

# Somatic Psychotherapy Today

Trending Somatic Practices Influencing Our Field Today

## KEYS TO A SOMATICALLY BALANCED LIFE: HEALTH, FITNESS, VITALITY

### SALUTOGENESIS AND WELL-BEING

**ATHLETIC MENTAL  
PERFORMANCE FROM  
THE INSIDE OUT**

EMBODIED APPROACH TO  
HEALTH AND FITNESS:  
THRIVING MINDFULLY

Walking  
Meditation:  
Easy Steps to  
Mindfulness

MOVING TOWARDS  
FREEDOM:  
Effecting Optimal  
Health Through  
Reichian  
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THE THREAT RESPONSE CYCLE AS A  
DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON  
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The Embodiment of Primary  
Respiration: Order, Organization  
and Transparency





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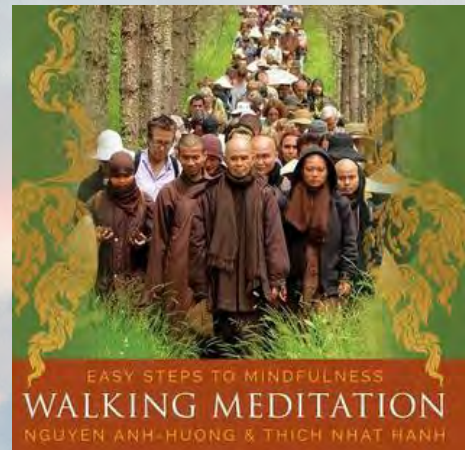
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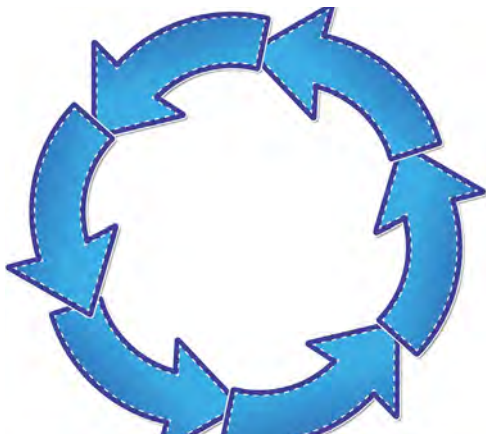
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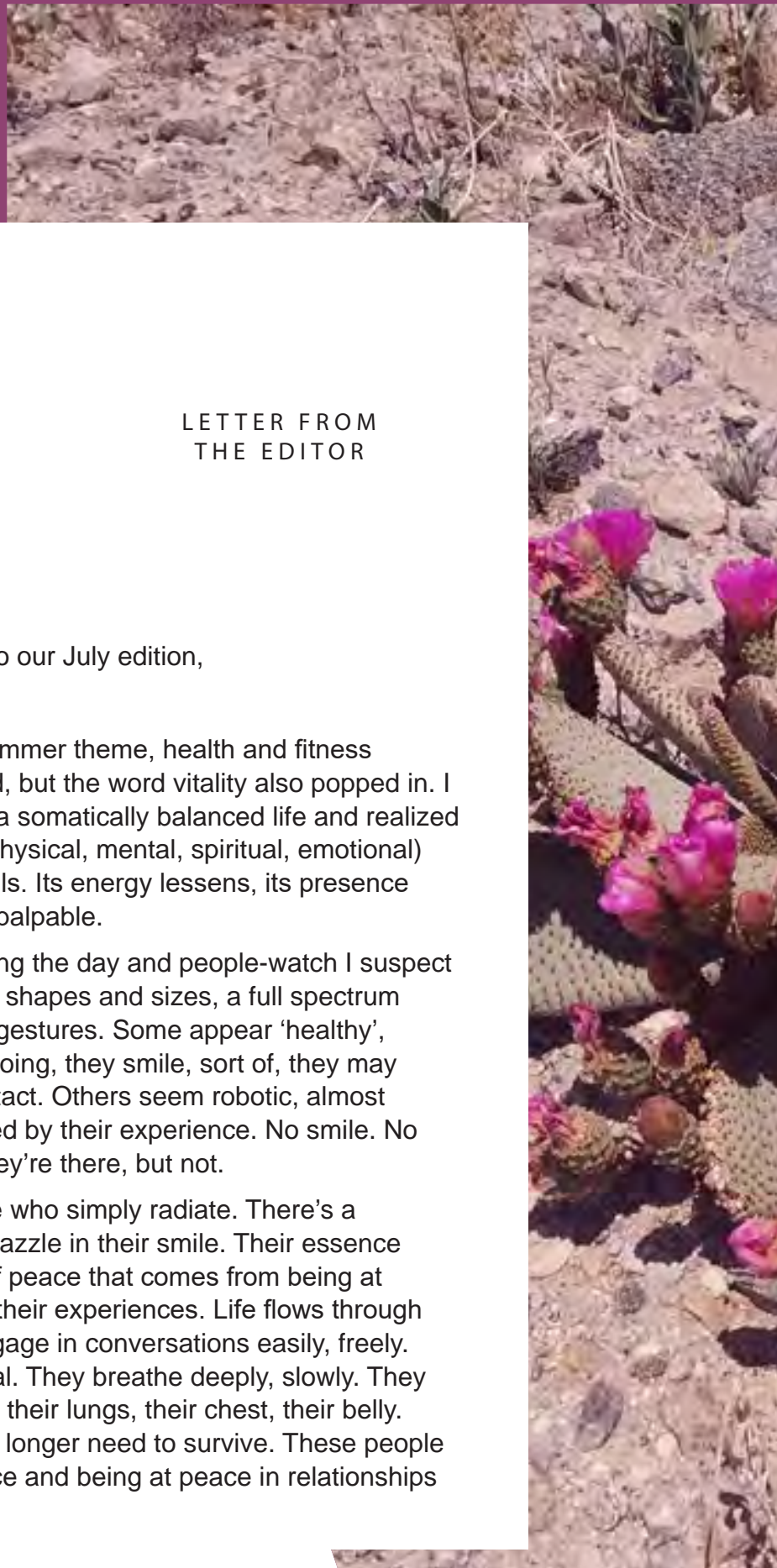
LETTER FROM  
THE EDITOR

Greetings and Welcome to our July edition,

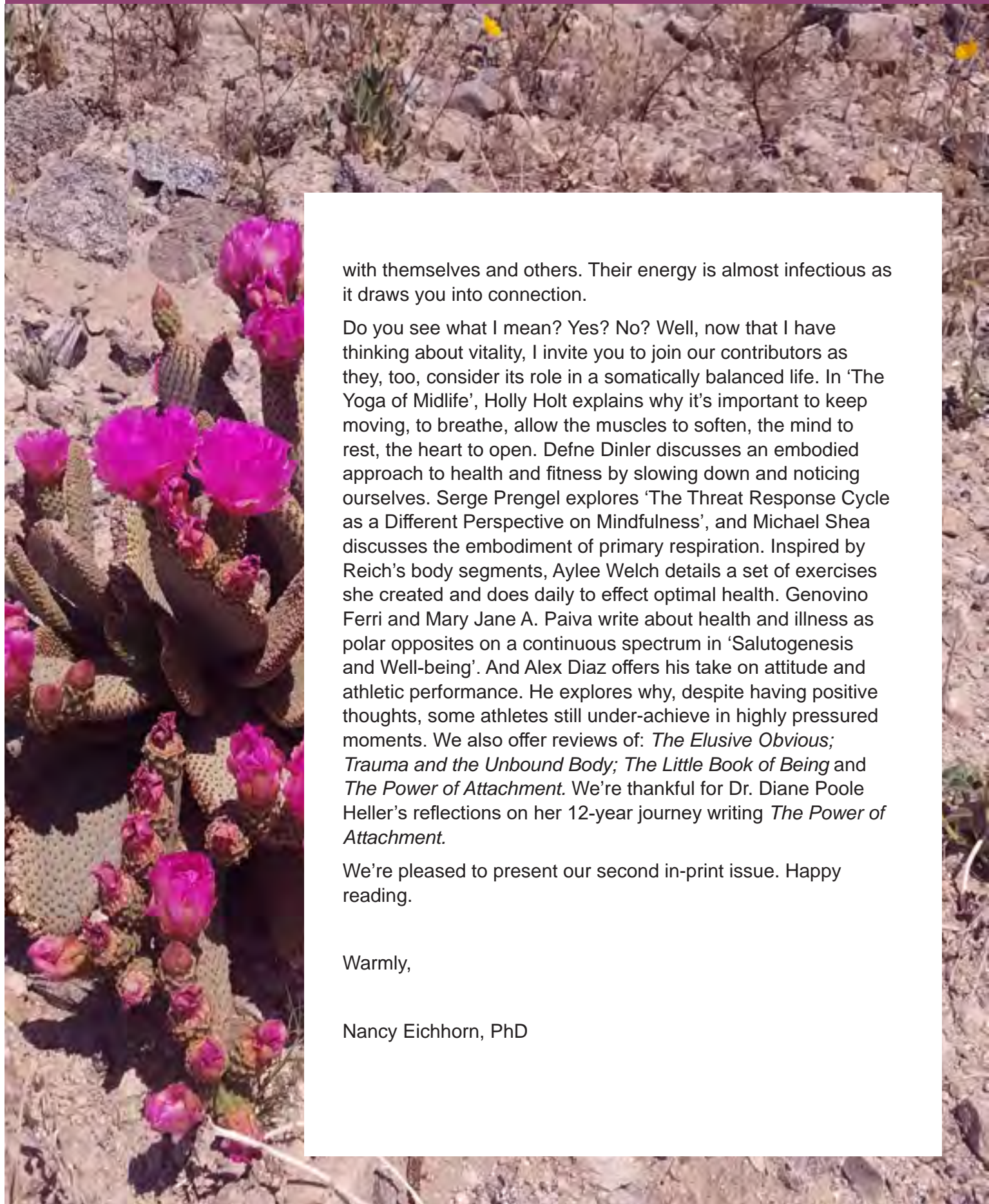
When I considered our summer theme, health and fitness immediately came to mind, but the word vitality also popped in. I contemplated its place in a somatically balanced life and realized that without health (be it physical, mental, spiritual, emotional) and fitness, our vitality dulls. Its energy lessens, its presence (and/or lack of) is visible, palpable.

