

From the Kitchen

19 August 2009

Many of the great teachings talk of mindfulness, being in the moment, waking from the dream of past and future and living in the 'now'. There are people who devote their lives to learning how to do that and, once learned, perfecting it.



The thing about being mindful of the present moment is that you miss nothing, even when it's no longer there. There is a trick to it, though: memories that come up are at that moment, the moment. It's about honouring wherever our attention is right now.

If you can be in the present, moment by moment, there are no regrets. Whatever you are attentive to, is what there is. What does not have your attention right now, is not the life you are living, because you can only live one life at a time. There are over six billion human lives to live at this moment, and you can only live one of them.

My observation of animals is that they do just that; not that my dog is not aware of my absence, or my wife's, and is not glad at our return. When my wife returns home after a day away, I am joyful at our reconnection. That is what the moment offers. Because I have had the opportunity of countless moments of experience during the day and have done my best to truly experience those, my joy is not based on a day of wifelessness but on that moment of wifefulness.

Stories are ways of talking about the past or the future in order to inform the present. Let me tell you a story about Priscilla.

One day, Miss Jane rescued Priscilla from evil scoundrels who were tormenting her. Miss Jane is a princess, although she doesn't always act like one. But, like a true princess, she stepped into the fray and bravely confronted the scoundrels who, thus challenged, abandoned Priscilla. Miss Jane brought Priscilla home, where she was soon discovered to actually not be a Priscilla but a Jonathon.

All that was nine years ago and Miss Jane grew from a young princess into a beautiful adult princess while Jonathon grew from a forlorn kitten into a beautiful tom. He was good-natured and peaceful and, above all, loving. He gracefully took on the mantle of top cat when the previous claimant to that title said farewell.

Miss Jane and Jonathon watched each other mature and grow in wisdom. They often consoled each other, with Miss Jane needing the more consolation. Jonathon taught his benefactor unconditional love and patience.

Jonathon's needs were simple: good food, a warm house or a cool floor (depending on the season) and love. Being white, he particularly liked lying on dark materials, such as Miss Jane's denim skirts or black pants, especially if she was in them.

Jonathon was a Buddha presence in the house. He proceeded calmly from room to room, sometimes stopping in front of Miss Jane and eye-balling her with his inscrutable face. 'Okay Jonathon. Thank you.' Miss Jane would feel more relaxed and more centred. His loud purring also had a calming effect on those who felt it – it was deep enough to be not merely heard.

Jonathon brought gifts for Miss Jane: a mouse tail or a squirming lizard; sometimes a whole, live mouse, held gently in his jaws. His greatest gift, however, was his calm, undemanding

presence. This demonstrated to Miss Jane that peacefulness was possible and encouraged her to aspire to such Buddha consciousness. She learned to more fully appreciate what she had and what was given to her.

And then Jonathon became unwell, deteriorating quickly at a physical level. But he didn't complain and he made no demands. In his going he was as he had been in his living – calm, accepting, purring. In his passing he taught as powerfully as he had always done.

Miss Jane continues to grow and learn. She has taken on much of Jonathon's ability to accept what life presents. And for her, Jonathon remains a presence.

Whoever or whatever we are willing to learn from can be a teacher. Some would say that there was nothing accidental about Jonathon's initial rescue, that Miss Jane needed what he had to offer, from the start. He could give her quiet companionship when the world seemed to be imploding and when her family 'didn't understand'. He also kept her company on those nights when being alone was not something she could contemplate.

Jonathon had enough to share with all of Miss Jane's family, but really was the princess's special creature. With Jonathon's passing, Miss Jane feels she is done rescuing or being rescued – she feels complete.

Dedicated to Jonathon and his princess and her special friend, her mother.

Photo by Sally Trewenack