

# THE GIFT OF THE PRESENT

Words: Diana Richardson

*“The greatest gift you can give your lover is to be present”*

**Thich Nhat Hanh**

The charm of Valentine’s Day is that it encourages us to put romance in the spotlight. Due to the routine of work and family life, our attention on love too easily becomes diffused. What can we do to make love a priority? In what way can we convey our appreciation and gratitude? How can we transport our deeper feelings?

The Vietnamese Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh, a global spiritual leader, poet, and peace activist, says: “The greatest gift you can give your lover is to be present”. Here there is a lovely play on words because gift and present mean the same thing. But the question is – yes, you may give a gift, but are you present? Are you present to your partner?

To be present does not mean, “Well I’m here. Isn’t that being present?” No, to be present means full-bodied, full open-hearted, eyes meeting in the here and now present. As a couple there is the tendency not to be present to each other. Even though we are around

each other, in each other’s company, we are generally not really ‘in the awareness’ of each other. Each person is wrapped up in their own world. If I am always turned away from you when I speak, or I am scrolling on my phone continually while you are speaking to me, or I don’t stop and listen to you, or I don’t turn my attention to you when I hug you, then I am not fully present. And, although we don’t consciously notice another’s lack of presence, our body feels their absence and our heart also feels it. Then we wonder why so often there is mismatched communication, and how quickly we can fall into misinterpretation, disappointment and conflict.

## SO HOW DO WE ACTUALLY BECOME PRESENT?

The secret is to increase our awareness of the physical body. This sounds too simple, but try it out - it works! The reason it works is because the body is the only thing that exists in the present. In the here and now. The nature of mind is that it is constantly thinking, so there is the tendency to get caught up in our thoughts – and thinking about the past or the future. And we get so involved in this ongoing process that we completely forget our bodies.

So, the art to accessing the present moment is to consciously feel and sense your body - on a kinaesthetic level. This means to develop the ability and the awareness to know where the parts of your body are, and how they are moving, or how they are positioned in space. Doing this immediately gives you access to the present moment.

The kinaesthetic sense is a mysterious sense since, by comparison to our other senses such as vision and hearing, we are largely unaware of it in our daily activities. Some of us are more naturally kinaesthetic than others and it is our predominant way of being in relation to the body, while for others it can be a learned or developed sense. Whenever you remember, take your attention to your body and feel your legs, feel your feet, feel your spine, feel your hands, feel your belly, your pelvis, basically attempt to get an 'inner' and more cellular sense of your entire body. At any moment, whether you are talking, cooking, driving, typing, or engaged in any other activity, it is possible, and valuable, to increase the level of attention you give to your body.

When we bring awareness into our bodies, we will be surprised to find that it is a world unto itself with many different realities operating simultaneously. The heart is beating, breath is rising and falling, and we can feel certain vibrations, tingling sensations and warmth, even light, moving through the body. Slowly, slowly we become alert to each movement, each gesture, each breath. When we learn to watch everything that is happening inside of our bodies, we are launched into the present moment.

The body acts as a bridge to the present moment, we can't really become present through thinking. In fact, thinking stops us from feeling. Attention on the body instantly gives us access to the present moment, to the here and now. This can be an ongoing

