

BEING HOME

THE ART OF BELONGING
WHEREVER YOU ARE

REBECCA ROSS

TURNING
STONE
PRESS



TURNING
STONE
PRESS

Copyright © 2015

by Rebecca Ross

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this work in any form whatsoever, without permission in writing from the publisher, except for brief passages in connection with a review.

Cover design by Frame25 Productions

Cover art by Shutterstock © Angela Waye

Illustrations by James Nielsen, www.reservenote.tumblr.com

Author photo by Ingrid Pape-Sheldon Photography

Interior design by Jane Hagaman

Turning Stone Press

8301 Broadway St. Ste. 422

San Antonio TX, 78209

turningstonepress.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available upon request.

ISBN 978-1-61852-098-2

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Introduction	vii
<i>Approaching Home</i>	
1. What Is Home?	1
2. Open the Door	15
<i>Creating Awareness</i>	
3. Crossing the Threshold	27
<i>The Nested Layer of Body</i>	
4. Homemaking	45
<i>The Nested Layers of Home and Belongings (Basic Skills)</i>	
5. Settling In	61
<i>Being Connected to Place</i>	
6. Sanctuary in the Self	89
<i>The Nested Layers of Body and Internal Self</i>	
7. The Ambient Home	113
<i>Clearing Space</i>	
8. Belonging Everywhere	123
<i>The Nested Layers of Nature and Society</i>	
9. Radical Homecoming	137
<i>Reflections on Presence and Environment</i>	
Acknowledgments	153
Bibliography	155

Introduction

Approaching Home

Home, for the coyotes, is always the same, only in a new place. It is different for humans. Home is harder to locate, if you set out to find it.

—*Home: Chronicle of a North Country Life*,
by Beth Powning

In her book *Life Would Be Perfect if I Lived in That House*, Meghan Daum describes her lifelong search for a place that meets an ideal she calls “domestic integrity.” By this she means living in a place that perfectly reflects the person dwelling in it, an indefinable acknowledgment of belonging. She moves repeatedly, each time hoping for the perfect place with the right tile, view, or ceiling height. Each time, she quickly or gradually becomes dissatisfied, while ignoring her own intuition. The very last paragraph in the book captures the challenge perfectly:

Maybe learning how to be out in the big world isn't the epic journey everyone thinks it is. Maybe that's actually the easy part. The hard part is what is right in front of you. The hard part is

learning how to hold the title to your very existence, to own not only property, but also your life. The hard part is learning not just how to be, but mastering the nearly impossible art of how to be at home.

Difficult and elusive perhaps, but not impossible. There is a skill set, a process of listening to yourself that can be learned, and applying these skills is the core of *Being Home*.

Stairways have always beckoned me upward and around corners; open doorways, unexpected nooks, and anything hidden could draw me into places the grown-ups wished I'd leave alone. At about age nine, my interest in rooms and buildings eventually led me to ask, "Who gets to think up such places?" The glamorous occupation of "architect" sounded like a good way to both support myself and have fun creating marvelous rooms, so my future was settled.

The reality of the profession was another story. Architects are expected to put in vast amounts of time and attention for relatively low pay. Very few reach the level of prosperity I had imagined, and I wanted a more balanced life. Much later, as a single mother of two children, with other interests and priorities, I just wasn't that dedicated. Work felt more like a drain than a career, and I began to look for ways out.

When feng shui arrived on the West Coast in the early 1990s, it seemed like a great way to connect people to their environments. It addresses this quality of energy that is found in rooms, sometimes called qi or chi in Chinese, in a practical way. However, after some study and exploration, I saw it being used as a set of superficial prescriptions and cures. People were installing mirrors or wind chimes because a book said to, without understanding the differences between them, or their real impact.

At the beginning of its popularity there was no mention of why or how these "cures" worked—or the role of the person in the equa-

tion. Over the years, I've met some dedicated and skilled feng shui practitioners who did install cures and explained how they worked, but at the time, I wanted something with less formula and that was more intuitive. These pieces finally came together when I founded the Composed Domain.

I created the business called “The Composed Domain” in 2000, a child born of several different parents. One parent was personal organizing, helping people with their clutter and overwhelming paperwork. Seeing this process open up the world for my clients, giving them space to function and enjoy their homes, was deeply satisfying. But I wanted to understand how I was able to “read” what each space needed for the change.

The other parent was discovered by taking classes from a number of teachers about energetic space clearing. I met people who were talking about the subjective qualities of a space: how it felt to them and how to adjust the feeling of a specific room. The combination of these disciplines was still missing an important element, which didn't become clear until I began learning more about personal energetics. The words *energy* and *energetic* may seem either too broad or too ill-defined, but they serve as handles for systems of information that have both visceral and measurable effects on your experience in places and with people.