If you take a moment during the day and people-watch I suspect you'll see a range of body shapes and sizes, a full spectrum of facial expressions and gestures. Some appear 'healthy', engaged in what they're doing, they smile, sort of, they may or may not make eye contact. Others seem robotic, almost lethargic as if overwhelmed by their experience. No smile. No engagement. Nothing. They're there, but not.

And then there are people who simply radiate. There's a shimmer in their eyes, a dazzle in their smile. Their essence reflects a deeper sense of peace that comes from being at one with themselves and their experiences. Life flows through them. They reach out, engage in conversations easily, freely. Their laughter feels natural. They breathe deeply, slowly. They inhale life, fully expanding their lungs, their chest, their belly. They exhale what they no longer need to survive. These people radiate wholeness, balance and being at peace in relationships







with themselves and others. Their energy is almost infectious as it draws you into connection.

Do you see what I mean? Yes? No? Well, now that I have thinking about vitality, I invite you to join our contributors as they, too, consider its role in a somatically balanced life. In 'The Yoga of Midlife', Holly Holt explains why it's important to keep moving, to breathe, allow the muscles to soften, the mind to rest, the heart to open. Defne Dinler discusses an embodied approach to health and fitness by slowing down and noticing ourselves. Serge Prengel explores 'The Threat Response Cycle as a Different Perspective on Mindfulness', and Michael Shea discusses the embodiment of primary respiration. Inspired by Reich's body segments, Aylee Welch details a set of exercises she created and does daily to effect optimal health. Genovino Ferri and Mary Jane A. Paiva write about health and illness as polar opposites on a continuous spectrum in 'Salutogenesis and Well-being'. And Alex Diaz offers his take on attitude and athletic performance. He explores why, despite having positive thoughts, some athletes still under-achieve in highly pressured moments. We also offer reviews of: *The Elusive Obvious*; *Trauma and the Unbound Body*; *The Little Book of Being* and *The Power of Attachment*. We're thankful for Dr. Diane Poole Heller's reflections on her 12-year journey writing *The Power of Attachment*.

We're pleased to present our second in-print issue. Happy reading.

Warmly,

Nancy Eichhorn, PhD



# Somatic Psychotherapy Today

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## *HAPPY HOLIDAYS: A SOMATIC AFFAIR*

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# SALUTOGENESIS AND WELL-BEING

By Genovino Ferri and Mary Jane A. Paiva

The term "salutogenesis" is derived from the Latin *salus* meaning "health" and the Greek *g nesis* meaning "origin". It is an interpretative position of science that examines the possible development of health and pays attention to those factors that contribute to a state of well-being, rather than those that cause illness.

Since 1948, the World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that health is something more than the absence of disease; rather, it is a state of social, mental and physical well-being. In salutogenesis, health and illness are not, in fact, two mutually exclusive conditions, but two polar opposites on a continuous spectrum.

The concept of salutogenesis, as developed by the Israeli-American sociologist, Aaron Antonovsky (1997), foresees dynamic interaction between protective factors and stressors. Health, which is in no way static, must, therefore, be

established, and maintained by overcoming daily difficulties, as a process in continuous development, with particular attention paid to the resources available for personal protection.

How, then, might we move towards the pole that represents health?

## *Two foundational concepts for interpretation*

One extraordinary, indispensable paradigm through which we might achieve *health*, and with which to interpret the multiplicity of social, cultural, relational, psychic and physical resources available, is *Complexity*.

"Complexity" derives from *cum plexum* meaning "interwoven", or, more literally, "with knots", as in those found in a carpet, which may not be unravelled without losing sight of the whole picture that they allow. It differs from the term "complicated", derived from *cum plicum*,

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Image by corinna-kr from Pixabay

literally meaning "with folds", which must be unfolded in order to be interpreted and understood, so that the first pieces seen must be separated and put back together again before it is possible to understand the whole.

On the one hand, it is necessary to apply a *systemic* approach that

*"the whole is greater than the sum of its parts"* (Bertalanffy, 1971). This permits an interpretative reading of salutogenesis in the entirety of its connections. On the other hand, it is necessary to apply an *emergentist* approach. This allows us to ask ourselves what the evolution over time of the system of connections might be and how the system modifies itself when we apply "salutogenic appropriacy".

Complexity is, thus, a new, indispensable paradigm in order to see and read a complex living system in its polyhedric entirety. However, it is a paradigm that is also capable of including the complex living system which sees and reads.

Complexity is *Intelligent Inclusion*, of the body and its senses. It is the inclusion of time and memories, of the life-story and the various rhythms experienced, in the interpretation of a complex living system, be that a living-body person, a living-body society, or a living-body planet (Tiezzi, 1996).

Complexity is perceiving the hidden connections among the phenomena of Life and reading them from, and in, their emergence. The Emergentist current of thought (Mancuso, 2018) offers an evolutive interpretation of complex living systems, which concerns phylogenesis and the origins of the species, but also concerns ontogenesis, which regards the formation of the single individual.

This evolutive world-view is primarily defined from the perspective of a bottom-up direction, but with circularity which is completed by a top-down return.



In this way, each person has their own specific life-story, and, although another person might have had very similar experiences, they will never be exactly the same. Self individuation may also be seen as unique and indivisible.

Every one of us is more than just our own genetic heritage. Every one of us has our own unrepeatable personality, which cannot be separated from our Corporeity or from our history of specific biological-biographical relationships that have been marked and incised into our corporeity.

Evolution represents a progressive increase in complexity and in negentropy (Schroedinger, 1995), until reaching awareness of self and the capacity to bring out and express our *elan vital*. According to Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Prize-winner for physics, "far from equilibrium (0 = entropic zero), energy and matter begin to see" (Prigogine, 1996, pg. 2).

***Another equally-safe direction from which to approach the question is Body-to-Mind.***

Body-to-Mind summarises and defines the negentropic, complex, evolutive direction of the person.

Today the Body is *cast* by neuroscience, to put it

phenomenonologically, in Life's project, in all its visibility and evidence, so as to be revealed to prevailing disembodiment, in a liquified society at risk of rarefaction, by the acceleration of external cognitive time, with the consequent theft of people's internal, affective, relational time. It is a society which, absolutely, must meta-communicate with its own dominant *Trait Mind* (as defined below) about the role of mankind and our place in existence.

The Body tells us, with its historical narration, about the comprehensibility of the *Body-to-Mind* direction.

It has its own solid, extraordinary "grammar system", resting on intelligent foundations, which are therefore capable of reading and of being read. The intelligence of the body is stratified in its adaptive recombinations across the whole time of phylogenesis and is summarised in the period of ontogenesis, so as to permit the progressive complexity of the mind.

***Complexity of the Mind***

. . . a body that not only informs us about pre-subjective and pre-linguistic perception-sensations but also about emotions and the subjective thoughts connected to them...

. . . a body that informs us "where we are" in space and time, and

*Continues on page 12*

"what we stand upon" in terms of our observative positions and our possible, sustainable horizons. . .

. . . a body that adds intercorporeity to intersubjectivity, permitting possible activations which, from the peripheral-surface of the "outside", pass through the cortical-spinal pathways, reaching the depth-centrality of the "inside" (Gallese, 2006).

### ***Body-to-Mind continuity becomes ever clearer***

Research in psychotherapy is ever-more focused on the *embodied mind* ("cognitive processes cannot be confined to the brain"), on the *enactive mind* ("the pairing of a sensory-motor organism and the environment is the founding element for cognition"), and on the *trait mind* ("a complex functional system which connects and coordinates the organisation of an evolutive stage, the prevalent relational bodily level, the trait patterns incised by the intersubjective-intercorporeal relationships and their respective modulations by neuromediators in the corresponding brain areas") (Ferri, 2017).



These are embodied, enactive, trait minds that are stratified and imbricated from the body to the mind, from pre-subjective intrauterine time onwards, so as to construct the *apartment building* of our personalities.

In the body psychotherapy setting, this complex body-to-mind interpretation permits levels of refined precise analytical-therapeutic appropriacy, starting right from the periphery in those specific



*apartments, or floors*, in this building, which present dysfunctional nodes (*plexum*), with bodily activations expressed by ad hoc, ontogenetic movements (Ferri-S.I.A.R., Character-Analytical Vegetotherapy), which regenerate health and well-being for the person.

### ***Two operational suggestions for daily life***

It is both fundamental and beautiful that we are becoming aware of the body-to-mind continuity of the self-subject, integrating our own life stories from the very beginning of the universe itself to our lives today, with our own feelings and emotions and our own capacities for resilience and sustainability, from which we derive our own negentropic rhythms.