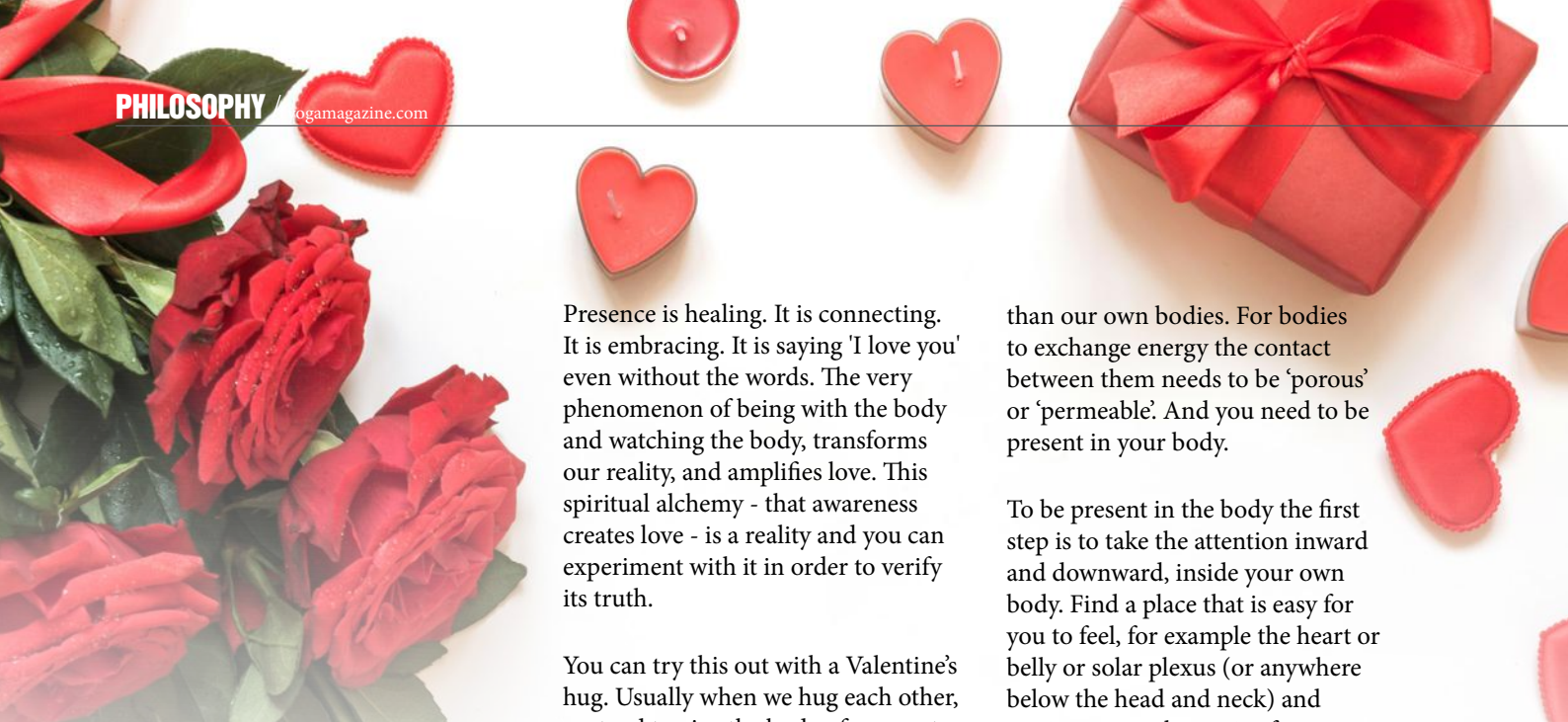
'practice' during your day. How am I breathing? How am I standing? How am I sitting? If you notice any tensions, in the shoulders or jaw or belly for example, then relax these tensions. Notice how the body will take a deep breath when you consciously relax tensions. Body language, our facial expressions, also our body positions, how we sit or stand forms a large part of our communication. As you practice being more present in your daily life then in time the magical quality of presence arises. You carry this quality with you wherever you go and whatever you do.