Personal energetics are simply another sensory mechanism, no more esoteric or paranormal than your ability to see, hear, smell, or recognize the contents of the room you're sitting in right now. In fact, you have an energetic anatomy that can be developed to perceive and interact with this information all around you. In the marriage of these parents, the practical and the subjective, a link is created. Making this connection is something that you can learn to do and it's at the heart of your ability to come home to your own dwelling.

A room that is meant to be a bedroom may not always feel like a restful place. Part of the problem may be obvious. It could be a

color that reminds you of a disco, or a window that overlooks a busy street. Paint and sound-baffling curtains could fix the surface problems, but there may be other issues. If your bedroom is the setting for endless nights of insomnia, you may need to heal your relationship to the room itself. In order to do this, you'll need to recognize how you are affected by the room, and how to find your own balance, there and anywhere. Only then can you bring the room back into alignment with yourself and your need for a good night's sleep.

The goal is to live in a supportive and meaningful place that reflects what really matters to you. What does this look and feel like?

Being Home teaches you practical skills for body awareness and for improving the feeling of safety, control, and function in your rooms. Your ability to be more aware can serve you at home, work, and out in the world. I'll also be referring you to books and sources that have fed my thinking and that you may want to explore further. I invite you to step across the threshold into a conscious relationship with all the places where you live.

How does this relationship between you and your belongings affect your day-to-day life? You can count on finding tools for daily living when you need them. You'll know exactly what you have in your closets, and that you love wearing all of it. You'll enjoy looking at decorations and treasures that reflect your past, present, and future interests. When you go out into the world, you'll trust that you can navigate unfamiliar circumstances and places with confidence and pleasure. And then you'll come home to a place that enfolds and nourishes you. Your real home reveals itself, right here.

Chapter 1

What Is Home?

A tourist from America paid a visit to a renowned Polish rabbi, Hofetz Chaim. He was astonished to see the rabbi's home was only a simple room filled with books, plus a table and bench.

“Rabbi,” asked the tourist, “Where is your furniture?”

“Where is yours?” replied the rabbi.

The puzzled American asked, “Mine? But I am only passing through.”

“So am I,” said Hofetz Chaim.

—*Tales of the Hassidim*, by Martin Buber

Being at home is more than physical comfort and peace of mind. When your body, mind, and the physical places you inhabit are connected to your *being*, you can begin to find home anywhere you are. By living in your spaces and your life fully, you'll express and expand your most true self, no matter where you go. When you step into a new relationship with your surroundings, you profoundly and directly improve your sense of well-being and vitality. With these goals in mind, I invite you to reinvent your own backdrop for living.

This invitation opens a door to new choices. As you cross the threshold, you come home not only to your environment, but also to your own thinking and emotional balance. In the process, you will acquire awareness about what it means to come home to your own body, self, and space.

Begin with the willingness to ask a powerful question: what will it take to live and work in spaces that feel just right?

Home is a place where you belong, can rest, feel safe, and recharge in a secure environment. What exactly does it take to feel at home, to know that place reflects what matters to you? Not everyone grew up in a comfortable house or had the chance to decorate a childhood bedroom. Was it even possible to find a safe nook of your own? Understanding the home you live in now may require looking back. Did the adults around you take care of their surroundings, or were things chaotic, unsettled? In an ideal world, you spend your time in a place that reflects your taste, is comfortable, and functions well. Even if this is not the case, you're in a relationship with the place you live, whether you know it or not.

Exile: An Experience of Identity Separated from Place

Home is also an idea that usually conjures a sense of ownership and belonging. Whatever your personal stories may be, if you haven't found that place or are separated from it by circumstance, you may feel exiled. And sometimes it isn't about the physical circumstances. Even living in a lovely house in a city of your choice, if you have not found home in your own body and self, you may still feel untethered, slightly off kilter, displaced somehow.

Eva Hoffman moved as a child with her family from Poland to Canada and writes of her own detachment and the sense of loss that followed in her book *Lost in Translation*. Part of her personal challenge was the search for balance in a land offering so much material

abundance that it seemed impossible ever to be satisfied. She calls it the “land of yearning.” It’s a place where opportunity presents people with so many possibilities that there is no way to settle for what they have or, most important, who they are.

Hoffman’s Polish friends see identity or character as a given, something one simply has without question. For them, outside circumstances explain their feelings or reactions. The drama of life is external, and their stories are about what happens. Her friends in North America focus instead on their internal experiences and struggle to explain it all in terms of their own particular and individual psychology.

