



## **AWAKE AND AWARE:** **The mindful journey to presence** *Vicente Simón. Universidad de Valencia* Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2011

**Agustín Moñivas Lázaro**  
*Universidad Complutense de Madrid*

**I**n his new book, Vicente Simón, the author of “Aprender a practicar Mindfulness” [Learning to practice mindfulness], “Vivir con Plena Atención: De la aceptación a la presencia”, [Awake and Aware: The mindful journey to presence] uses concepts contributed by various psychological theories -memory, imagination, the computer metaphor, the ego, the real self and the ideal self, desire, identification and disidentification, attachment, etc.- to bring us closer to the different branches of Eastern psychology and to propose, through a journey, that we take a glimpse at other ‘states of consciousness’ and ‘being in the world’. We may perhaps see, in the author’s approach, an evolution similar to that followed by Eleanor Rosch (1973, 1978, 1983), who started her research on the categorization of reality in cognitive psychology - which led to her prototype theory in cognitive psychology (the 1st and 2nd formulations, the latter incorporating the findings of Wittgenstein and the concept of “family resemblances”). After publishing *The Embodied Mind* in 1991, together with Varela and Thomson, Rosch delved more and more into Buddhist psychology and compared the concepts of Eastern and Western psychology (2007). Eleanor Rosch is currently a lecturer at the University of Berkeley.

To achieve this, the author attempts, in the preface, to make sense of the path travelled and the spaces uncovered, communicating his ‘impression of wonder’ through metaphors, as a pilgrim interrupts his journey to call his family, saying that in addition to paying attention to the road we must also notice the landscape around us, in order to make the startling discovery that he, the traveller, is the Consciousness that contemplates everything, the very Being that, in his unfathomable naivety, the traveller himself was looking for.

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Correspondence: Agustín Moñivas. Dpto. de Psicología Básica II: Procesos Cognitivos. Sección Dptal. en Trabajo Social. Campus de Somosaguas (UCM). Pozuelo de Alarcón. 28223 Madrid. Spain. E-mail: [amonivas@psi.ucm.es](mailto:amonivas@psi.ucm.es)

The objective of the proposed route is to alleviate our pain (the first of the two forms of suffering) and increase our ‘presence’ in the world; the ‘state of presence’ which has its own inertia and is beyond all intellectual contemplation.

V. Simón tells us that perhaps the most important lesson we have to learn is, as Schopenhauer said in his day, that life leads us to our destination and not vice versa. Thus, believing we know where we are going, we only arrive where we are meant to arrive. What happens in life, on the way home, is exactly what was meant to happen. The illusion of individuality breaks down when we meet with wonder, and only the mystery of the traveller, the journey and the goal remains.

In the epilogue, the author tells us that “the whole meaning and rationale of this little book is found encrypted in its potential contribution to alleviate suffering and to embark on the journey to serenity for anyone who takes the time to read it” (p. 133).

### **THE JOURNEY AND THE TRAVELLER THROUGH THE DIFFERENT CHAPTERS**

The *raison d’être* of book is to bring travellers to a state of consciousness called the “state of presence” -without necessarily travelling the route of suffering- to compare and contrast it with the habitual state of consciousness.

If the reader has the patience and perseverance, as well as the personal interest, to accompany the author on the journey through the sixteen chapters of this book, the nature of the ‘state of presence’ will gradually become apparent. The protagonists of this journey or the resting places where we can pause and reflect include: the different states of consciousness we pass through in our personal development to reach the state of adulthood; subject/object duality prior to the presence state; the ego, in its dysfunctional aspect and in what the author calls ‘involved ego’; the identification of the ego with the personal history; the solution to all of the problems of the



ego when we become aware that 'I am not the ego'; tensions between the real self and the ideal self or between 'what is' and 'what should be' (the ego's plan); the 'circle of ever more' or the 'circle of ever less' ; desire; pain or first suffering (inevitable); resistance; second suffering (avoidable); non-resistance or acceptance, the 'state of presence', consciousness, being and, in short, Reality.

The sixteen chapter journey is comprised of the following stages or stops along the way:

1. The states of consciousness and their transitions (suffering and the state of presence).
2. Will there be a collective change of the states of consciousness or will the egoic period continue?
3. "Life is what happens to you while you are busy making other plans" (J. Lennon).
4. The ego, that virtual entity and conceptual category that we believe ourselves to be. The basic or functional ego vs. the involved or dysfunctional ego. The discovery that the ego is not me.
5. Trapped in a conceptual world. Distortions of the conceptual world. The ego as a concept.
6. The identification of the ego with the personal history and looking at the mind from the ego.
7. The illusory insufficiency of the self.
8. The ego's dance with time: the 'circles of ever more and ever less' and the loss of the present.
9. The second suffering. Two sides of the same coin: resistance and acceptance.
10. The state of presence. Characteristics.
11. The dimensions of being.
12. The comprehension of opposites.
13. La illusion of separation.
14. The liberating sense of acceptance.
15. The path to disidentification.
16. I, the Consciousness.