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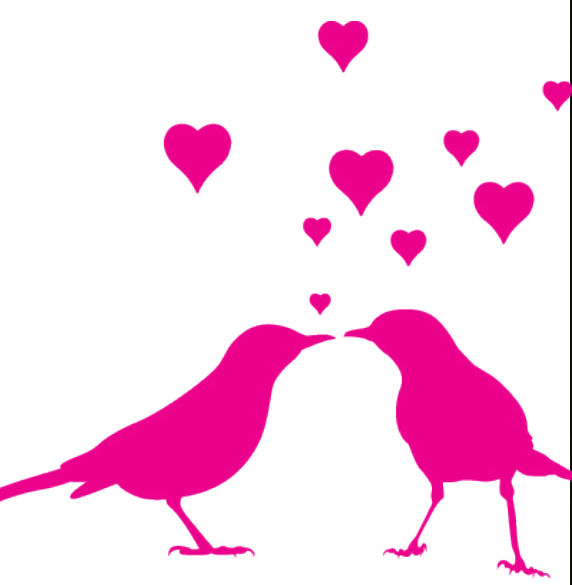
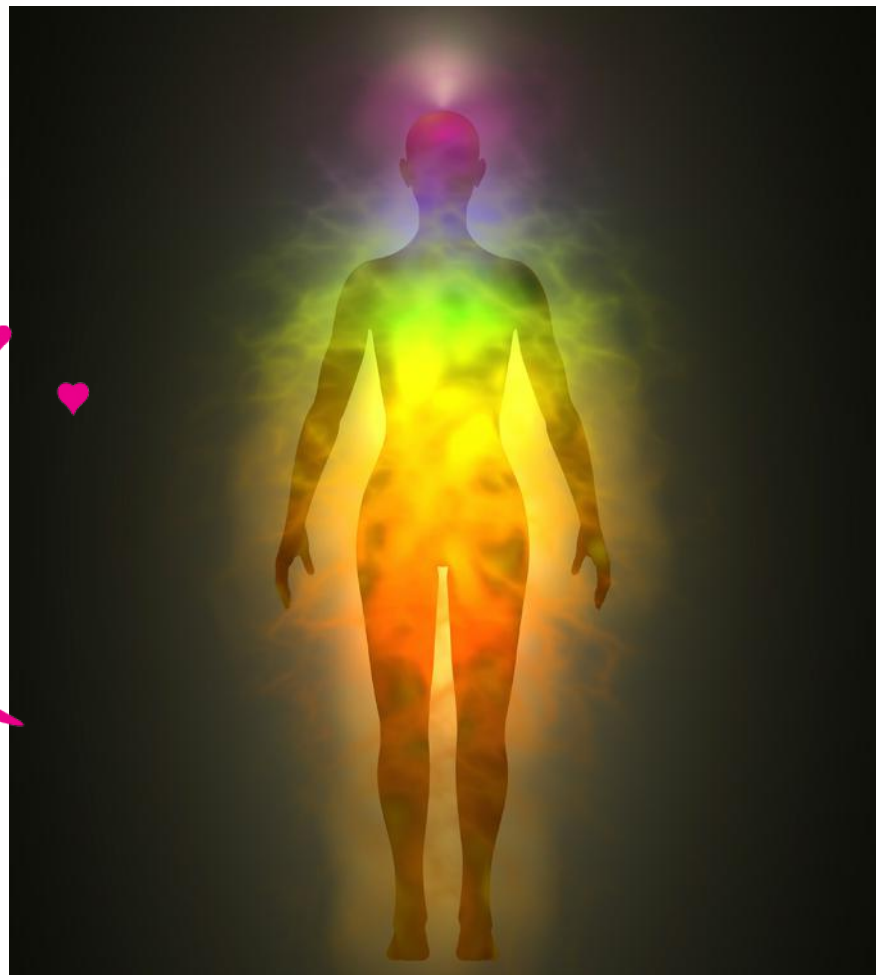
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Presence is healing. It is connecting. It is embracing. It is saying 'I love you' even without the words. The very phenomenon of being with the body and watching the body, transforms our reality, and amplifies love. This spiritual alchemy - that awareness creates love - is a reality and you can experiment with it in order to verify its truth.

