



Presencing

Resurrecting the Body - Part I Awakening to the Body

“The body is an instrument for calculating the astronomy of the Soul”

~Jalaludin Rumi



The body is a finely designed instrument that includes our “attending” or sensing mind. The thinking mind, which we train in school, gets credit for most of the things we do in life. Indeed most of us are completely absorbed by thoughts and emotions that include very little sensing into the body. Instead we act out our thoughts and emotions without really “sensing” them.

I was out to Chinese dinner with my good friend John Scherer who has written some books on personal growth and teaches executive training seminars. We



were discussing our lives and our work. I told him about some of the amazing things that I have observed when clients start to become somatically aware of their bodies: “It’s as if there’s a mutual awakening between the mind and the body as the client becomes present... the body changes, the mind changes, and the person seems to change as well.” John, who is also a Lutheran pastor, said:

“Maybe this is what is really meant by ‘resurrecting the body.’” We were both profoundly struck at that moment by the implications of what he said. Perhaps the body-mind, suffused with presence, is the real transformation we are looking for...

If we pay attention to what is happening right now, the body becomes our guide, our teacher. Neuroscience now reveals that the body actually anticipates or gives signals of an impending choice *before* we have the thought or take the action, a kind of pre-sensing. So if we learn to attend to the body's signals by monitoring the sensations in the body (presencing), we find the wisdom and creativity that is there, waiting to be revealed, underneath our mental conjecture.

The thinking mind has been trained to be separate from the body. In the Adventures of Baron von Munchausen, Robin Williams plays the king of the moon. The king is so disgusted by the desires and appetites of the body that he successfully separates his head from his body. He is quite happy with this arrangement, until he has to sneeze... Almost all of our education is oriented towards removing ourselves from one another and from our own bodies. Bodies are valued only for the pleasures and functions they perform. Anything uncomfortable is perceived as



pathos or suffering. We then try to move away (separate ourselves) from the discomfort and mentally look for a reason, in our thinking mind. We tell ourselves that if we can find a reason or understand the discomfort we can become free of the irritant. This is our usual way of proceeding when we are bothered by something. The mind then removes itself, abstracts (rises above) or dissociates from the present experience and mentally searches for an explanation and a cure. Like the king we want to be free of the body.

Rather than learning the language of the body, which is calling for attention in the moment, we start recollecting all the possibilities, through sequential, cause-



and-effect, reasoning, for someone or something to blame for the discomfort. The blaming is a further attempt to remove our selves from the bodily experience, and, in effect, from the moment. If we find a "reason" e.g. bad sleep, bad food, bad person, time-of-the-month, to explain the discomfort we feel somewhat relieved. Our choice to separate is vindicated. If we can find persons to agree with us, allies, we feel even more relieved. Often bodyworkers and other caregivers spend much of our

time with clients, searching for reasons, trying to produce cures or fixes, and agreeing with client's stories about blame. These are patterns we often repeat that continue endless cycles of suffering (Buddhist *dukkha*). We thus overlook

the fact that the body is impermanent (Buddhist *anicca*), and join in the search for permanent relief.

But there is another way to respond to the body's signals. We can use them with ourselves and with our clients, as ways of staying present – especially when the discomforts persist. In presencing we join-with and enter the symptom experience... even if we know the “cause.” The net effect of this willingness to join and be curious is that we end the “suffering.” The Buddha found that there are three causes of suffering: avoidance, craving, and attachment. I believe that even more central to this understanding is our ongoing relationship with fear. Fear is the active agent in the creation of suffering¹. We convince ourselves that the discomforts are to be feared. When we try to remove ourselves from the discomforts, we are forestalling our own suffering because fear, our motivator is still with us. We dread a recurrence of the discomfort, so the suffering of the dread is still with us.



Recommended Reading:

Damasio, Antonio. [Descartes' Error: Emotion Reason and the Human Brain](#)

Gendlin, Eugene. [Focusing and A Process Model](#)

Goenka, S.N. [An Introduction to Vipassana Meditation](#)

Carter, Robert. [The Nothingness Beyond God: An Introduction to the Philosophy Nishida Kitaro](#)

Nyanaponika, Thera. [The Heart of Buddhist Meditation](#)

Ramachandran, V.S. [A Brief Tour of Human Consciousness](#)

Tolle, Eckhart. [Practicing the Power of Now](#)

Yuasa, Yasuo. [The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory](#)

¹ The same may also be true of the suffering that is caused as a result of lust, which produces a guilty or fearful rush feeling in the body. The thinking mind is stimulated by the rush and produces endorphins as part of the sympathetic response. So craving, a form of attraction, when modulated by fear, produces it's own forms of suffering... fear is the defining characteristic of separation. When the motivation is joining or love, the body produces endorphins of caring rather than taking. Rape could be an extreme example of the separated self, craving the fearful rush.