Like “pilgrims of internal progress,” some people feel responsible for constant improvement and self-management. Hoffman’s Polish friends think the Americans aren’t facing simple reality with their endless self-analysis. An American might explain: *I am having intense self-worth issues, my job is soulless, and I need to create.* A more European and pointed statement might be: *I choose to quit my soulless job and am moving to Paris.* The Poles’ direct, fact-telling mode can seem blunt and withholding of an emotional component to an American wanting the inside story of feelings and introspection.

Which is more real? Both approaches depend on the relationship between your identity or sense of self and the circumstances of your surroundings. Both reflect ways to handle the outside world, and the more you understand your own assumptions about that process, the more likely you’ll feel at home there. Exile is being separated from a country, a house, a family, or anything that signifies belonging. Even in a world you have carefully arranged, you can feel exiled if you aren’t at home in your own mind and emotions. The phrase “make yourself at home” points to more than taking your shoes off. Only you can make your *self* a home, and from there create that rest, ease, and belonging in the places you live, work, and sleep. It’s a relationship and requires communication.

EXERCISE

Start the Conversation

Invite your bedroom . . . or wherever you sleep . . . to speak to you. Go into the room and find a comfortable place to sit and, if possible, close the door. Have paper and pen or a device nearby to record your exchange.

- How does the room sustain you? With clothing, pillows, books, a clock? Make a list. Include what you enjoy about it: the colors, the art or objects.
- When you go to bed, are you able to let go of the day easily? What are your typical routines in the space, and are they really restful?
- When you get up again, are you ready and able to launch into the day with ease?
- If the room does not feel supporting, list why. Noises, temperature, or a bad mattress? Try to identify anything that feels wrong or uncomfortable.

Now imagine not having this place—if you were detained in a distant airport, or the building burned down, or if you were living on someone's sofa or on the street.

- How does that feel? What would you miss most?
- Does this idea trigger any gratitude or appreciation for what is here now?
- Or perhaps you experience a sense of freedom, escape, or release?

The place you sleep in has its own identity, and you can communicate with it about its gifts or shortcomings. Your reactions to these questions show what you bring to the relationship.

- How do you talk to this place? What would you like to say to it?
- How do you tend to your sleeping place? By providing blankets, lights, hangers?
- Listen for its messages about what feels right or what needs to be fixed.

There is a vivid difference between a “home” and a “place you sleep at night.” The latter could be a hotel room or a campground with little or no personal meaning. Your home is the expression of the connection between your mind, feelings, sense of self, and the external, physical world. A home is far more complex, reflecting that correspondence. It is a dance in which your awareness can directly shape the rooms you live in. This might be as simple as putting your clothes away, or as complex as moving to a place with more natural light.

Learning this dance requires openness to both past and present circumstances. You may have to let go of old patterns and things that once felt safe, but aren't working anymore. The relationship between your inner and outer worlds will evolve no matter how fast or slowly the changes happen. The point is to step into the flow and take the lead. By engaging with the dance, you can learn how to inhabit not just your bedroom, but the wider world as well.

Nested Ways of Being Home

Every house, apartment, condo, ashram, or dorm you've ever lived in is seen through the lens of your emotional and intellectual being. You enter each of these places in your physical body with its sensations, reactions, and general state of health. The rooms, filled with your belongings and accumulated history, are another layer in this nested series of places. In turn, you move through the world of nature, cities, streets, and encounters with other people.

The challenge is to recognize each layer and take ownership. The link between these layers is your *being*. As a word this fits quite well, because it's both an object and an action. With the attention of your *being* on each of these nested places you can, by consciously *being*, create a meaningful environment within all of these layers. The following illustrations present the way awareness of these nests can take you from the idea of taking a walk, to the experience itself.



TURNING
S T O N E
P R E S S

Internal Home: Your inner/mental world of self, personality, and identity. With comfort in your deepest core, self-awareness, and presence, you can know what matters at each of the other nested layers.



The nest of your inner being holds your idea of self in the world.

Body Home: Your external/physical world of body and health. Pleasure in the ownership of your body and health creates your vehicle for action, and it becomes the tool for creating your home.



The nest of your body is vital to being where you are and want to be.

Spatial Home: Your rooms and spaces that hold your belongings, memories, and tools. The space in which you eat, sleep, bathe, and pay bills is another framework for being. It becomes a place that expresses and supports you, in turn expanding your sense of how to be at home in the world.



The nest of your home serves the goals and dreams of your innermost nested self.

Nature Home: Your relationship to nature as a source of inspiration, healing, and grounding. The natural world provides a living context and backdrop for being home. It supports you in finding balance; it can both stimulate and soothe.



The nest of nature is always there to be explored and honored.

