

I Have Time

by Patty de Llosa

Hurrying speeds us away from the present moment, expressing a wish to be in the future because we think we're going to be late. To counter it, Master Alexander teacher Walter Carrington told his students to repeat each time they begin an action: "I have time." He tells us that on his visit to the Spanish Riding School of Vienna, where horses and riders are trained to move in unison, the director ordered the circling students to break into a canter, adding, "What do you say, gentlemen?" And they all replied together, "I have time." Try it yourself sometime when you're in a hurry. Send yourself a message to delay action for a nano-second before jumping into the fray.

We are bombarded all day long by stimuli that call us to immediate action. But the pause of saying "I have time" summons an alternative mode of the nervous system, inhibiting the temptation to rush forward under the internal command to "do it now!" When you hold back your first impulse to go into movement by creating a critical pause during which your attention is gathered, you become present to the moment you are living.

So why do we feel the need to hurry? It may be an unconscious sense that danger is near, but it's not a lion in the street — more likely a deadline or an exam or an unpleasant confrontation. In my case it was often the fear that I wouldn't finish the job soon enough or well enough to please someone in authority. I discovered that I harbored a Stern Judge who kept an eye on me all day long, commenting on everything I did: "This is more important so get it done first," or "That's less important, so hurry through it." Now, any time I find myself worrying that I don't have enough time to finish something, I remind myself that I'm creating my own stress. Then I can choose to respond rather than react.

Some people prefer to stay in the fight-or-flight mode, honing their "edge" and paying the price for it in physical fatigue and mental strain. I used to do that too. But even in the middle of the myriad demands to perform at your best, telling yourself "I have time" can provide a mini-break to the nervous system. It offers a moment of choice in spite of the fact that you have to finish the job. It reminds you to attend to your body-being as you press forward with your work, inviting you to release the tensions gathered at the back of your head, and let your thoughts latch onto your body movements. You can interrupt whatever you are doing for just a second to stretch out of the position you are in and into the present moment.

You may well ask, "How can I be expected to stay in the present moment when I'm pressured to finish this job?" O.K. When you have to get something done in a hurry and there's no choice, try any of these five steps I offer up from my own experience.

First, acknowledge how you really feel about the job. Let your reactions appear in your conscious awareness. Accept them, whatever they may be. "That's how it is at this moment."

Second, turn to the only remaining place where there's freedom: within yourself. Notice the thoughts that are athinking in you and turn them toward the job at hand.

Third, focus your attention on the moves your hands are making — feel the tap of each finger on the computer, or sense the strong muscles that press the freshly glued object together, or revel in the warmth of the soapy water you are washing something in.

Fourth, begin to explore other parts of your body, starting with the back of your neck, where stress tightens our muscles into tough guide-ropes that pull the head out of alignment. Let your thought move whenever and wherever the body moves, seeking out the tense corners and inviting them to release.

Fifth, from time to time interrupt whatever you're doing, no matter how important, to get up if you are sitting, or at least stretch out and away from the position you are in. If you are standing, think of your legs like tree trunks and send down imaginary roots to ground yourself on the earth while your head floats up above your torso.

Since everything's connected in the mind-body continuum, you might be surprised to what extent you can relieve your stressed-out system with a brief, non-essential walk down the hall, a peek out the window at the larger world, or even give a seriously deep sigh that engages you right down to the toes. Do anything to interrupt the deadening bond that glues all your attention to what you're writing, reading, cooking, chopping, building. Truly, the body possesses wisdom that thought doesn't understand. We can practice listening to it and allow ourselves to expand into present reality. "I have time" helps us do just that.