In this final chapter, V. Simón synchronizes all this and more, throughout this journey, on the Witness, the Consciousness, the four Realities -space, light, quiet and origin- in which we know ourselves, and the thirteen 'no longer...' '

The path to disidentification is travelled by cultivating the habit of 'presence'. But presence arises by developing the 'witness' (chap. 10). Starting with the witness, we begin to create the distance that facilitates the disappearance of 'identification'. The witness:

- ✓ An impartial observer who takes note of what is going on, both in the external world and the internal reality.

- ✓ Contemplates the wondrous spectacle of life and does not identify himself with it.
- ✓ Creates the distance that facilitates the gradual disappearance of disidentification.
- ✓ Enables us to understand the illusiveness of the reality we believe ourselves to be.
- ✓ Realizes that 'I am not what I thought was' (identification vs. disidentification). As Nisargadatta Maharaj said, "I cannot tell you what I am, because words can only say what I am not" (p. 126).

Following the course of the preceding sentence, metaphors and similes have been used to communicate at least some of the taste of Consciousness, Being, the Source, and the realm of the Absolute. The abovementioned metaphors and similes are summarized here:

- ✓ The realm of the formless.
- ✓ The absence of form.
- ✓ The origin of time and space which enables forms to manifest.
- ✓ The easiest way to access this is by cultivating Presence (being aware that we are aware - metacognition).
- ✓ Being Consciousness is likely to be beyond our possibilities.
- ✓ Find one's true belonging, one's true nature, in the origin and source of all forms.

The four Realities in which we know ourselves are as follows: 1) knowledge of ourselves as space makes us invulnerable to the wounds that the contents of this space may suffer; 2) awareness of being light allows us to see things as they are, devoid of pretence; 3) knowledge of ourselves as stillness frees us from fear, anxiety, guilt and envy; and, 4) knowledge of ourselves as the origin makes us feel that we are creative and instruments of the constant transformation for which the world of forms was conceived.

## CONCLUSIONS

"Vivir con plena atención. De la aceptación a la presencia" [Awake and Aware: The mindful journey to presence] is a book in which the author has the ability to use metaphors (the journey, the pilgrim or the dream), to quote poets, philosophers, mystics and physicists, at the beginning and throughout the development of each chapter, its entire development pivoting through a principal concept; a concept that interweaves with the previous chapter, where it has been announced previously, by way of introduction. All of this makes the text, whilst not light reading, not baroque.



We discover V. Simón the philosopher, framing his own knowledge in well-chosen quotations, to set about tearing down the various wanderings of the ego: its identification with the personal history, with the body, with desire, with the circle of ever more or ever less, among many other things. In this sense, at the beginning of each chapter, there are at least two quotes from authors ranging from Pessoa to Borges, via Nisargadatta; contemporary physicists and mystics from different eras who, by way of prelude, succinctly introduce the content of each chapter.

One wonders whether expressions such as 'being happy' and 'feeling complete in life' may lead to confusion, regarding life as a state to be achieved rather than as a process in which the horizon cannot be seen, only the will to stay in the fight to be, 'to become Being'. And one also wonders whether this journey can be a group trip, not just an individual one, although the work may have to be quasi-unison whilst at the same time respecting the individual pace, just as in a marathon.

But what is most surprising about both Vicente Simón and Eleanor Rosch is their commitment to what life has been revealing to them, based on their university work. And, instead of remaining in already conquered positions from which to view the world or be admired, they have both preferred to venture deep into the area of the ancient wisdom of all peoples.

In this sense, various considerations are possible. We choose one that is related to the movement originated in the University of Massachusetts, 1978, by Kabat-Zinn, leading to multiple health programs, and third-generation psychotherapy programs based on MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction), and which has its maximum guarantee in neuroscience.

Siegel (2010) tells us: "Science has shown that practicing mindfulness, i.e., paying attention to the wealth of experiences in the here and now, improves physiology, cognitive function and interpersonal relationships. Being completely present in consciousness opens us up to new possibilities of wellbeing." (p. 15) or "...if we help ourselves to connect with our own minds, our civilization will move forward and overcome the automatic reflex behaviors of the consumer society that are leading us to

the precipice. But if the human being has such potential for compassion and empathy - and we all know exemplary cases of this- the forms of organization must also have this responsiveness. Perhaps it is as simple as tuning in with ourselves, among the members of this group, mind to mind, relationship to relationship and moment to moment (pp. 16-17).

There is no conclusion more fitting than the words of Dr. Vicente Simón in his thirteenth 'no longer': "No longer have I anything to say, because I have discovered that the most meaningful and rewarding things are found in the fruition of silence. Silence, which is said to be the language of God." We truly hope that this No longer have I anything left to say...' is only the closing remark of this book.

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