

Continua of Practice Series

CONTINUA OF PRACTICE: ALIENATION TO BELONGING

by Rodney Smith | October 20, 2015

“Awakening: A Paradigm Shift of the Heart,” will deepen your understanding of these talks.

This continuum speaks to the need to belong that is deeply rooted in our social and biological makeup. This need may well be one of the driving forces in our yearning for spiritual completion, but we usually attempt to satisfy it through worldly pursuits such as patriotism, political involvement, religious affiliation, neighborhood organizations, or club memberships. Almost anyone who thinks like us or shares common traits fit within our broader tribe of belonging, but even when we group likeminded people around us, most of us still feel a subtle sense of alienation that cannot be overcome. We seem to be outside observing life rather than embedded within a full membership. That isolation does not seem to be overcome through purchasing material objects. In fact, the more we relate solely to the world of form, the less we sense our true belonging. Neither do we find a comfortable home within our ideas and concepts, and in general seem unable to find this root belonging within the world of objects or within ourselves.

The sense of alienation comes from denying our interconnectedness and is the price we pay for deliberately holding ourselves aloof and distant to life. The discovery of mindfulness begins to change this by offering us a definitive place to stand and connection with the rest of the world. We land in the body as the body and in the mind as the mind. Through mindfulness we find our bearings and stop looking for belonging outside of ourselves. We begin to notice that everything belongs exactly where it is, and realize that our historical restlessness was a result of how disagreeable we found our bodies and minds. In this sense belonging has to do more with our self-acceptance than finding a comfortable and compatible surround. Mindfulness holds us to the only place and the only time we can be and refuses to allow a conceptual journey to another location. We either find our sense of belonging here or it is not to be found. Slowly we acquiesce and discover we can be present with ourselves and others without losing this ground. Now our sense of belonging is maintained through most circumstances, and when shameful or doubting thoughts arise, they do not dislocate us or have us shrink from our relationships.

Now mindfulness expands to become a much broader field of inclusion and with it comes a wider stretch of belonging. The focus of this newly discovered awareness is no longer our own personal location but touches all things equally. We literally belong to all things because all things coexist within each and every thing. This more expansive view frees us from any sense of alienation since everything is now available and accessible. This view can create a false nirvana when we lose ourselves in the rich intimacy available within this perception. Everything can seem so close and available that we resist moving through his level of sensitivity toward even greater fulfillment. Why move when our lifetime ambition of truly belonging has finally been met? The counter-influence comes when we realize that the contentment from this view of awareness is partial and incomplete. It can be taken from us when

circumstances change. The questions then become, "Is there a belonging that is not circumstantial? Is there a belonging that is intrinsic to our being?"



See [Series Overview](#) for a description of this diagram.

FOR YOUR CONTEMPLATION

We usually start the spiritual journey feeling alienated and disconnected within our own skin. Our bodies and minds often appear more confusing than helpful, more difficult than friendly. Many of us have not learned how to belong to ourselves, or how to rest within the movements of mind and bodily sensations. This week use the statement, "I belong only here, now," whenever your body and mind seem disagreeable. Establish this ground of body and mind on which you live and refuse to move away. Do not fight with yourself, just surrender to the ground and give up all resistance.

This series is based on the book, "[Awakening: A Paradigm Shift of the Heart](#)" (Shambhala 2014).