It is also certainly fundamental and beautiful that we are becoming aware that we are immersed in the vast living field which our biosphere represents, emerging, as it does, from a vaster cosmological history and a negentropic geometric location, which is a cradle of the great magic of life. In other words, it means we are becoming aware of our "Terrestrial Commonality" (Morin, 2003).

But, from a practical perspective, what can a complex body-to-mind interpretation suggest in our daily lives for our well-being and to generate health?

We should learn from the pleasure we derive from the activation of our

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Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay

Mu-receptors by beauty, meant as "the splendour of truth" (Mancuso, 2018), which is a profound, precious experience and which causes and permits the emergence of *enthusiasm* within us. The word "enthusiasm" is derived from the Greek *en*, meaning "within" and *thèos* meaning God (the God within). However, even when those same receptors are activated by psychotherapy in different key areas of the brain, it is an effective activation that is almost on the same level as pharmacological treatment for deep depression with citalopram (Fava, 2015). Our Mu-receptors can suggest some important considerations on, for example, our fitness and on a diet favouring neurogenesis, which is the process by which new neurons are formed from stem-cells.

Doing physical exercise and aerobic exercise in particular, for four to five hours a week (walking, running or dancing, for example) promotes the proliferation of neuronal precursors and, in particular, notably increases the size of the left part of the hippocampus. Meanwhile, cognitive stimuli and learning (never stop studying!) promote the recruitment and survival of newly-formed cells (this sequence clearly reflects the directional pattern of our body-to-mind process).

Furthermore, aerobic activity correlates with the capacity to reduce stress-hormone levels, like adrenaline and cortisol, and improves mood. It also improves blood-flow, carrying a greater quantity of oxygen to the brain— a fundamental nutriment that supports cognitive functions, working memory, selective attention, and executive brain functions.

Physical exercise, like a reduced-calorie diet, increases the levels





of Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factors (BDNF) – neurotrophins that promote the growth and development of immature neurons increasing their survival, as well as improving the functionality of adult neurons and maintaining synaptic connections.

Appropriate diet, and hydration with at least two liters of water daily, allow the individual to move towards the pole of health and neurogenesis, increasing neurotrophin levels.

In particular by:

- favouring a natural diet that is low in animal fats;
- consuming seasonal, organic fruit and vegetables, respecting the "food rainbow" (for example: red oranges, orange carrots, yellow lemons, green peppers, blueberries, violet cabbage and white melon)
- eating unrefined, wholemeal carbohydrates (and not industrially-produced, refined carbohydrates);
- consuming foods with a low glycemic index;
- having a savoury breakfast;
- ensuring there are a variety of cereals in the diet (such as: barley, spelt, rice, amaranth grain, quinoa etc.);
- paying attention to the quality and origin of dietary fats and proteins (dried fruit and oilseeds, for example, may be used as alternatives to animal fats, while plant proteins found in legumes,

for example, may be alternated with animal proteins from white meat or fish);

- ensuring balanced consumption of major food-categories (carbohydrates, protein and fats);

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- maintaining body-fat percentage within the normal range for gender, age and daily activity according to BMI;
- avoiding alcoholic, carbonated and sugary drinks;
- minimising simple sugars and salt consumption (as an alternative, enhancing flavours, perhaps, through the use of herbs and spices).

### ***A final consideration***

The possible future for people and for life is born from respect for the self, respect for their sustainability, respect for their limits, respect for the rhythms of their internal time in pulsating-equilibrium with external time. It is born from a profound respect for others, for relationships and for the living planet Earth.

Our possible future can only be born with humility coming from those eyes able to read *Intelligent Complexity* that is greater than us and than our cognition. It shall also be born from the intelligent direction that the wisdom deposited in our *Body-Logos* (Ferri, 2017) grants us with its negentropic responses to the attention we pay to ourselves in our daily lives.

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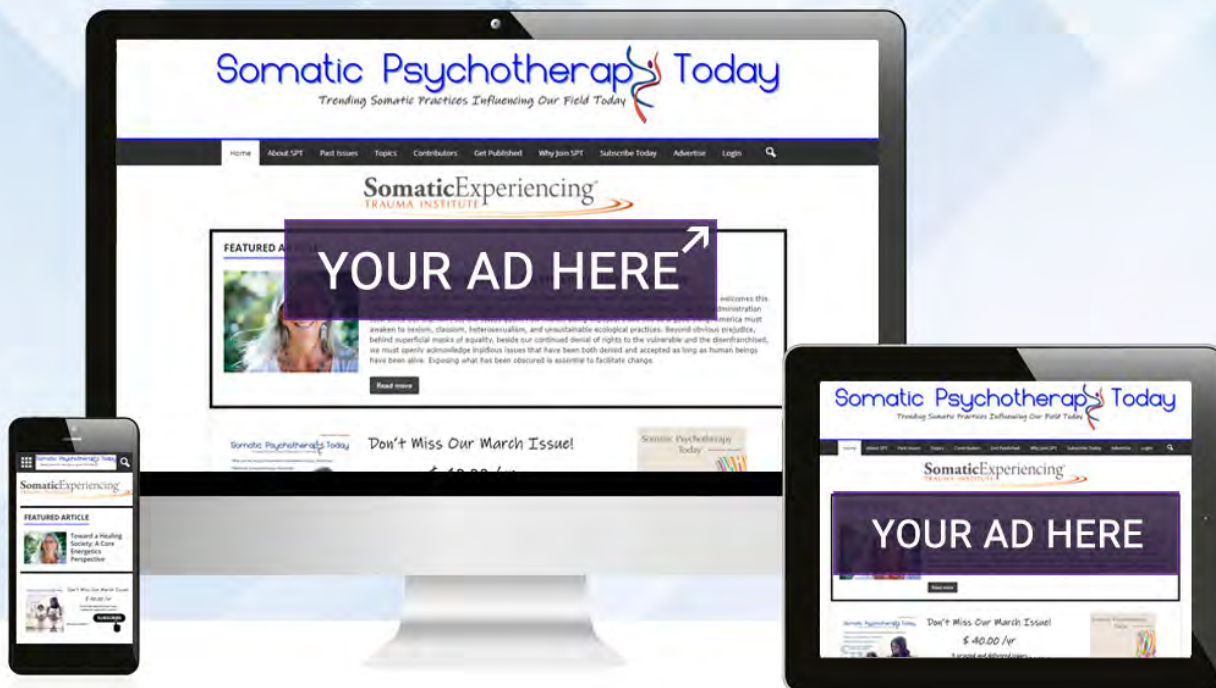
**Mary Jane A. Paiva** is a clinical psychologist, body psychotherapist and Reichian Analyst trained by Genovino Ferri and Federico Navarro, who have been practicing this model for over 40 years. After graduating as a clinical psychotherapist, Mary Jane became specialized in psychoanalysis and body psychotherapy. In 1995 she co-founded the institution IBAR - Brazilian Institute of Reichian Analysis. She was invited to be the Psychopedagogy director and professor of SOVESP - Society of Orgonomy and Vegetotherapy of S.Paulo, Brazil where she worked for over 20 years. She lectures worldwide and writes articles for magazines in Brazil and in the United States.

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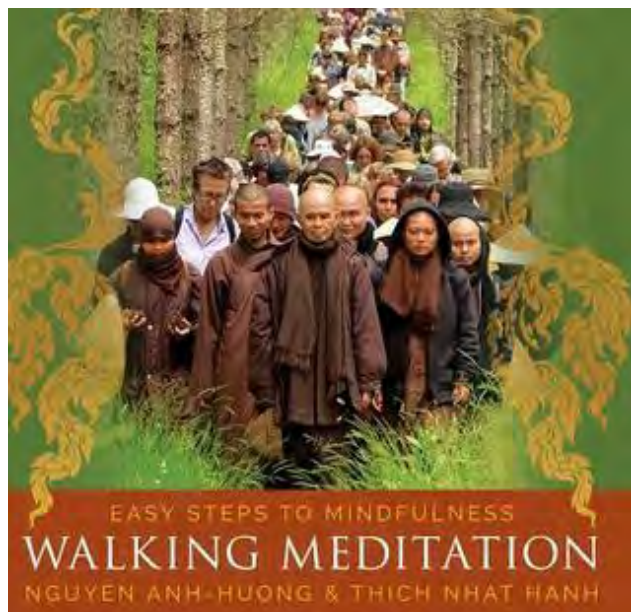
Michael D. Ostrolenk is a licensed psychotherapist who completed his MA in Transpersonal Counseling Psychology at John F. Kennedy University and did post-graduate studies in somatic psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies. He is certified in Spiral Dynamics and Wade Mindsets. Michael is the head instructor for SEALFIT's Unbeatable Mind Academy as well as a personal development coach. He is also the host of #ORadio, a podcast that explores individual and social transformation.

### **Michael D. Ostrolenk MA, MFT,**

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## *Walking Meditation: Easy Steps to Mindfulness*

Nguyen Anh-Huong & Thich Nhat Hanh

Some books are designed to be read, studied, discussed; some are written to be contemplated, information percolates, processes. And some are inspired to be lived—there's energy, passion, grace. Readers feel a resonance, attune with

words on the page creating a sense of safety to peer into the depths, to dive into explorations alone and in relationship.

