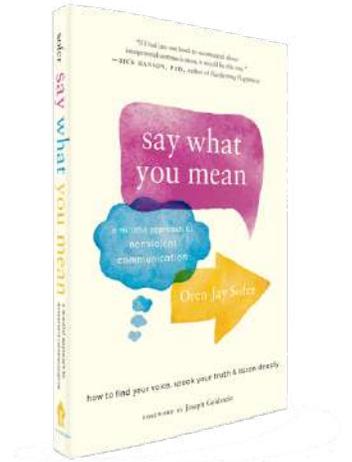




Say What You Mean: 12-part Bonus Series

This series introduces you to some of the foundational material for my book, and will give you a head start on your practice of mindful communication. Each section consists of a short written reflection and/or a guided meditation.

I suggest you take your time, giving yourself a day or more to practice with the material in each section.



Contemplation 1: The Most Important Person in the Room

To be human is to be in relationship. We are social creatures, and have been for millennia. Our bond with fellow humans is often the source of our greatest joys and greatest sorrows. Even when we're alone, we are in relationship: with the environment, with our thoughts, feelings and memories.

Communication is one of the primary modes of navigating relationships in life. Be it through speech, writing, gesture, touch, or silence, we are continually engaging with life. Because of this, learning to communicate skillfully is one of the most rewarding journeys we can take.



If you're reading this, you've already taken the most important step: recognizing that there's something to learn. Next, I'd like to propose a radical idea: **the most important person in any relationship is you.**

No, I don't mean that you matter more than everyone else. Nor am I suggesting that you focus on getting your own way at the expense of others. (Clearly, such strategies never produce helpful results in the long run.)

What I mean is that YOU are the primary instrument for change and transformation.

We can spend so much of life focused outwardly, giving exclusive attention to people, places, projects, and tasks. If we never slow down and look inside, we fail to recognize the common denominator in everything—ourselves.

Our own body and mind are the lenses through which we see, feel, and experience life. When we're unaware of ourselves, it's like looking through foggy glasses. Self-awareness is the foundation for a meaningful life, and for creating understanding, creativity, connection and collaboration in relationship.

This is why the first foundation of mindful communication is **presence**, the capacity to be here in a balanced and reflective way. Without presence, life is a rudderless ship. We try to navigate and wonder why we can't steer.

Practice:

Reflect on this simple fact: you are the common denominator in your life's relationships. How are your relationships and conversations affected when you're more self-aware?



Contemplation 2: Orienting to Life

This series offers different tools to be more present in your life, your relationships, and conversations. The more present we are, the more our values can guide us. Presence gives us more information about our inner world and the conditions of our life, which in turn helps us to steer towards our goals.

I'd like to share a foundational practice for establishing presence from the work of Dr. Peter Levine, founder of a form of trauma healing called Somatic Experiencing.

"Orienting" means connecting to our environment through our senses. We use our eyes, ears, even smell to assess our immediate surroundings. All mammals do this to check that we're safe. If the coast is clear, our organism can settle into our natural state of relaxed awareness—one aspect of what's called mindfulness.

Try the meditation below to learn this skill, then explore it in your life. What happens if you take a few moments to orient before beginning the day's work? Before driving? Before an important conversation or during a lull in a meeting? Try bringing an attitude of exploration to these practices: with each one, run an experiment. Find what works for you, and leave the rest aside.

Download the Meditation: <https://bit.ly/swym-bonus1>

Contemplation 3: Finding Your Ground

I hope you're enjoying this series so far. It's been fun for me to write, and to think of you reading it and taking these tools out into your life.

This series focuses on training in **presence**, the first foundation of mindful communication, so that we have a healthy basis for conversation and relationship. When we're really here, aware in the present moment, we lay the groundwork for connection and for implementing the rest of our communication tools.



Life tends to draw our attention outwards to sights, sounds, and other people. This is natural; life offers many gifts through the senses. However, if we become *lost* in the experience of our senses (or in our thoughts, plans, memories), we lose access to our wisdom and to valuable information about our inner world.

Conversation in particular tends to have this effect. Our focus moves up into our head and out through our eyes as we attend to the other person, what they're saying, or our own ideas.

"Grounding" is a powerful tool to counter-balance to this tendency. In this practice, we use the sensations of weight and heaviness in our own body to root our attention more firmly in the present moment. Not only does this help us return to the present, but it can support us to feel more calm, steady and centered.

Practice:

Feel the weight of your body as you sit. Notice where your body touches the ground: your feet, your backside on the chair. Can you feel any weight or pressure? Try to keep some awareness there as you continue reading.

