

## OPENING THE HEART AND STAYING CURRENT

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By Pam Kramer

*I open my heart to others in love and service. I stay current in expressing my feelings to those close to me and take care of my emotional needs in appropriate and healthy ways, seeking counsel when needed.*

“Love something, and watch it blossom.”

– Michael Murphy

Staying current in ITP means staying in the flow of life from a place of love and service, greeting what arises with receptivity, curiosity, discernment and a generous spirit - on our own terms and in our own unique ways. Like the continual flow of a stream or river, the practice of staying current offers moment to moment opportunities to notice how we are in body, mind, heart and soul and how we express the experience of integration of our many parts in our daily lives. Staying current starts with inner awareness and extends outward from within to engage with another, a group, the world at large, even the cosmos!

The practice of staying current attunes us to matters of the heart – the pull toward human connection, the desire to love and be loved and the transformations that can occur from the full-on experience of what’s alive inside that wants to be expressed. Authentic human connection elevates and transforms our relationships. We are comforted, healed and empowered when we are fully heard, acknowledged and understood. Our hearts open and our lives are greatly enriched when we experience the power of attention and love transmitted through genuine and skillful expression, spoken or simply felt.

The influence of Aikido from George Leonard’s teachings plays a role in this practice. On the Aikido mat, the student steps in to meet the “attacker,” negotiates with the energy

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exchange and, in the spirit of harmony, actively chooses a response in the very nanosecond of an encounter. With Staying Current, we take note of what is coming our way – from the inside or outside - be it healthy, surprising, joyful or painful - and negotiate with the experience so as to arrive at the most loving and fruitful outcome in the given moment. Sometimes, no action is the action taken, as personal autonomy on how we navigate and make decisions takes precedence. Rather than rush to react, we pace ourselves to allow for a mindful response.

Staying current can be characterized as an ongoing integral awareness practice, tuning into the dynamic messages of our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions, whether we are awake to their voices or not. The body as a helpful teacher looms large in this heart-oriented practice, as we notice when and where the body's signals emerge internally or externally, be they tension, lightness, fatigue or expansion, as examples. Those signals, often in the form of physical sensations, can be understood as our body's way of letting us know to take heed, listen, inquire and respond. As if it weren't enough to attend to the myriad of sensations in the body, our practice of staying current encourages us to notice and acknowledge feelings, even expand our vocabulary of feelings to best discern the emotional experience we're having first before deciding what we want to do with the data we've been collecting. It's an all-at-once, multi-faceted integral happening!

The mind enters the picture, sizing up the storyline of what occurred against past experience and future aims and does its best to think through how to affect most satisfying outcomes. The murmurings of the soul – the essential self – bring best intentions through evolutionary love into the mix, seeking highest potentials for all concerned, including what matters most to oneself. Putting together all aspects of our integral being is a practice itself. Conscious, embodied integration of our many parts reinforces wholeness, balance and integrity – much of what ITP aspires for practitioners. Rather than focusing awareness on one aspect of ourselves, such as the heart with its vast array of feelings, the practice prompts us to pay equal attention to all aspects - the totality of who we are – to mine our deeper truths for self-understanding, growth and mindful action.

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The ITP principle of cultivating awareness of oneself, another and a given group features vividly in the practice of staying current. Beginning from within ourselves, practitioners take an inventory of the impact of an occurrence where they may feel triggered or awakened to heightened energy. Practices to ground, center and reflect on the effects of that energy are recommended to allow for full integral disclosure of the experience and the opportunity to regain composure and perspective. It may take some time, however, to recalibrate and notice the new energy that's available for what's next. Balancing and centering, along with breathwork, in combination with mindful walking, reflection, journaling and speaking with a trusted resource are suggested steps for staying current with oneself. The practices of patience and self-compassion help soothe the nervous system and psyche during the lifelong journey of transformation that ITP offers.