*Walking Meditation* is an inspirational work-of-art crafted to offer a real-life experience in walking meditations. It offers compelling poems and narrative, stunning photographs, audio files to guide the practices, and videos—"archival footage of the Venerable Thich Nhat Hahn instructing students in the basic practice of slow walking meditation" (pg. 3). According to the authors, *Walking Meditation* is a complete program of meditation instruction that we can use to create our own walking meditation practice.

### *A confession*

At this point in my review, I feel compelled to share that I've been a head case most of my life. My aspirations to achieve involved doing, and mostly alone—a lone wolf type. My exercise routine focused on cardiovascular output, as fast and as far as possible in a single day on a single-track trail (i.e. 25 to 30 miles at an average of 3 to 4 mph pace, for the most part solo treks).

I left out the core of my body as well as any muscular upper body strength. My legs carried the weight. For the most part, I also left out other people. I was happy when I was moving, alone.

Then I started hiking with groups and forming friendships. I discovered that sharing the trail had its merits. Next, I started a new exercise program at the local gym—yoga and high intensity interval training classes. I went from solo movement to group immersion with social engagement as potent a component as the core body. My mental, social and physical needs changed.

I was attracted to the concept of walking meditations because I'm more apt to walk and meditate than sit. Me, my temperament, my way of being, means moving. I'm okay moving slower—aside from my new exercise routines, I also live with my elderly parents who do not move quickly, not even fast. They move slow, steady, safe. And, I'm more interested in sharing experiences with other like-minded people. I look for connections where I feel a sense of, *I get you and you get me. and this feels good.*



When I opened the first few pages of the book and started to read, a thought came to mind:  
What if SPT Magazine readers joined me on this new adventure in the art of walking meditation?  
What if we live this book together?

Every two weeks or longer if we decide we need more time to be with the practices—this is about being with rather than rushing through - we will read one section of the book and do the practices thanks to the audios and videos available online (the website is given in the book).

While reading at our own pace, we can post questions and comments on a group forum in our subscriber's area. And when we do the exercises, we can share our experiences, our awakenings, and our challenges.

We will be doing it alone but together, a co-creation of an experience that will allow us to self-pace and to be part of a community that values communication and connection, that is compassionate and supportive.

**Interested?**

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- 1 Order the book from SoundsTrue at:**  
<https://www.soundstrue.com/store/walking-meditation-4285.html>
- 2 Log in to the Subscriber Area and sign up on the subscriber's forum.**  
Please introduce yourself—share your first name, where you live, why you want to join this adventure and what you hope to walk away with from this experience.
- 3 Read the first section on Conscious Breathing. Share your thoughts**  
and experiences and offer supportive comments to one another.
- 4 Practice!**

Throughout the book we'll explore: slow walking meditation, walking meditation in nature, walking meditation in public places, walking meditation to embrace your emotions and then going further.

I look forward to sharing our experiences.

Warmly,

Nancy

# EMBODIED APPROACH TO HEALTH AND FITNESS: THRIVING MINDFULLY

by Defne Dinler, MA, LPC

As humans we are resilient creatures. This makes us great survivors, and it can also create a blind spot in our approach to our wellbeing. We can go to extremes without realizing. For instance, we enjoy the taste and feeling of a soda, we end up drinking it every day. We can work till we get too sick or have all work with no play, or all play with no work. We can get obsessed with an exercise or let go of any healthy movement because we can survive anyway.

Our bodies, our minds, and our hearts are very tolerant of us. How lucky for us we can push boundaries so much. How unlucky for us that we end up pushing those boundaries so much!

We indulge and deprive ourselves at the same time. What if we created the space to notice everything we did? As a body psychotherapist, even though I teach mindfulness on a daily basis, I notice my own blind spots way more than I would like to admit.

I am comfortable around people when they are emotional. It is easy for me to be mindful of myself and others in moments of emotional crisis and create support for myself and others. I had no idea that I did not have an ounce of mindfulness around my eating habits. I'm relearning chewing, noticing my hunger and fullness, tasting my food. I'm relearning to listen to my body instead of distracting myself with life and my environment. When I exercise, I'm relearning to find my breath and to enjoy my strength even at the edge of my weakness.



Personally, wherever I notice I want to complain about not having good self-care, I have come to realize it's my opportunity to slow down and find my edges and take care of myself in those edges.

What do you like to complain about? Not enough time? not enough sleep? weight? strength? hobbies? anxiety? It's all information for you to recognize you've pushed yourself to a survival place rather than thriving in life. If you want to come back to thriving, notice the changes you want within to create them.

It is such a great opportunity to recognize limiting beliefs and create the changes you want. I keep noticing my relationship to deprivation around food. When I catch myself in an old habit, I get to remind myself of abundance. This way I get to keep bringing in an appreciation for the abundance in my life consciously as opposed to a fear based reactive deprivation feeling that can lead to over eating or not being able to tolerate hunger.

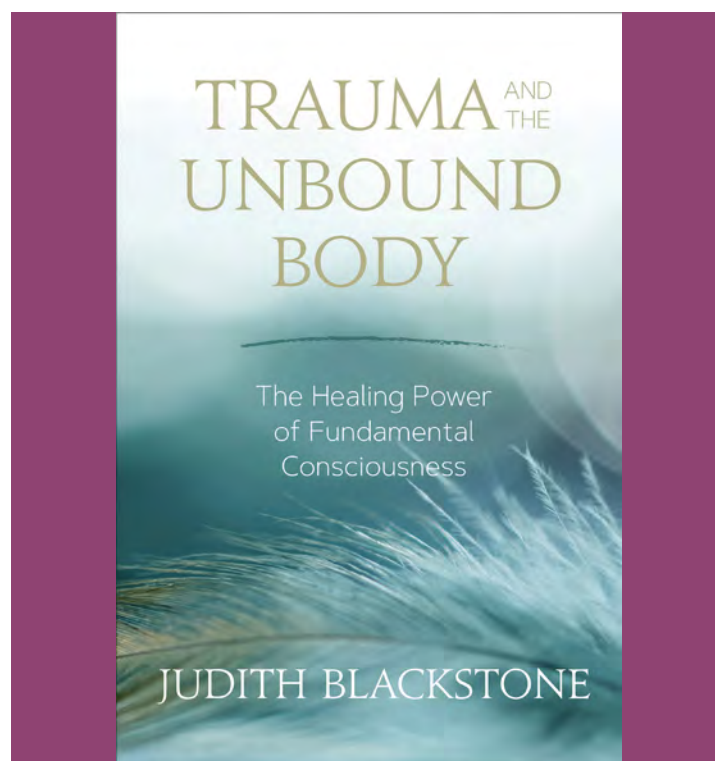
As you notice where you want your health and fitness to be and how you keep finding yourself limited in it, you can find resources from your environment, reaching out to friends, family, experts, etc. and create the life you want mentally, emotionally and in your amazingly

resilient body. Allow your own embodied system (body, mind, heart) to teach you how you can thrive best by slowing down and noticing yourself. The more you notice the more power you have.



**Defne Dinler** is a licensed somatic counseling psychotherapist who uses action-oriented therapeutic modalities that lead to a deeper understanding and achievement of goals for teens and adults. She specializes in relationship challenges, depression, anxiety, and trauma. As a body psychotherapist, her belief is that to heal the mind one needs to connect to their body first.

# BOOK REVIEW



Written by Judith Blackstone, PhD  
Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn, PhD

*“Wholeness is not a vague ideal, but a lived experience. It is a potential, inherent in our human nature. To be whole is to be conscious and in contact with ourselves everywhere in our body, to live within our body. When we inhabit our body, we experience ourselves as an undivided consciousness, a subtle, unified ground of consciousness, pervading our whole body and our environments, at the same time” (pg. 1)*

Judith Blackstone’s newest and sixth book on the Realization Process is her first to focus specifically on using this process to understand and heal trauma. She defines healing as becoming whole and notes that “trauma fragments and limits our wholeness” (pg. 1).

She teaches people how to release trauma-based patterns by inhabiting the internal space of their body, specifically at the juncture



between pure awareness and our physical and emotional being, what she calls our fundamental consciousness.

## Fundamental Consciousness

“It’s hardly ever talked about,” she explained during a recent UTube interview with Bliss + Grit regarding *Trauma and the Unbound Body*. (Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rb2bhHwIhR0>) “Fundamental consciousness is considered a spiritual experience. It’s not talked about (*for that reason*) yet it brings us to life; it is the basis of contact (*in relationship with ourselves and others*), and the basis of everything we feel: love, intelligence, expression (*voice, gender sexuality*), pleasure, our sense of power. These seem like innate qualities of being, but they come to life as we contact our self via fundamental consciousness.”

To inhabit our body and be in contact with our body is an advanced experience. It takes personal maturity and spiritual awakesness. None of us grow up living within our body.” According to Blackstone, “psychological healing and spiritual awakening are considered intertwined and inevitable aspects of our progression toward personal maturity” (pg. 5)

According to Blackstone, when we become whole within ourselves there’s an openness and we are one with everything around us. As we cultivate awareness and connect with the core of our body, we have the potential to “feel that we are living at the very center of all our experience. We know ourselves as the unchanging center within all of the constantly changing movement of life. Even in challenging situations with other people, or in personal crises, we can remain in this centered position. We are still responsible to other people, but we are not entangled with them or with old patterns of relating with them” (pg. 88).