When standing, feel your feet on the ground or your legs. Notice the weight and heaviness of your body as you stand. Try bending your knees slightly a few times to drop your weight into your heels. What it's like to rest your attention there in the lower half of your body?

Finally, see if you can begin to bring some awareness to the sense of weight or heaviness in your body as you converse. Try this out in low-stakes, easy conversations at first.

This practice may be more or less challenging depending on you. If you're an athlete, a dancer, or if you practice yoga or Tai Chi, feeling the sensations in your body may come quite easily. If you're like me when I first started, it may take some time and entail a good dose of frustration! (Remember, the point of these exercises isn't to master them all; it's to find one or two that work.)

Be patient. Keep exploring how you sense weight in your body, trying these exercises out whenever you have a few minutes. Over time, you'll develop more facility with grounding, using gravity as a reference point to return to presence and steady your mind.

Contemplation 4: Soothing the Body and Mind

I hope all is well wherever this email finds you, and that you've been enjoying your exploration of presence.

Presence is the part of interpersonal communication that gets the least attention, yet it's the prerequisite for any kind of productive conversation. If we lose presence, we're on automatic and the conversation is left to chance or habit. Take your pick—either way, the odds aren't very good.



Presence is another word for mindfulness. It's the experience of being aware in a curious, balanced, and open way. This is our natural state, which means it's not some special, rarified experience we have to work to create. We simply need to remember it and return to it.

The more we take time to strengthen this quality of natural, relaxed awareness, the more easily we can return to it in the midst of our day, a conversation, or a heated moment.

One of the most reliable ways to strengthen presence (and to return it when we're lost), is mindfulness of breathing. The breath is always present and available. It's rhythmic, which makes it soothing. And it's connected to our autonomic nervous system, so we can use it to calm and regulate the body-mind.

If you're a meditator, none of this is news to you. Yet no matter how long you've been practicing, there are always benefits to discover from mindfulness of breathing.

Try this meditation on establishing presence and soothing your body and mind. The practice is meant to be easeful. If breathing is uncomfortable for you (due to a condition like asthma or trauma to your throat) you may want to skip this one. Some challenge is to be expected, but if you notice yourself getting tied up in knots or panicking, let this go and focus on the other practices!

Download the Meditation: <https://bit.ly/swym-bonus2>

Contemplation 5: A Core of Strength

Thanks for sticking with this exploration of establishing presence for communication! So far, we've touched on the importance of self-awareness, orienting, grounding and breathing.



Today, I'd like to explore another potent reference point that you can use to strengthen awareness in your daily life and in conversations—the *centerline*. The “centerline” (sometimes called the “midline”) runs down the middle of your torso just in front of your spine. It's half-way between the front and back of your body, in the middle of your right and left sides.

When we sit up straight or stand tall, our spine extends to its full length and it becomes easier to feel the centerline. Bringing awareness to this midline (or even just to our spine), tends to create inner strength and clarity, and enhances our ability to be present in conversations.

I had a transformative experience of the power of the centerline while studying Zen meditation in Japan in my early 20s. My first few nights there, I shared a room with the Zen Master, Ekai Korematsu Sensei. One afternoon, I barged mindlessly into our room to get something. Half-way across the room, I stopped as I noticed Ekai Sensei sitting bolt upright in meditation. There was a palpable, vibrant stillness in the room. I could feel my breath and my heart beating as my own spine straightened with alertness.

In that moment of seeing him sitting and feeling the quality of wakefulness in the room, something shifted inside me. It was as if my body suddenly understood how to use my posture to be present in a different way. There were no words—it was a direct, felt understanding.

When we're grounded and aware of the centerline, we develop core strength and alertness. The feeling of gravity establishes us firmly in the present, like a great tree rooted in the earth, while the centerline confers alignment and vitality, like the trunk and branches of that tree reaching to the sky. Contemplating the image of a great tree (or a Zen master in meditation!) can be a powerful way to internalize these experiences.

Listen to the guided meditation, then try it out during your day. On your commute, waiting in line, while listening in conversation, bring your attention to your centerline. Can you keep some awareness there? What's the effect of that?

Download the Meditation: <https://bit.ly/swym-bonus3>

Contemplation 6: A Touchstone for Presence

The exercise I'm sharing with you today is one of my favorites. When I was a little kid, I found a smooth, oblong grey stone on my grandmother's gravel driveway. It was just the right size and weight to fit comfortably in my hand. I carried it around with me in my pocket, and held it in my hand as I fell asleep at night.

There was something incredibly comforting about holding that stone, its smooth surface, the feeling of gentle heaviness in my palm. I now understand why.

