

Introduction: Welcome Back

Years into your healing work, you might feel that you have largely come back to yourself, and at the same time wonder why you still have trauma-related problems. Or, you might be just starting out, wanting a peek into what lies ahead.

Some things have gotten better, but perhaps not the one goal you set your heart on achieving at the beginning of your process, close relationships or freedom from chronic pain or a steady income or being “normal.” Along the way, you have worked very hard and wondered what is wrong with you that your life is not yet perfectly managed. No one seems to talk about the fact that untraumatized people do not manage their lives perfectly either, nor the fact that injuries from trauma can be healed, but not erased.

This book is a non-judgmental companion for your healing process after the initial crisis is over.*

You have found some support that works for you, although support might be an ongoing struggle. You are familiar with your survival tools like denial, dissociation, and

* For more on the beginning of the healing process, see my previous book *Wellspring of Compassion: Self-Care for Sensitive People Healing from Trauma*, or TraumaHealed.com/articles/by-topic/.

that loud Inner Critic, and have acquired some alternatives that work better in the present. The old tools do still pop up, though. You have practices for connecting with yourself and providing for your needs, longings, and sensitivities as best you can.

You know how your system responds to anxiety, flashbacks, and other Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms. You can bear witness to painful memories, and have at least a general idea of your past history.

You sense your preferences and boundaries, and can communicate about them clearly. That does not stop some people from violating them. You recognize emotional abuse, victim-blaming, and other subtle forms of abuse, and avoid them when you can.

Some aspects of your living space are just the way you like them, and others are still a challenge. You have created routines and traditions that suit you. You are struggling more with present-time issues than the past, although you can see how the past still affects you.

How can you reconcile with the present you have, rather than the easier, cozier present you deserve? How can you reconcile with who you are in this moment?

My goal for healing from trauma was to become present. I thought there was a magic threshold of presence that would heal my physical symptoms, smooth my relationships with others, and transform my relationship with myself.

Over time I discovered that presence is a gradient, not a threshold. After more than two decades of becoming more present in my body, each new awareness feels like I am just beginning.

While presence is better than its alternative, absence, it does not fix nearly as much as I thought. Instead, it tells me

there is nothing wrong with me and I do not need fixing.

Presence gives me a fierce defense when people deny my reality. I am right here paying attention! At the same time presence makes room for uncertainty, ambiguity, and internal conflict.

Trauma fractures us from ourselves. Presence is the antidote. Being present does not erase or undo trauma . That is dissociation, numbness. Presence includes trauma's narratives and effects, without being hijacked by them.

Presence can be drenched in pain, and it can also be playful, pleasurable. Pleasure can be hard to allow if it feels unfamiliar, dangerous, or shameful. Consider being present for tiny bits of pleasure at a time.

Becoming present is an ongoing exploration of willingness to accept what is, and willingness to allow it to change. Over time, we find ways to reconcile with ourselves as we are right now.

To reconcile with the world, we have to reconcile with unfairness and systemic injustice. We received unfair harm in the form of trauma and abuse. We did not get the help and care we needed then, and we may not be getting everything we need now. We also received unfair advantages in the form of resources that helped us survive and heal.

We find our individual reasons to keep trying, keep living, keep holding on until the next shift that might make things better. We find parts of our world that bring us joy, and make choices to move toward more of what we want. As we regain our balance in the present, we can turn some of our energy toward supporting others with their struggles.

You can read this book as a continuous whole, or dip in and out, focusing on the topics that are most alive for you right now. If you feel anxious, impatient, or bored, you can

take a break or skip the parts that are difficult for you.

As you read, listen to your body and notice what is true for you with gentle awareness. Tune in to your experience when you have an uninterrupted block of time to yourself, or in bits and pieces as you go about your day, whenever you have time to think and feel.

Overview. These themes weave through all the articles, and group them into sections.

1. **Healing Tools.** We want to heal faster, and at the same time, healing needs to be gently respectful of our boundaries, needs, and vulnerabilities.
2. **Acceptance.** As a daily companion, the balm of acceptance allows every aspect of our experience to be as it is, including demands for things to be different.
3. **Body.** You do not have to improve before deserving to be present in your body, just as your body does not have to improve to deserve your presence. You already belong together.
4. **Trauma Effects.** When we understand the physical and emotional effects of our trauma histories, we can manage them more skillfully.
5. **Self-Trust.** Over time, we rebuild trust in our perceptions, our viewpoint, our wisdom, and our effectiveness in the world.
6. **Hard Times.** We continue to encounter individual abusive interactions, systemic injustice, and personal defeats no matter how healed we get.
7. **Relating.** When we come out of emergency mode, we can once again perceive and send the subtle signals of relating.

Check the **Glossary** for definitions of unfamiliar terms.