To be clear, fundamental consciousness is not simply a relaxed state. To be in this place we must let go deep within, which isn’t easy. Thus, Blackstone’s Realization Process, which provides the means to get there. This process includes “practices that cultivate the ability to contact ourselves and open ourselves within the whole internal space of the body so the actual realization of fundamental consciousness can occur” (pg. 44). She teaches people how to attune to their fundamental consciousness to heal. She is clear that she “cannot make any definitive metaphysical claim about fundamental consciousness,” because she doesn’t know what it actually is. However, she is just as clear that “the experience of fundamental consciousness is available to us, it is a given aspect, an innate potential of human nature” and “when you experience it pervading your whole body, you experience the internal coherence of

*Continues on page 26*

your individual being” (pg. 5).

## Healing Trauma

The book was written to show readers how trauma (both extreme, i.e., abuse, severe injury, and those considered relational, i.e., when ordinary events are too confusing or abrasive to be fully absorbed) separates us from our bodies. She discusses how we respond to these traumas in different ways, how we cut off from ourselves. Sometimes we cut off in little ways like tightening our throat to cut off words we dare not speak, or tightening our jaw to cut off sounds we dare not release, or dampening our hearing or our spirit just a tad to adjust to situations around us that are overwhelming. These actions are typically unconscious; they happen as part of our survival mechanism, especially when we're young and trying to live in the context of abusive/threatening/demeaning relationships. Emotional wounds are just as toxic as physical to our health, our spirit, our being in the moment and in our adult lives (they fall out). She shares how constriction and fragmentation disrupt and alter the unity between mind and body, between the oneness of self and other. And she offers practices to resolve the separation and become whole.

Each chapter covers part of

the Realization Process, a step-by-step guide to come into understanding and then practice. There are examples and case presentations and guided experiences within the chapters to help ground the concepts shared. She notes that she developed these practices and has taught them over the past four decades. She started by healing herself and then moved outward with her discoveries and training to help others heal themselves. The practices are twofold: (1) some directly facilitate body-mind integration through inhabiting the internal space of one's body (how to contact our fundamental consciousness); (2) some help us utilize our attunement to fundamental consciousness to release trauma-based constrictions in the body.

## Bringing this review to a close

Blackstone's writing style feels personal, familiar. As if we're sitting together and she's right here sharing her journey, her process, her practices. The book is filled with insights and considerations allowing me, as a reader, to contemplate what she's offering. I was not aware of the Realization Process before reading this book. Now, I feel as if I have a good grasp of the content, what it's about and how it works. And she offers many practices to experiment with it, to see what



fits for me and what may not. My only lament is that there is not a CD or a website available with these practices recorded. It's difficult to read them and do them at the same time if you are reading this book solo. I look forward to spending more time with the practices, especially coming into the body and contacting my fundamental consciousness. I see this alone as being vital to my meditation process, to my ability to be focused and present in myself, in my being in all situations during the day, throughout my life.

**Vitality** *and Beauty*

*are gifts of Nature*

*for those who  
live according  
to its laws.*

*-Leonardo Da Vinci*





Life isn't about wishing you were some-  
where or someone you are not . . .

Life is about embracing where you are  
and finding balance and peace . . .

and trusting something wonderful to come in the  
future . . .

A somatically  
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# ATHLETIC MENTAL PERFORMANCE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

By Alex Diaz, PhD

**I**n the game of athletic success winning may hinge on an athlete's mental attitude more so than skill. Matches are often won or lost before the game even begins because mental attitude significantly impacts performance outcome. The thoughts we think and believe about what's happening in our mind and body when the competitive pressure is on—on the field, on the court, in the water—impact what we can and cannot do.

Given its enormous weight in

performance achievement, why is it that, despite having positive thoughts, some athletes still under-achieve in highly pressured moments? And what can they do?

## *An Athlete's Brain in Thinking Mode*

**W**estern culture has strongly promoted the understanding that outcomes rest on our thinking process. If we just remain positive, we will be able to navigate



obstacles. The famous football coach for the Green Bay Packers, Vince Lombardi's motto was, "Winners do not quit, and quitters do not win." This belief is still shared by many coaches, and athletes fully buy into this tough-minded attitude.

Athletes believe they can control their brain to think what they tell it to think. Thus, much weight is given to the newer part of the brain, the neo-cortex, which is considered the home of positive thoughts and intentions. However, it is the older reptilian brain that efficiently regulates highly charged emotions by storing implicit memories. It's not our thoughts that guide our athletic performance but rather our intrinsic sensations associated with the flight or fight survival mode we inherited from our ancestors.

### *Flight or Fight: Stored Sensations*

**A**n athlete's nervous system, just like any other human being, is organized to respond to perceived threats. A coach yelling, internalized parental pressures, teammates' body language indicating rejection all have the potential to trigger one's autonomic physiological fight or flight response. Although it is JUST a game, an athlete's body may respond as if it is a matter of life or death. The body is organized to complete these physiological triggers. But, when unable to do so that thwarted arousal remains in the body as incomplete responses.

Take for instance the moment a coach is yelling at an athlete. In that split second, that athlete's body can instantly be responding to either a fight or flight sensation. In the space of an unconscious breath, our neo-cortex—the thinking brain—can stop those impulses by attempting to make sense of the situation. After all, punching the coach or running away will only make things worse. However, it does not mean that those incomplete responses have gone away. On the contrary, those impulses remain in the body for life.



*Continues on page 32*

## *It Begins in the Brain*

**O**ur brains hierarchically develop implicit experiences first (sensations, a felt sense, non-verbal) and explicit ones later (clear memories associated with verbalized stories). Babies connect with parents by exchanging gazes; Smiles are expressed and an implicit relationship is created. Later in life, these same interchanges contain a verbal dialogue. Developmentally speaking, it is a human condition to experience non-verbal awareness before sensations turn into verbal language. This anatomic chronological order remains for life.

**For example:** we may feel butterflies in our belly and notice the sensation with little to no reaction. Or, if we feel these same butterflies in a scary situation, we may associate our reactions to this fluttery feeling as threat/danger. Later, we may verbalize them as anxiety or fear.

In this sense, a tennis player, who is serving to win a grand slam match, may feel rapid heartbeats and shallow breathing. Said player may feel butterflies in their belly. These implicit sensations and reactions are based on past associations and experiences. If rapid heartbeats and shallow breathing are associated with danger and fear, the tennis player may falter and lose focus. If these same sensations are associated with positive tension in safe surroundings, the energy can be used to the player's advantage.

Human behavior shapes around a combination of personal genes and





life experiences, both supportive and upsetting. Such experiences mold a neurological imprint in our brains leading to the development of behaviors whose roots lie in implicit subconscious memories. These memories do not conscientiously come up. According to psychologist Peter Levine, emotional memories include “surprise, fear, anger, disgust, sadness, and joy” (Levine, 2015, p. 22). These memories lie just below the neo-cortex.

**Another example:** a basketball player who needs to make both free throw baskets with time running out in the game may feel an array of felt-sense awareness, such as tension or sweaty palms. These sensations may either be noticed and accepted as part of the body’s normal response to intense activity and stress or interpreted as dangerous or bad based on implicit memories from prior experiences or perceived future expectations.

Or perhaps a golfer. Consider a golfer who feels the perceived pressures of not wanting to let his coach or perhaps his parents down. This golfer may experience sweaty palms, a rapid heartbeat, a sense to pull left or right. The result may be a pull hook shot into the woods, but the trigger was the accumulated thwarted experiences stored in the body. Said athlete can talk him/herself out of not feeling nervous, but the body will only listen to a language that pays attention to implicit memories, not reasoning.

### *Our Brain in Sports Mode: Coherence*

**W**hen we meet our implicit needs, we say we have achieved coherence. It is a simultaneous embodied synchronicity that humans naturally embrace to achieve present moment awareness and self-regulation. Opposite to a coherence experience is one where technical thoughts, ruminating emotions, and overwhelming expectations interfere with fully trusting one’s abilities.

Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihaly (1990) calls it flow. It is the experience of being fully submerged in the essence of the action, free of an ego while pursuing one’s ultimate personal rewarding goals.

Emotionally regulated athletes reach coherence when there is a match between what they sense and what they express. In a flow state, our golfer, rather than tense and sweaty, will be aware of the water hazard on the right yet still aim at the flag to make the green free of negative thoughts and worries.

Athletes who do not experience a flow state and are asked about their

*Continues on page 34*

under-performing experience under pressure (in the heat of the game), may rationalize their feelings by either minimizing emotions or expressing a rationalization aimed at, subconsciously, diverting the attention from that of feeling upset.

On the other hand, an emotionally regulated athlete not only feels the upsetting emotion by embodying a faster heart palpitation, but also by verbalizing its content.

When athletes attune to a coherent emotional awareness, an implicit-explicit level of a relationship takes place. In a coherent state, athletes are in tune with their internal body signals. These sensations are embraced, normalized, and accepted. In so doing, the athlete's body is physiologically organized to regulate stressful moments and emotionally respond to the challenges of competition.

### **Peak Performance Mindfully**

Achieving peak performance means training our mind to remain focused during mental, physical and spiritual challenges, to notice what's happening in one's body as well as one's brain. Athletes who are in sync with their bodily sensations and mental cognitions can push beyond their apparent physical limits. Their positive mindset promotes resilience and enhances self-belief.

