

CURIOUS ATTENTION

By Philip Johncock

Curious attention is one of the “best, quickest way(s) to shift your state of consciousness, get unstuck and grow more capacity to give and receive love and joy.” -- Kathlyn Hendricks, Ph.D.

What exactly is “curious attention”?

First, let me start by saying that “curious attention” is sometimes referred to as “presencing”. “Presencing” is defined by Drs. Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks as the “act of resting your nonjudgmental attention on something real that you’re experiencing right now.”

Drs. Hendricks describe the experience of presencing in this way:

“When you’re fully present, you feel a natural inner sense of spiritual connection along with your other natural body sensations. This clear sense of your authentic spiritual nature is the first gift of presencing. When you’re fully present in a relationship, you feel a natural spiritual connection with the other person. When you and a partner are both fully present in your relationship, you feel your natural spiritual connection with each other. You feel it in the background of everything you do.” (*Spirit-Centered Relationships* 2006: vi)

The benefits, they write, of “presencing” in the relationship realm are to feel more genuine love and spiritual connection in your life right now and to create safety and trust.

Second, allow me to say what “curious attention” is not. It is not attention that is fixated, judgmental, critical or rigid. For example, when I want to be right, have a listening filter (like listening to fix), have an agenda ... my attention is fixated or judgmental. If my ability to place curious attention on something inside me (like constriction in my back) or outside (like on a client’s voice over the phone) is rigid, little else enters my awareness ... and I can get stuck. This often happens when a person keeps saying the same thing over and over again like a broken record. His attention is stuck. And, when I become overly critical (to myself or others), my attention is fixated.

By contrast, “curious attention” is “nonjudgmental”, flowing, flexible, and in the moment. The Hendricks write about feeling inner sense of spiritual connection and other natural body sensations. They also speak about focusing this attention on a person’s experience ... in the moment. What is the person experiencing right now? Most of the friends I have are unfamiliar with someone be fully present with them and interested in what they are experiencing ...

curiously, without judgment. When this happens, they feel heard and loved unconditionally.

Curious attention is like adding a sense of “hmmm...” and wonder to something. Instead of interpreting or judging or moving quickly to make meaning out of something, notice feelings and body sensations.

Try this experiment. Start with something inside ... a body sensation. Notice a body sensation. I notice pressure and a pulsation in my right pelvis. Then, place your attention on something outside. I notice the purple walls behind my computer. Then, bring your attention back inside. I notice a strain on the left side of my neck and myself taking a deep breath. Then, outside again. I notice out of the corner of my left eye a poster on my wall that has a white border with purple/yellow artwork and letters. Go back and forth from inner and outer noticing for two minutes.

I notice another deep breath and the breath against the back of my throat and sinus cavity. I notice the black speaker to the computer on the desk. I notice my sit bones against my chair. I notice the chord from the blinds. I notice an itch on my left side by my ribs and another itch on the right side just above the hips. I notice a blue post-it note hanging on my computer monitor.

One way to visualize “curious attention” is a “loop” of awareness ... between one’s inner experience and the outer world.

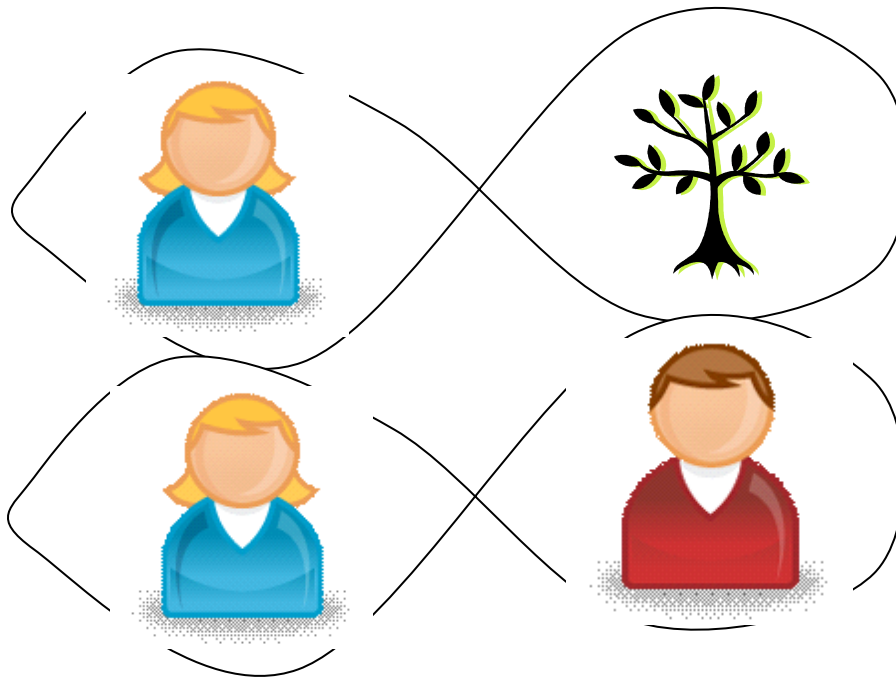
When I teach this, I ask students to notice at the top and bottom of the hour where their curious attention goes ... and write down what they notice. I invite them to note inner and outer experiences.

After exploring for some time, I ask them some questions around their explorations around “curious attention”:

- √ What parts of your body do you use primarily when you notice your curious attention focusing on something? Examples: eyes, ears, skin
- √ In exploring this loop, what’s the rhythm of oscillation between inner and outer? In other words, is more time spent on the inner experience or outer?
- √ What stops the loop of attention? Examples: critical thoughts, a frown or grimace, loud noises, something to be done.
- √ What do you characteristically “add” to your curious attention? Examples: needing to do it right, evaluating, approval-seeking

What are some benefits I've noticed around "curious attention"? As a person refines their ability to have free-flowing curious attention, magic happens ... even telepathy, believe it or not. People experience fewer arguments and getting stuck in fixated attention. I experience an electric energy, tingles around my body. I have more fun and am more present with clients and people. In coaching sessions over the phone, I can pick up on subtleties in voice inflection and tone. My inner sensations can often times signal something that my body is picking up that my mental mind isn't.

Visually, this curious attention between inner and outer world can be visualized as a loop. Below is an image of a woman focusing her attention on her inner experience. Then, she places her curious attention on a tree. Then, she loops attention back to herself. Then, on another person.



LOOP OF CURIOUS ATTENTION