Once we are fully connected to our own experience, there is greater capacity to welcome someone else into our experience and to allow for a mutually satisfying exchange and the possibilities of what can be created together. At the same time, we stay connected to what's alive inside. It's a "both and!" The practice of blending drawn from Aikido becomes useful here to register one's own point of view and, at the same time, witness the other's view as well. What begins as a full-fledged personal check-in with self opens to an energetic connection with another. The real fun, along with a major dose of complexity, occurs when staying current with a group, holding one's individual experience while blending with the experience of others in a group, regardless of size. Translating our experience into language using skillful means is an essential component of the staying current process.

Does it always go smoothly? Certainly not! Staying current can be messy and we can sometimes fall on our faces when seeking the transformation of a relationship. The practice nudges us to return to the encounter after our missteps with even greater conviction. Staying current takes perseverance, courage and faith when we lean into deeper connection for the sake of love, harmony and our own health and wellbeing.

On that note, there are qualities, such as openness, awareness, curiosity and readiness, to

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name a few, and skills, such as critical thinking, self-regulation and embodied resilience, that help set the stage for staying current. It is also helpful to assess skill or quality development needed for growth in this practice and to mark one's progress when staying current proves beneficial, despite challenges along the way. Affirmations serve as a portal for transformation when aimed at development in qualities or skills ripe for growth with matters of the heart. When all is said and done, it comes down to practice, and fortunately, that's what ITP is all about – practice!

While well-crafted training tools and materials for staying current are available, the practice alone may not, nor is it designed to, fully address the care and feeding of all emotional needs. ITP can indeed be therapeutic but does not take the place of therapy. Using trusted resources is strongly encouraged. This may include sharing our struggles with friends, fellow group members if in a group, and tapping into outside support such as psychotherapy or somatic-related therapy groups dedicated to understanding behavioral patterns, including trauma, and reorienting to new ways of engaging with oneself and others in more compassionate and satisfying ways. One's personal practice, in combination with group support and therapeutic resources, offers the most helpful recipe for emotional self-discovery and development. As George Leonard says, "Practice mentally for physical activities. Practice physically for mental activities." As we engage in an array of physical, mental and spiritual activities, our emotional world reaps the benefit as well.

On a more expansive level, the practice of staying current is an integral awareness practice where we are awake to signals and waves of energy from both within and outside ourselves. This includes the unseen realms where guidance may appear from virtually out of the ether. It's important to pay close attention to messages from wherever they show up – be it in our dreams, while walking in nature, taking a shower or feeling a tap on the shoulder when no one is seemingly there. Our extraordinary capacities are at play in the staying current game, where experiencing empathy – truly experiencing the feeling world of another – can occur, along with other extraordinary capabilities such as clairvoyance

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and intuition. While the commitment of staying current does not specify how our extraordinary nature and supernormal capacities directly link to this particular practice, these awakenings can provide on a richer understanding of one's emotional makeup and that of others. All is in play when it comes to deepening the experience of our evolutionary nature in this practice – how we grow, transform and support others to awaken to the fullest expression of their potentials in matters of the heart and whole integral being. In our practice of staying current and in the entire ITP journey, we aim to lovingly embrace our evolutionary nature through heightened awareness of the extraordinary in the ordinary and the glimmerings, small and large, of untold wonders beyond our conscious understanding.

Staying current is ultimately a practice of love, beginning with oneself. Developing a loving relationship with our many parts is a lifelong journey, fitting for a long-term endeavor such as the ITP program. When we are in loving, compassionate relationship with our whole self, we are best positioned to extend that loving regard out to others, our global family and the natural world. Practitioners are encouraged, through the commitment of staying current, to explore their connection to each integral part and use the affirmation process to build trusting and respectful regard of oneself over time. The support of others, friends, family or fellow practitioners, plays a significant role in a practitioner's growth by witnessing where a fellow member is in their development and aligning with their particular aims for healthy change.

In ITP, we affirm that love is the root of all possibility. The practice of evolutionary love takes center stage and is intimately interwoven into the staying current process. While we may find difficulty or upset with ourselves, another or a group, we can hold the troubling circumstance, different perspectives and the players involved, in their highest potential while, at the same time, being fully aware of and sensitive to the present condition. Evolutionary love is the most powerful tool available to address painful emotions and situations beyond our control. Holding all that is in its fullest flowering, no matter what, is balm to the soul and an honoring of the preciousness of life.