There are several holistic psychotherapeutic approaches that aim at eliciting implicit language attunement for the purpose of self-regulating emotions to achieve flow. Yoga, mindfulness, breathing,

relaxation, and somatic psychology embrace the connection between the verbal and non-verbal language. These practices help to develop a greater sense of tuning in to the felt-sense awareness and, as such, enhance the capacity to regulate emotions, fully experience present moment awareness, and increase an athlete's chances of achieving peak performance.

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**Dr. Diaz** is the Sport Psychology Consultant to athletes and coaches for Concordia College, Bronxville, a licensed psychotherapist, and holds a doctoral degree in clinical psychology with a specialization in somatic psychology. He is certified in Sports Peak Performance, Somatic Psychology, Mindfulness Stress-Based Reduction for Teens, and maintains a private practice in Tuckahoe, NY. Dr. Diaz teaches mental performance to all level athletes, including school, college, professional, Olympian, and amateur athletes.

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# Moving Towards Freedom: Effecting Optimal Health Through Reichian Inspired Exercises



Aylee Welch, LICSW is a master therapist and the founder and director of Seattle School of Body-Psychotherapy. She works from the lens of Core Energetics which believes that we all carry a Higher Self which is our own unique expression of the life force that is in in all things. Aylee also infuses her writing and teaching from the additional perspective of being both a ceremonialist and a community herbalist. [www.bodypsychotherapy.us](http://www.bodypsychotherapy.us)  
[www.bodypsychotherapyschool.com](http://www.bodypsychotherapyschool.com)

***Do you secretly love/ hate to hear about odd things that people do in bed?*** If so, this article might make your day! Sexy or not, I love to do a particular set of exercises every morning in order to stay open and feel more alive and to keep vital nectar circulating well in my body.

What is this sexy vital nectar?

Wilhelm Reich is an important influence in what I am about to share so all aspects of our being are part of the process. The gentle movements that I'm writing about help me feel present in my body and ready for the day before I even step out of bed. They loosen segmental blocks that have occurred and continue to occur during my life and keep me lubricated and open from the inside out.



## Reich's Segments

One of Reich's important discoveries was his theory about the "Segments" of the body. This term refers to muscle groups and plasmatic currents that work together in the biopsychosocial system. They move on a horizontal plane across the body and have the capacity to either facilitate or block our emotional expression.

According to Reich, and true to my experience, our life force moves from the center of the body to the periphery, and then beyond, leading us out into the world. It is the expression of our natural impulse. When this occurs, we feel pleasure. As adults, these segments dictate what we express. When we subdue our impulses over time the segments block our expression and become a protective armoring that comes between our full self and the world, leading us to react habitually instead of in response to what may be best in any given moment.

Segmental armoring is both muscular and emotional. It stops the current of life flow like what occurs when a hose is pinched. Think about the strength in your jaw. You may be able to see how effective a muscle can be in cutting off flow. The spine undulates like a worm and the presence of armoring inhibits spinal movement and expression; it cuts off our life force from inside, trapping our energy in the system.

Reich's work consisted of laying people down and provoking the blocks through specific physical and

breathing exercises. As the muscle groups were stimulated, the emotional material arose to be worked through and expressed, leading to an opening of the segment through catharsis and resulting in life changes. In the work that has evolved into Core Energetics, we understand that the whole person must be addressed. That means that the issues that come up in treatment must be tracked and healed on all the levels of our being: the body, our emotions, our thinking patterns, and our will or the level of behavior, as well as our spiritual perceptions. I call this the 5 levels.

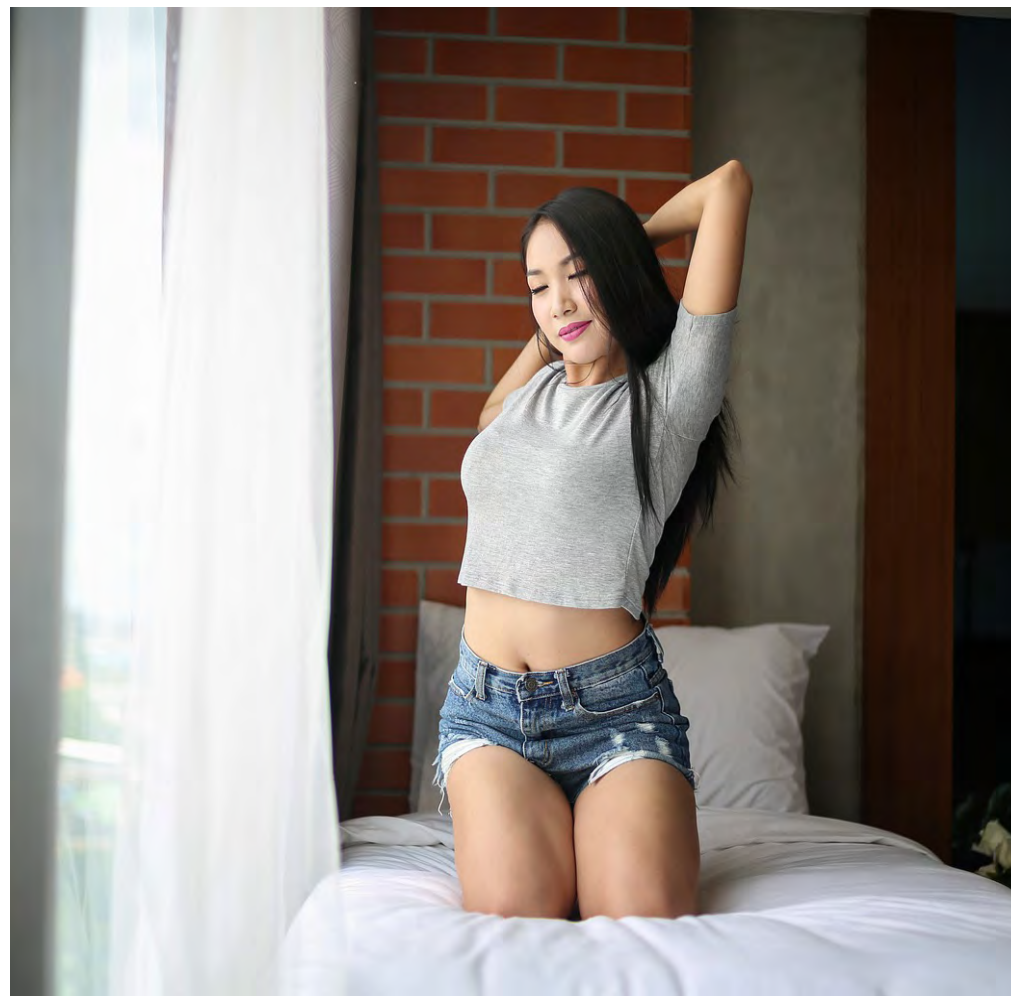
When an issue arises, we examine how the experience leading up to the situation manifests in energy, (most often colored by events from our early life experiences) and how this reactive energy is either expressed or trapped, not just in blocks and the literal armoring, but on all of these 5 levels. When we address each level for a particular set of experiences that led us to unconsciously form a block, we allow for deep grounded change to occur. We incorporate neurobiology and trauma theory to the work in order to avoid flooding the system during the treatment. And yet, in Core Energetics, we believe that expression is key to therapy, even while we understand that expression manifests in many forms. For example, a deep sigh can be a huge opening in the system. And sometimes a tennis racket, pillow, and the movement of long held deep rage is called for. Both effect change for the whole system and make room for life-force to flow anew.

*Continues on page 38*

## 7 Segments, 7 Blocks,

**The Ocular Block** controls what we see, what we allow into our field. Eyes are the “window to our soul”, our place of expressing and receiving, of bonding and boundaries and reality testing. Proceed with care here. The muscles around the eyes are the first and only ones that a newborn human can control so our youngest information, and our earliest wounding, may be stored and possibly activated through stimulating gentle eye movement. It involves the many muscles around our eyes and the entire ring around our head. Many people with ocular blocks get tension headaches.

**The Oral Block** affects the mouth, nose, throat, our food intake, smiling, swallowing, the jaw, neck, sternocleidomastoid muscle, and the tongue, which connects to the cervical vertebrae. Babies explore the world through these muscles when they are 6-18 months old and many of the beliefs and patterns related to asking for and getting our needs met are stored here. It is also related to our libido, our experience/ expression of pleasure, of nourishment and of connecting. It, along with the eyes, are directly connected with the nervous system.



**Neck Block**, the hotbed of tension, includes the throat, which has the capacity to express the energy of our whole body. Including the gag reflex, it is tied to the diaphragm and also loosens some of the lower segments. When one is safe to express their true experience, there is a deep biological release and opening. It is



directly related to speaking our 'no' or our 'yes', both with our voice and with our arms; to taking in nourishment and pleasure or rejecting what disgusts us.

**Chest Segment** involves the pectoralis, intercostal, deltoid, trapezius, ramrods, elector spines and other muscles. It integrates our experience with contact, presence, breath, self-compassion, boundaries, and what we can take in. It

is our heart center, our feeling center and our center of perception as it is the seat of our largest nerve plexus that allows us to take in information from our senses. Our immune function is highly affected by this segment.

**Diaphragmatic Block** forms a ring around our lower rib. It includes the stomach, kidney and liver. The solar plexus is affected by this block too. It is where the Will meets the involuntary system and regulates how much we can take in. Try to tighten your diaphragm and see how you can have a big relaxing breath! It is impossible because the muscle prevents the intake. When open, this segment seats our instinct and gut feelings. Think about strength and see how it is a central energy

regulator as breath is key to all of this. This can be a place where underground power plays are initiated.