Practice:

We can use what are called "touch points" to anchor our awareness in the present moment. The mind moves incredibly quickly. In the span of one moment, it can travel across vast distances of time and space: from continents to galaxies, from ages past to decades ahead.

The body is slow. It doesn't travel into the past or future – it's always right here. We can use this to our advantage. Any time we're aware of a physical sensation, we are – for that instant – present.

A sensation is anything you can feel in your body. Try rubbing your hands together for a moment. The friction and heat you feel are sensations. So are the experiences of weight, heaviness and pressure we explored in grounding, and the feeling of movement, warmth or coolness associated with the breath.

A touch point is an area of high sensation that's easy to feel, like your hands, your feet, your lips touching—or holding a literal "touch stone." We can use these areas of the body to return to presence. It works in ordinary moments, and can be especially helpful in challenging situations.



Practice:

Close your eyes and put all of your attention in your hands. Feel any sensations you notice there: warm, cool, pulsing, moisture, heaviness, touching. Let your attention rest there for a while.

When you're ready, shift your attention to another touch point in your body. You can try your feet, or your lips. Again, notice any sensations you feel, and see if you can allow your attention to rest there. When you notice your mind has wandered, just gently bring it back. Open your eyes when you're done.

Try this out for short periods during your day. In between things, during a meeting, while listening to someone, shift some of your attention to a touch point. If you have a favorite stone, carry it in your pocket and try holding it surreptitiously during tense or tedious moments. What's the effect of bringing more awareness into your body?

Contemplation 7: Mutuality - The Paradox of Presence

I hope that you've been exploring some of the mindfulness practices in this series. To the extent that you can develop some facility with one or two of them, you'll have a good tool-kit for strengthening presence in your life.

One of the most common critiques of meditation is that it's self-absorbed. In the late 90's when I first started meditating, mindfulness was still considered pretty "fringe." My parents were worried about me, convinced I would waste my life gazing at my navel.

Yet the interesting thing about mindfulness (and contemplative practice in general) is that the more aware we are of *ourselves*, the more aware we become of *others*. It paradoxical, but self-awareness makes you less self-centered!

The more we are in touch with our own body and mind, the more aware we become of others and the world around us. Mindfulness enhances our senses, so it's only natural that we become more sensitive to the presence of others.

Herein lies a key to successful conversations. Developing a healthy sense of mutuality is an essential building block of relationship. And presence opens the door to a very real, embodied experience of mutuality.



Practice:

As you grow in mindfulness, you can begin to take the first step to effective conversations: to *lead with presence*. This means that we begin conversations with the simple fact of our own awareness, and strive to return to that awareness as often as possible. Before our agendas, ideas, plans, or even any words, we just show up. We're here with one another.

Explore the sense of mutuality that arises with presence. What's it like to begin conversations with the simple fact of your own presence—aware of yourself, aware of another? Aim to keep a spirit of curiosity as you explore this. There's no right or wrong way to do it. Take an interest in your experience and see what you notice.

Contemplation 8: How to Steer Clear of Conflict

The practices I've been sharing with you are designed to lay a foundation of stable, balanced awareness for conversation and relationship.

Being aware of yourself, another, and your surroundings is called "relational awareness." Fully developing this capacity is an advanced practice, but we each already have a sense of it just by being alive. When we're faced with a potential conflict, shifting to a wider perspective can help us to stay calm and let the inner storm pass.

Awareness is like an adjustable beam on a flashlight. It can focus down onto one point, like your index finger or what someone else has said, and it can zoom out to a much wider frame of reference, like orienting to the space around you. When we're angry or upset, our focus tends to narrow down on the object of our irritation -- visually or mentally.



This ability to widen awareness is an incredibly helpful tool for conversation. Not only does it invite us to include other person, but it can help us to track a complicated situation, or to feel more space inside during challenging situations.

Try this meditation to explore widening your field of awareness.

Download the Meditation: <https://bit.ly/swym-bonus4>

Contemplation 9: Being Real with Ourselves and Others

I hope things are going well for you as you make your way through this series.

Another common misconception about mindfulness is that it means feeling good. This is the primary message that's used to sell mindfulness in the marketplace: "Be mindful, reduce stress!" While mindfulness practice can definitely enhance our well-being and mitigate unnecessary stress in life, *it's not just about feeling good.*

Being mindful means becoming aware of what's happening—pleasant or unpleasant. If mindfulness was just about feeling good, it'd be a very limited tool. What would we do when we felt tense, anxious, angry, or down?

Presence (aka, mindfulness) means being real. Whatever we experience, can we become aware of it in a curious, balanced, and open way? If we can't be honest with ourselves about how we feel, how can we be honest with others? And if we can't be honest with others, how will we have the space inside to listen to them when they share honestly with us?

