celebrate the returning. Say it inwardly: *"I came back."* That is the whole practice in three words. The wandering is the human condition. The returning is the spiritual life. Every tradition agrees. You are not bad at this. You are doing this.

3. Presence With People

Give another person your full, undivided attention. Not waiting for your turn. Not composing your response while they're still talking. Just receiving them. This is dhikr. This is Brother Lawrence at the kitchen sink. The people in your life will feel it — and that is one of the rarest gifts one person can give another.

PRESENCE IS AVAILABLE IN EVERY MOMENT

We are not striving toward something far away. We are not manufacturing a spiritual state we don't have. We are not trying through great effort to arrive somewhere we have never been. The divine presence — the Christ within, the ground of being, the still small voice — is not waiting for us to be still enough or spiritual enough. It is already here. It has always been here. It is the ground on which every moment of life has rested, including all the moments we were too distracted to notice.

I am already in the presence of the sacred. I have only forgotten.

And then I forgot again. And then I remembered. That remembering — that returning — is the whole of the spiritual life, distilled.

CONCLUSION

You will leave today, and your mind will wander. Probably before you reach your car. That is not failure — it is the human condition, the starting place of every mystic who ever lived. Rumi wandered. Teresa of Avila wandered. Brother Lawrence wandered between the potatoes.

What made them who they were was not that they stopped wandering. It was that they kept returning. So, this week: practice the return. One micro-moment at a time. One breath at a time. One coming-back at a time. When you catch yourself gone and find your way back to here, to now, to this breath — let that be enough. Because it is.

Every return is an act of love. Every return is, in its quiet way, a prayer.

AFFIRMATION

**I am present to this moment. I return, again and again,
to the sacred ground of here and now.
Each return is an act of love.**