**Abdominal segment** includes all our back and abdominal muscles, and our digestive organs. This area holds information from our earliest connection -- the symbiotic exchange through our umbilical cord, and the preverbal bonding capacity that we learned. Think gut reactions, instincts. It is where we "digest" figuratively and literally. It affects metabolism, what we want or don't want, trust, and our personal, rather than relational, sense of self.

**Pelvic segment** includes all pelvic and reproductive muscles. This segment cannot remain open unless the energy has somewhere to go. It also holds the key to our fuller life flow and orgiastic potency. It is the seat of kundalini, of the sacrum or sacred. It regulates survival, elimination, mobility, and pleasure. It initiates the pumping of the lymphatic system, which keeps us clean and alive, a place of potential regeneration. Be very careful not to provoke movement in this segment until the others are open and beware because we store a lot of sensitive material here.

### **Block Work**

When we first begin to loosen the muscular segment in a therapeutic milieu, we watch for material to come through images, emotions, and one's thinking patterns. It is important for people to work with a trained practitioner when beginning to loosen these segments.

*Continues on page 40*

In treatment we see what the client wants to work on and through observation we can bring awareness to the segments involved in their interactions. When we begin to loosen the blocked muscles of the segments regarding the situation, it is most likely that images from similar experiences will come up. This is when we can dance between the 5 levels to see how we can unearth trapped energy from old experiences that haven't been fully processed in order to free the client. What ensues can be a more accurate read on what is going on in their present situation and a transformation of old pervasive patterns of relating that had been formed from early experiences.

Once a person acclimates to this work and is equipped with a trustworthy observer mind that can help them track their process, they can begin to do these exercises on their own.

### **A Morning Exercise Process**

Upon waking, begin to gently roll your eyes around in the eye socket, move them up and down and all around, zig-zag.

Look far out, look close in. Find the sticky spots that your eyes tend to jump over and gently see if you can move in that direction and wonder what material might be stored in that muscle tension. Be gentle. Close your eyes. Relax. Repeat a couple of times.

Now begin to open your mouth wide and take in a boatload of air, maybe in segments by sucking a small bit of air in to the belly, some more into the





mid belly, the low chest, then fill the chest and hold. Let go all at once, perhaps shaking a little to allow the full expulsion of your breath. Breathe all the way down to the belly. As you let go, let the air sound like a whisper, “ahhhhhhh”. Breathe deeply again. Hold the air in with your mouth open wide until a gentle sigh invites you to release. Do this a few times, making sounds across your vocal chords as you breath out. The next time you take in air, make the whisper sound, “uh, uh, uh ahhh” in larger gulps with your mouth opening increasingly wider before you let go. Hopefully, after some practice, this will take you into the spontaneous and involuntary depth movement of a yawn, which deeply relaxes the respiratory system from your mouth to the bottom of your lungs. Y-A-W- ah ah ahN! Yes, I am suggesting that you literally teach yourself to yawn on a whim!

Now pause for a moment, feel the relaxation from the inside out. You may perceive moisture moving into your mouth cavity. Relax and enjoy the movement of your life processes into the periphery of your body.

Next begin to stick your tongue out and make the sound, “blah, blah aa aaah”. Stick your tongue out further. Maybe you will change the word to “ble ecch”. See if you can let your body express the feeling of disgust through these motions. While disgust might not be something you seek to feel, it is important for the body to have access to this natural reflexive response in order to protect us from toxins. And in order to do this, our muscles must be flexible. It takes getting used to, but many of us stick our fingers down our throat, once again attempting to provoke the deep involuntary movement from inside the body, this time, stimulating the gag reflex. After this you should again feel deep opening and relaxation into many areas from your mouth through your neck and deep into your torso, and feel your fluids moving throughout the body. Take time to allow yourself to integrate and enjoy the opening.

Do note that people with a history of eating disorders may not be good candidates for working this particular segment on their own and in this way as it may stimulate their old eating disorder behavior and mindsets. But for many others, being able to open this expression can be life altering and I have seen many people positively impact their TMJ through gagging regularly. And maintaining the opening through a morning practice gives us all autonomy over our health.

Lastly put your feet flat while still lying on the bed. Pushing downward, begin to

*Continues on page 42*

gently bounce your pelvis onto the bed. You will be making contact right at your sacrum. Do this for a few moments. Stop. Repeat. Rest with your knees together. Maybe move from your knees allowing them to gently open and close. Again, take time relax, feel your presence in your body in the moment. Put your legs flat and your arms overhead and stretch every which way for a few moments. When you are ready, come upright and let your feet find the floor. Rise and meet the day!

## Conclusion

The body holds energy from all our experiences that have not been fully digested. Our emotions, muscles, posture, attitudes and belief systems form from this material and impact our experience and quality of life moving forward. The earliest life experiences are most impactful. Working gently to loosen the material and bring ourselves back into flow, combining it with expression and awareness, facilitates deep lasting change. Maintaining an open system is easy to do once we have begun to work. Sexy or not, I find these simple exercises help me to usher in my day with joy and presence, and I present them in the hope of lifting each and every one of you who have taken the time to read this.

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# THE ELUSIVE OBVIOUS:

## *THE CONVERGENCE OF MOVEMENT, NEUROPLASTICITY & HEALTH*

By Moshe Feldenkrais (1904-1984)  
Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn

Feldenkrais wrote *The Elusive Obvious* in his mid-70s, three years before his death, with the intention to offer a “coherent and comprehensive statement of his theoretical point of view” (xii). His writing style intrigued me, his conversational tone engaging. His conversations about words and movement, about science and acceptance, about learning and awareness pulled me deeper into his philosophical stance on health and healing. He offered that the content only provides information necessary to understand how his techniques work. He deliberately avoided discussing *why*. “In science,” he wrote, “we really only know how” (pg.1).

Considering my approach to this review, I felt a sense of wonder. *What if's* came to mind: What if I tried some of the exercises provided in the book more than once? There are short and more in-depth experientials to help readers ground the content discussed. Would I notice more of a lasting difference other than the *ah ha* moments I felt in the short term? What if I found a local practitioner to work with this methodology? Would the seemingly never-ending inflammation and pain in my left knee be resolved?

While I can't say with any certainty, Feldenkrais writes, “*You can, at any time of your life, rewire yourself, provided I can convince you that there is nothing permanent or compulsive in your system except what you believe to be so*” (117).

Feldenkrais wrote that he doesn't treat, cure, or even teach people. He says that he tells stories and offers lessons to help people learn about themselves. He believed that learning comes by the experience of manipulation and that learning is the most important thing for a human being.



Learning appears to be a central part of Feldenkrais' work: "I believe it is more important to learn the way to learn new skills than the feat of the skills themselves" (92). He wants people to consider better ways to move, not right ways, "the right movement has no future development" he wrote (pg. 92). He is clear that successful learning comes when we proceed at our own rate. Being pushed, pulled, and/or prodded to keep up, to catch up, to meet expectations at a pace that is not ours does not work. We need to discover own rate of learning (pg. 91).

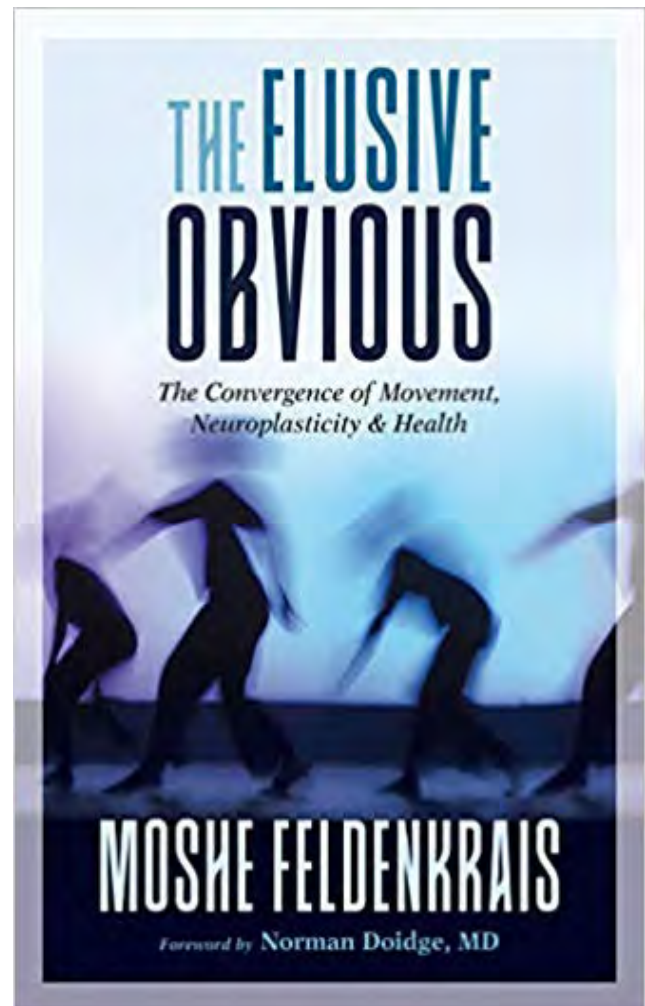
According to Feldenkrais, learning means grasping the unknown (94) with awareness — meaning a combination of consciousness and knowledge. With mindful living, Feldenkrais wrote, people can tap into awareness and movement to create actions that break what he called bad habits—restrictions in our body and in our movements are caused by habit and learning. In his process, he focuses on "the relationship between movement, learning, emotions and human development" (xii).