You can try this out with a Valentine's hug. Usually when we hug each other, we tend to give the body of our partner an enthusiastic heartfelt squeeze, but there is no tenderness or real exchange of energy. We are not touched by the hug, even though it was well meant. One reason is that we tend to 'compact' our bodies, and push them into each other. Through this we lose access to the finer sensitivity of our bodies, as individuals, and in fact we feel the body of the other person rather

than our own bodies. For bodies to exchange energy the contact between them needs to be 'porous' or 'permeable'. And you need to be present in your body.

To be present in the body the first step is to take the attention inward and downward, inside your own body. Find a place that is easy for you to feel, for example the heart or belly or solar plexus (or anywhere below the head and neck) and use it as an anchor point for your awareness. If you don't find such a place then just choose a place. The purpose of this is that you don't focus on the body of your partner, instead you focus on your own body. Stand with your weight equally distributed on your legs and feet, so that your body is centred, and not displaced to one side, out of the midline of the spine.



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Then scan your body looking for tensions, using your awareness, and then softening them. Classic places where we hold tension are the jaw, shoulders, belly and also the pelvic floor, the web of muscles at the base of the pelvis. This scanning and relaxing can be done again and again because unconscious tensions tend to reassert themselves quite quickly. Then breathe slowly through your nose, taking the breath downward into the diaphragm and belly. And then stay some minutes just breathing together, feeling your own body, being present in your own body. If you are of a suitable height in relation to each other, then you can gently bring your foreheads together, and just rest in this position for a while. In this way a hug can continue for many minutes, rather than being a quick squeeze and then it's all over. You can also create a beautiful space with flowers, low lighting, candles, fragrance, and music, as these contribute to creating an atmosphere that supports us in making a shift into the present.

Essentially we have a basic tool in our hands - self awareness - (or mindfulness) and that is to be aware of what happens in our senses and how we are affected in the present. The more clear our senses, the more concrete our relationship to body in the here and now, the more we become aware of how we are affected in the present. The clearer our senses, the more likely we are to give information and receive information as it is, as opposed to acting from the past where our triggers, hurts or reactions lie.

Another beautiful guideline is to be generous with your love, don't give to get, give because it brings you joy and fulfilment, and soon you will realise that the more you give the more you have. The less you give, the less you have. It also supports love if we communicate out of present moment, and avoid talking too much about the past or the future. Also experiment with using silence as communication



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and become accustomed to 'sharing silence' as a way of being together. When you are talking, listen with an open accepting heart to what your partner is saying, or sharing. Don't be too quick to answer back, with your input or opinion. And don't interrupt them. Allow your partner to finish what they are saying, before you respond or start speaking.

Accept your partner as they are, love them the way they are. Focus on their positive qualities. Avoid trying to change them to fit into your picture of how your ideal person should be. If you want to relax and stay in love, acceptance is the only way. All denial and non-acceptance creates tension. By saying 'yes' and accepting of how things are, or how they are, then we can relax and enjoy life.

Being present while making love also makes a huge difference to keeping our love alive. In the sexual arena it is easy to become a bit absent because we follow routines and tend to get a bit mechanical. To bring a qualitative shift into your relationship and level of harmony, gradually become more and more aware of what you

are doing, and how you are doing it, moment by moment, deepening your level of presence using your awareness. Through this we are able to create enriching experiences of love each time. This happens because we understand the real nature of sexual energy - that awareness transforms sex into love.

It makes a big difference to our lives when we discover there is something concrete that we can do about love. While Valentine's Day is there for us to shine the light on love, we don't need to wait for it. Day by day all it takes is to increase our awareness, to be more present each moment, and this practice will enhance the quality of your life and your love many levels.



**Diana Richardson** is a disciple of tantric master Osho and a teacher and practitioner of holistic body therapies. Michael Richardson is a teacher of t'ai chi, practitioner of shiatsu, teacher of the Gurdjieff Sacred Dances, and a disciple of tantric master Osho. Together, Diana and Michael have been teaching the art of Tantra in their weeklong "Making Love Retreats for Couples" since 1993 and are the authors of 'Tantric Sex for Lovers' (boxed set). They live in Switzerland.