

# I Can Feel Their Presence

*A single evening you can run with two or three people, no preparation and no book. Everything you need to say is in this document.*

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**People** Three. Two works.

**Time** 35 minutes

**You need** This document. Nothing else.

**Preparation** Read it once beforehand.

## FOUR THINGS BEFORE YOU START

- You are not teaching this. You are reading things out and then being quiet.
- The silences are not gaps to fill. They are where the evening happens.
- Nobody has to fix anything tonight. Curiosity, never verdict.
- Anyone can pass on any question, including you, without explaining why.

## The running order

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*Times are from the start. Indented text in the amber rule is meant to be read out loud, more or less as written.*

*Everything in grey is for you.*

**0:00** 3 min **Settle**

“We’re going to sit quietly for three minutes before we start. There’s nothing to do.”

Then stop talking. Don’t pray aloud, don’t explain what’s coming, don’t apologise for the silence. Keep time on your phone, face down.

**0:03** 5 min **The question that opens it**

Read this slowly. The pauses are the point — they are marked, and they are longer than they look.

“Think of someone who accompanied you well. Not a saint, not a famous spiritual director, not the person whose name would impress anybody. Someone ordinary — a friend, a relative, somebody in a parish — who was with you in a season when you needed company.”

**PAUSE — 10 SECONDS**

“Don’t list their qualities. Don’t describe what they said to you. Just remember what it was like to be in a room with them.”

PAUSE — 15 SECONDS

“What did you carry away?”

PAUSE — 20 SECONDS

“Hold on to that. Give it one word, just to yourself. We’ll come back to it.”

**Don’t ask anyone to share yet.** If someone starts to, say “hold it for a minute” and carry on.

## 0:08 4 min Two short readings

Ask somebody else to read the first one. It lands differently in another voice.

“As an ex-smoker, I can identify a room that has been smoked in recently, or even just one that a smoker has been using. This physical perception also applies to the spiritual traces we leave behind. After any encounter — a conversation, a meeting, even just a rolling of eyes; something gets left behind. This trace, rather like smoke in a room, spreads and changes the atmosphere.”

The Practice of Sacred Noticing, p. 3

PAUSE — 10 SECONDS

“There is no opting in or opting out of being spiritual. Every decision has a spiritual impact; the question is whether it is positive or negative.”

p. 5

Say nothing after the second one. Don’t explain it, don’t connect it back. Let it sit for a few seconds and move on.

## 0:12 10 min The question, in silence and then in pairs

“Where have you felt a room change because of who walked into it?”

Two minutes of silence first. No writing, no notes. Then say: **“Turn to one other person and talk about that for eight minutes.”**

If there are only two or three of you, skip the pairs and just talk together. Don’t go round in order; let whoever wants to start, start.

## 0:22 8 min Whole group

“Is there anything anyone wants to say out loud?”

Then stop talking. **Do not go round the circle.** Do not summarise what anyone says, and do not thank each person for sharing — both turn it back into a meeting.

If nobody speaks for thirty seconds, that is a perfectly good outcome. Wait it out. If it stays quiet, move on without comment.

If it is going well and you want one more, this is the one:

“You have carried somebody’s kindness for years. Have you also carried somebody’s contempt like a bruise?”

**0:30** 2 min    **The turn**

Read this one yourself.

“Once you develop sensitivity to your spiritual footprint, you can’t unknow it... You become aware of your own spiritual scent; and sometimes it’s not the fragrance you thought you were wearing.”

p. 8

“Nothing has to be fixed tonight. We’re only noticing.”

Don’t elaborate on that. It is the whole permission, and explaining it removes it.

**0:32** 1 min    **One thing to carry out**

“Before you walk into one room this week — a kitchen, a meeting, a phone call you don’t want to take — take one breath and ask what you’re carrying in with you. Then go in. That’s the whole thing.”

Don’t add a second practice. One is small enough to actually happen.

**0:33** 2 min    **Close**

Read this, and then say nothing at all. Not “thank you for coming,” not “see you next month.” Let the poem be the last thing in the room, and let people leave when they leave.

*Now I have noticed you,  
A mystical nature is suddenly there.  
Never before to appear,  
And only to last for a moment,  
Or an hour.  
It seemed everlasting,  
Awareness like no drug could provide,  
Seeing with my soul,  
How things are, for the first time.  
O precious moment.  
Stay with me.*

The Now — p. 11

## What will probably go wrong

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### **Somebody fills the first silence.**

Let them. Then return to the silence without commenting on it. Correcting them once will make the rest of the evening careful.

### **It turns into a discussion about what “spiritual” means.**

This is the most common way the evening is lost. Bring it back to the room with a question about experience rather than definition — “what did you actually feel when that happened?”

### **You want to sum it all up at the end.**

Don’t. A summary tells everyone what they were supposed to have got, and quietly cancels whatever they actually got.

### **Somebody says more than they meant to.**

Don’t follow it up, don’t ask a second question, and don’t check on them in front of the others. Let it pass, and speak to them afterwards if it seems right.

## If you want to go further

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This is the first of six gatherings. The other five work the same way but draw more directly on the book, so from the third one onward you will want a copy of *The Practice of Sacred Noticing* in the room.

The full set, with the facilitator notes, is free at [spiritualbreak.com](http://spiritualbreak.com).

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