Try this guided meditation to explore presence as being honest with ourselves.

Download the Meditation: <https://bit.ly/swym-bonus5>

Contemplation 10: The Strength of Vulnerability

Today I'd like to share some reflections with you on vulnerability.

To be truly present is vulnerable. When we're fully here, we contact a vulnerability that is an essential part of being alive. When we can embrace this, it yields strength, vitality and confidence rather than weakness or fear.

Most of us generally don't like feeling vulnerable. We live in a culture that sees vulnerability as weakness. We may have been socialized to feel ashamed of our tender emotions. As a child, I was teased by peers for crying at a party; shamed by a gym teacher for expressing feelings in class. The roles we are assigned may differ along gender lines, but they are alike in their rigidity.

As an adult, I worked hard to reclaim my ability to feel and express emotions. The more I did, the less alone and isolated I felt. What I learned in the process is that it's not our greatness that unites us, but our vulnerability. It is when we share our humanness that we feel most connected.

Internally, this vulnerability is part of our aliveness. There is a certain exhilaration that comes when we feel it. Externally, when expressed, it's part of our power. This vulnerability has strength because it is aligned with truth. When we open our heart and share what's inside, it carries weight because it is irrefutable.



Practice

Take some time to slow down and become present. Find gravity, that feeling of weight in your body. Feel the rhythm of your breath. Contemplate this mysterious gift of being alive and having a body. Can you feel its vitality? Can you sense the fragility of life?

Now consider your emotions. With whom in your life can you share what's true for you? And how does it feel when you do that? Can recall an experience where you shared your heartfelt, authentic experience and were met with empathy, support or understanding? How did that feel? Can you access some of the trust, strength of empowerment that you felt then right now—even a bit?

Of course, not every person or situation will be open to hearing our deeper feelings. We use discernment to decide when and with whom to share our heart. But we needn't feel ashamed or embarrassed by our vulnerability. Life is vulnerable! Feeling that means that we are in touch with the truth of things.

Contemplation 11: The Freedom of Not Knowing

In the last contemplation, we explored the vulnerability of presence, and how that can be a source of strength in our conversations and relationships. Today, I'd like to look at one more aspect of presence: uncertainty.

Humans like stability. We long for security. This is completely natural, and it's healthy to have a certain degree of regularity and predictability in life. Without that firm basis, it can be difficult to attend to our other needs. This is especially true early in life, when a stable relationship with a primary care giver helps us learn how to form deeper bonds of connection.

But reality is otherwise: life is unpredictable. Anything can happen at any moment.

Part of the vulnerability we experience with presence is the vulnerability of not knowing. When we are really here, we begin to recognize that nothing is certain. And, just as with vulnerability, when we're able to embrace this fact (rather than turn away from it), we find a gift on the other side.

Uncertainty is a doorway to freedom. What would it be like to not need to know? To be free from the need to predict the future or control an outcome? This kind of flexibility and spaciousness is particularly useful in conversations, where we can't know how the other person will respond or where things will end up.

Check out this last guided meditation in our series to explore this quality of uncertainty, and how it can lead to an experience of ease and inner freedom. You can download and review all six guided meditations at the link below.

Access all Meditations: www.orenjaysofer.com/bonus

Contemplation 12: Developing the Skill of Presence

I hope you've enjoyed this 12-part series on the first foundation of mindful communication. We've touched on some key themes and practices:

- Orienting
- Establishing presence in the body
- Experiencing the mutuality of presence
- Widening awareness to include sound and space
- Finding authenticity through presence
- Exploring vulnerability and uncertainty

These are all included in the first step to more effective conversations, *leading with presence*. They're not information, not something that we learn just once. They're practices, which means they're meant to be repeated, implemented and honed over time.

Leading with presence is a skill that we can develop. Since presence is our natural state, it's immediately accessible. And, since most of us have a strong habit of forgetting to be here, there's plenty of room for growth.

When we lead with presence anything is possible in conversation and relationship. It allows us to meet one another with respect, dignity, and humility, which open to the door to real, transformative dialogue.

I've been at this stuff for 20 years, and I'm still learning new things about what it means to be present—with myself, with another human being, and with life. I recently discovered another anchor or reference point for presence in conversation (in addition to the four I usually teach): the vibration of my voice. What are you learning about presence as you explore?

What's next?

These tools are meant to be used. Continue exploring these practices, along with the rest of the material in my book. I hope you'll find ways to bring them into your life, and to share them with others. And if you're looking for some guidance, I warmly invite you to check out my online and in-person trainings.

Maybe I'll see you there,

Oren