



Life is Not a Waiting Room

Many years ago (sometime last century) I attended a retreat given by a spiritual teacher I was interested in engaging with. The whole retreat was premised on a simple question:

"What if being here meant you were in the right place at the right time?"

It was early days in my own spiritual unfolding and, looking back, I was only able to hold a very superficial understanding of what was being pointed to. From memory, I thought he was emphasising the need to take the retreat seriously as an opportunity to find liberation here and now. And I am sure that was part of the intention.



But years later I see much more wisdom contained within the phrase *"right place, right time"* than I did then, and I find myself wanting to explore what it might mean for how we engage with life as it arrives on our doorstep.

Many of us live as though we are in transit to the next moment. Like travellers passing through a town on our intended route, we are already focused on the next destination before we have fully arrived at the one we are in. Our lives become preoccupied with the next task to complete, a new problem to solve, another stage to reach, yet another box to tick—and the list is endless.

From one perspective this makes perfect sense. We are deeply conditioned to scan for threats and opportunities, and the ability to anticipate what lies ahead has clear evolutionary advantages.

Yet there is another way of inhabiting our “coordinates” in life.

I have come to think of it as presence.

Presence is not simply paying attention. It is a willingness to be fully available to what this moment is revealing and offering. It is a receptive openness to the people, circumstances and possibilities that are already here, and those just arriving, coupled with a sensitivity to how we might participate in them.

When we live this way, life ceases to feel like a waiting room. The conveyor belt slows down, and we finally get to appreciate the view.

The present moment is no longer merely a stepping stone to somewhere more important. We begin to recognise that it is the only place where life is actually happening—and therefore the only place where we can fully participate in it.

When that recognition truly lands, it can stop us in our tracks with its profound simplicity. We realise how much of our lives have been spent waiting for the perfect time, the perfect circumstance, the perfect version of ourselves, or the perfect understanding that would finally satisfy a longing we can barely name.

And then we discover that life was never elsewhere.

It was always right here.

When we let that sink in, a kind of surrender occurs. Not a giving up, but a deep and restful acceptance that *this is it*. Whatever hand life is dealing us in this moment, we are in the right game playing for the right stakes.

This does not make us passive. Quite the opposite. When we stop waiting for life to begin, we become available to it. We respond more wholeheartedly because we are no longer holding this moment at arm's length while hoping for a better one to arrive.

It also expands our sense of perspective. We begin to glimpse ourselves as part of something larger whose horizons remain undefined. We see that we are both a speck of sand on a beach and, at the same time, the totality of everything we perceive.

This paradox is not a problem to be solved but a creative tension to be lived. It sparks curiosity, awakens compassion and demands a spontaneity that a programmed life could never achieve. It is part of the thrill of being alive.

None of this means the future is unimportant. Life is also flow, unfolding and becoming. There is an element of always being in transition.

Yet transition is not the whole story.

Presence allows us to appreciate each stage as complete in itself. Flowers still unfold. Projects still develop. People still grow and change. But the half-open flower is not a failed blossom. Each stage belongs equally to the life of the flower, including the wilting at the end.

"*Right place, right time*" does not mean that every circumstance is ideal. Far from it. Pain, loss, uncertainty and difficulty remain part of the landscape of being human.

What it does mean is that every moment offers an opportunity to participate wholeheartedly. We may not know what comes next, but we can meet what is here.

And perhaps that is where the deepest freedom lies—not in escaping uncertainty, but in embracing it. Living on the creative edge where life is continuously arriving, where we are always being invited to respond, and where we remain capable of being surprised by the wonder of creation itself.

Perhaps "*right place, right time*" simply means that this is where life is meeting us.

And if that is true, then this moment is not a preparation for reality.

It is reality itself.