Expanded Home: Your world of streets, stores, workplace, recreation and other people. Being at home in self, body, nature, and environment, you carry a sense of relaxed and alert presence with you everywhere.



The nest of larger world is yours, an extension of the home you create.

Example: The Grocery Store

How do the nested layers fit together? Take a simple, everyday trip to the market. You bring your mood, the day's schedule, and other priorities into the process of shopping. In the market itself, you'll encounter brightly colored signs and all sorts of stimulating situations. The building will be full of people with their own moods and attitudes. Your state of mind is affected by all of these factors, the attitudes of the checker, or perhaps an adventure with the automatic scanner. And you, in turn, affect that checker and the people behind you in line.

Your sense of personal well-being, flexibility, or degree of patience all create ripples in the environment. Then you return to the car with traces of the market in your mind and body. There is constant flow between all these nested layers of place, and learning to recognize and manage them gives you greater control over what and how much is affecting you.

The total picture of all this information and your reaction to it can be called the perceived *energy* of the place. Once you begin to recognize that you've always been engaged with it at some level, it can become a conscious tool. In later chapters, you'll learn how this energetic content can be adjusted, or "cleared," for your comfort and personal goals.

Knowing and understanding how you relate to the energy of the market can make a big difference in the efficiency and pleasure of your shopping trip and how you feel when you're unloading the groceries at home. This increased awareness is a radical skill in being right where you are. It's the hallmark of finding home wherever you stand.

Home as a Map of the Mind and a Reflection of the Self

On some deep level, we all know that our belongings are a reflection of who we are. These things don't sneak into our homes in the

night while we're asleep. We've gradually surrounded ourselves with objects for many different reasons, and before any change can occur we must take stock. The challenge is profound, since we have cluttered up our heads at the same time we have brought our belongings into our space. We hold on to so many ideas and beliefs about the objects that we become our own biggest obstacle. Being home includes questioning these stories and reasons.

Examining our thinking can start to free us from objects and create more space for change. This is true no matter how much actual stuff we have. A college student in her first dorm room or the owner of a three-car garage full to the rafters: both these people face relationships with a space that can be acknowledged and healed.

It is possible that they are struggling with simple clutter or a sense that nothing they own really fits or reflects their taste. Too many hand-me-downs or make-do furnishings might be distracting. Creating an environment that is "just right" is not about time, money, or decorating talent. When a person finds home in their own body and self, it is easier to design a room that reflects a feeling of belonging.

What is being home to me? What does it mean to be held by a space, knowing I am home? After a day out in the world, I need to know that I am safe, welcomed, and that the room will hold me and everything I bring with me. How my office functions, the objects and furniture, are surface qualities. What matters is how it feels when I walk in. Walking in, I need a place to set down my bags and coat. I'll want to put my phone on the desk, next to the mail. Next comes the moment of being held by my space. My whole day, with all its events and interactions, can be brought in and be handled, processed, and let go. It's safe and easy to drop both my shoes and my concerns into a trusted place.

Looking around, I'm surrounded by my own choices. Everything in the office was chosen and placed in a spot that works. The books speak from the shelves, the colors delight my eyes, and there's my

familiar, comfortable chair. I know exactly where things are; it's easy to fuss around and answer email, find stamps, or catch up on paperwork. Held by my office, I can sit down and process my day or do nothing at all, watch the birds in the garden, and feel the welcome sense of being in my domain. This is my birthright as a human being—to grow in awareness and the ability to shape my world.

Being Home Whether You Are at Home or Not

When I'm truly at home in myself, I can function in the wider world with ease and patience. In this condition, it's clear that I'm responsible for my experience. It's a way of *being* that accepts the reality of any current situation and cuts through stories that don't serve me or anyone else.

Let's say I just missed the bus. My opinion of this event will dictate my emotional reaction. Is it a calamity or an inconvenience? Being at home in my mind and body makes it possible to move from reaction to choice. Shall I just settle back and wait for the next bus, or do I hail a cab? What are my real options? Do I have to start making phone calls to arrange a ride? If the next bus is thirty minutes away and I have my book, waiting is no problem. But if I'm already late for a meeting, corrective action is required. Quick, call for that ride or hail a cab!

Being at home in mind, body, and place allows me to see, understand, and relate to circumstances and other people. When I trust myself in any situation, I can interact with accurate vision and compassion. Without inhabiting my own senses fully, none of these things are likely. By dwelling here, I navigate the nested homes of body, mind, self, and space with ease and grace.

How do you get to this place? In order to feel at home in yourself, as well as your body-home, not to mention the bedroom, you need to know where you are right now. This requires awareness and presence, and I invite you to open the door and step inside the dwelling of your own awareness.