### **A Man Before His Time**

Born in a small Russian town, Feldenkrais studied mathematics and worked as a surveyor and map maker. He proceeded to the Sorbonne for his doctorate, furthering his studies in mechanics and electricity. While there, he met Professor Kano, cited as the creator of Judo. Feldenkrais soon earned his Judo Black Belt.

A knee injury playing soccer in his twenties and a lack of options for healing, lead him to study, discover and learn more about movement and the human body, with his primary purpose understanding the effectiveness of his actions. He developed Functional Awareness

*Continues on page 47*





## AWESOME QUICK FROZEN ON-THE-GO BITES

Your time about 10 mins  
8 Delicious treats to go

### Grocery Ingredients:

- *Vanilla Greek Yogurt* - 1 Cup
- *Coconut Oil* - 1 tbsp
- *Berries* - Your pick: 1/2 cup - *Go Wild Berries* they work much better!
- *Granola* - 1/2 cup

---

### Instructions:

1. Muffin Tin: Line baking paper or silicone liner

### Layer:

2. Next drop 1-1/2 tablespoons of *Vanilla Greek Yogurt*
3. Next drop 1 tablespoon *wild berries*
4. Next drop add 1 tablespoon of *Vanilla Greek Yogurt*
5. Sprinkle a thin layer of *Granola* on top, gently press it into the *Vanilla Greek Yogurt*, so it'll stick.
6. Fill about 8-10 muffin cups.
7. Set them in the freezer in an air tight container for 3 hours.



(individual manipulation technique) and Awareness Through Movement (a group learning process), based on his practical applications of current science and thought and what he interpreted as the needs of others. He created these methods to approach problems from an entirely new direction. He first used Functional Integration and Awareness Through Movement during World War II (pg. 75).

Some say his work was “before his time” because he ‘knew’ the brain was neuroplastic and he realized that the nervous system was more flexible than other people thought. A key role of the nervous system according to Feldenkrais was to establish order in the midst of a world that has much chaos in it (xxiii); it grows and changes throughout our life (xv). He wanted to help people quiet their nervous system so they could be open to learn. His focus was to help people unlearn unconscious habits and restore the normal developmental process, which may have been interrupted by many different kinds of brain problems in childhood or even before birth (xiv).

Feldenkrais believed that the circuits involved in movement and action could be altered if people learned to refine their awareness of how they moved (xiv). He emphasized that we are capable of freedom, choice, and conscious awareness; and we can use our free choice to change habits.

He offered people exercises to practice how to find the sensations in their body . . . “becoming aware is the significant part of your learning, and it is not at all important which movement is used

for the lesson” (pg. 105). He felt that hours of practicing awareness in movement or action remain the most absorbing and interesting time in our lives.

### **In Summary**

I know my typical review includes more details about the materials presented. This book doesn’t call to me that way. I will offer that the book begins with a Foreword to the 2019 edition by Norman Doidge MD, who came to the Feldenkrais method because of an injury of his own. Next is Feldenkrais’ original Foreword, followed by the preface, the introduction and then 10 chapters. Feldenkrais also included extracts from his interview with Will Schutz (who initially brought Feldenkrais to the United States). To complete the book there’s a comprehensive bibliography, an index, information about the author and final a list of resources.

What felt important to me was Feldenkrais’ philosophical approach and how his writing resonated, what sense stayed with me outside of my notes. This is the kind of book that needs more than one read. There’s depth in each chapter demanding time and space to contemplate, to practice, to explore. I can honestly say I need more time to truly feel as if I “get” it, which I think is the hallmark of a good book. It’s not a recipe, not a template, not a been there done that experience. It feels real, authentic, present and deep. Perhaps I’ll write another review, after a second or perhaps even third read. Time will tell.

## THE YOGA OF MIDLIFE

by Holly Holt

*"Exhale completely, release all the air from your body. Now, notice the pause at the end of the exhale."*

My yoga teacher's words invited me into a new place, a place of connection and understanding beyond the rational mind and into the mystery of the body. As I gently allowed the air to leave my lungs, I felt a deepening. My body became weighted, and I felt at peace. I thought to myself, this must be what it's like. A tiny death. A movement away from the severing that had occurred over a lifetime into a wholeness that would, eventually, bring me to my last breath. A moment of fearless surrender.

Try this. Inhale deeply, then exhale completely. Let ALL the air leave your body, no forcing. Let the air release slowly like air seeping from a tire. Pause. Observe the emptiness. Trust that the inhale will happen on its own. Inhale again. Exhale. Release, release, release. Pause. Wait. Observe. This breath practice of pausing at the end of an exhale is called Suspension.

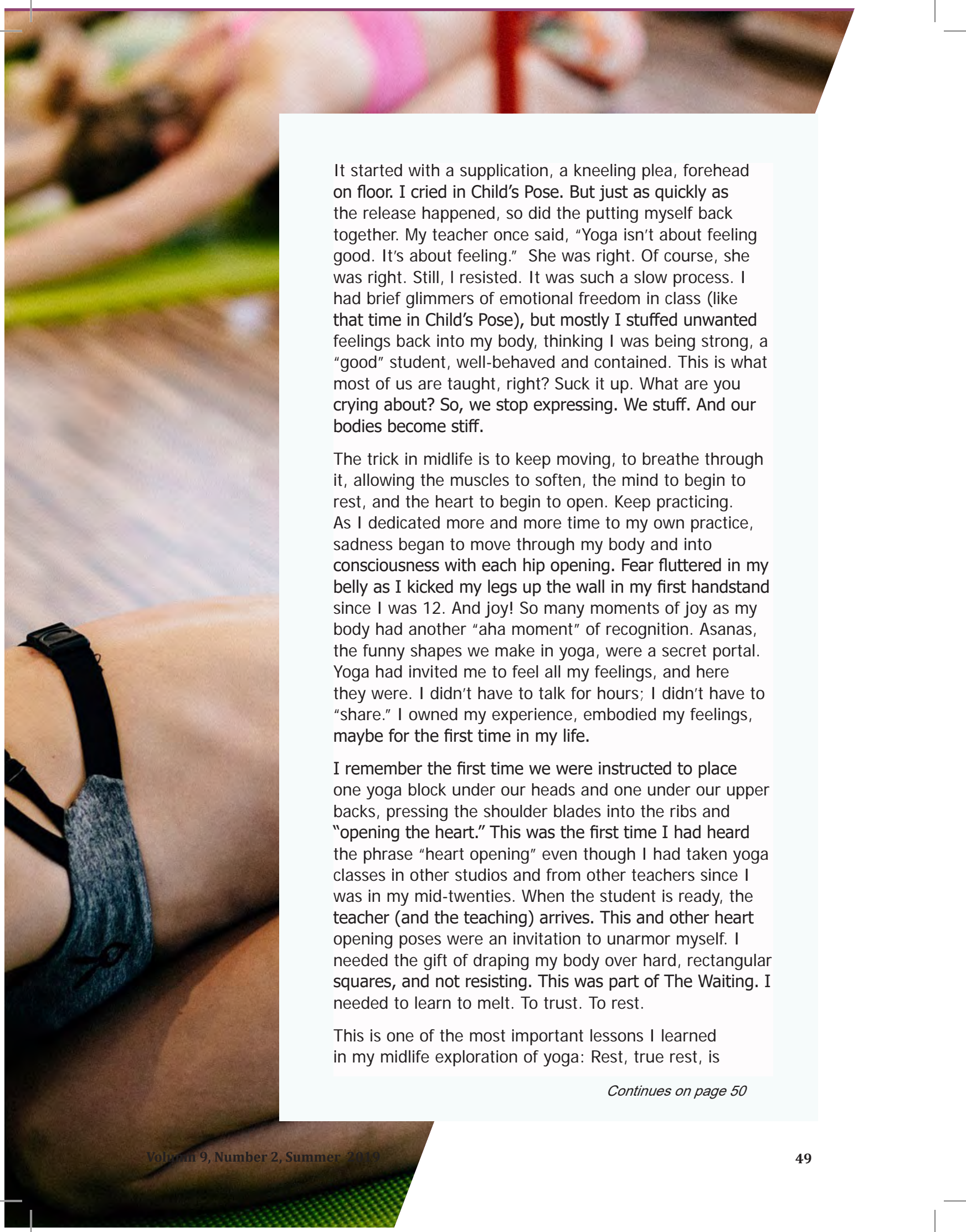
Another name for it might be Midlife.

Oh, midlife! People make fun of the "crisis," but folks, it's no joke. When my own transition began, something inside me started to crack. I realized my son would be graduating high school, launching into his own life, and wouldn't need me anymore. My husband and I hardly knew each other after spending years only focusing on the day-to-day. My parents' aging bodies revealed to me my declining future. My job was not satisfying my creative needs anymore. I felt trapped. What is the point in going on? I thought. Yes, it was high-drama time, akin to the teenage years without the firm skin.

My midlife yoga practice saved me. It taught me what suspension felt like, so that I could endure The Waiting. That's the only way I can describe it. Some call it a cocoon, but even cocoons have edges. I was formless yet frantic, floating above deep, dark waters, surrounded by the fog of the unknown, suspended between the here and the mysterious there. The uncertainty was nearly unbearable. Like so many others, I had never made plans for this time in my life. I did not recognize the not old/not young person who now inhabited my body.

So, I decided I needed to learn to inhabit her.





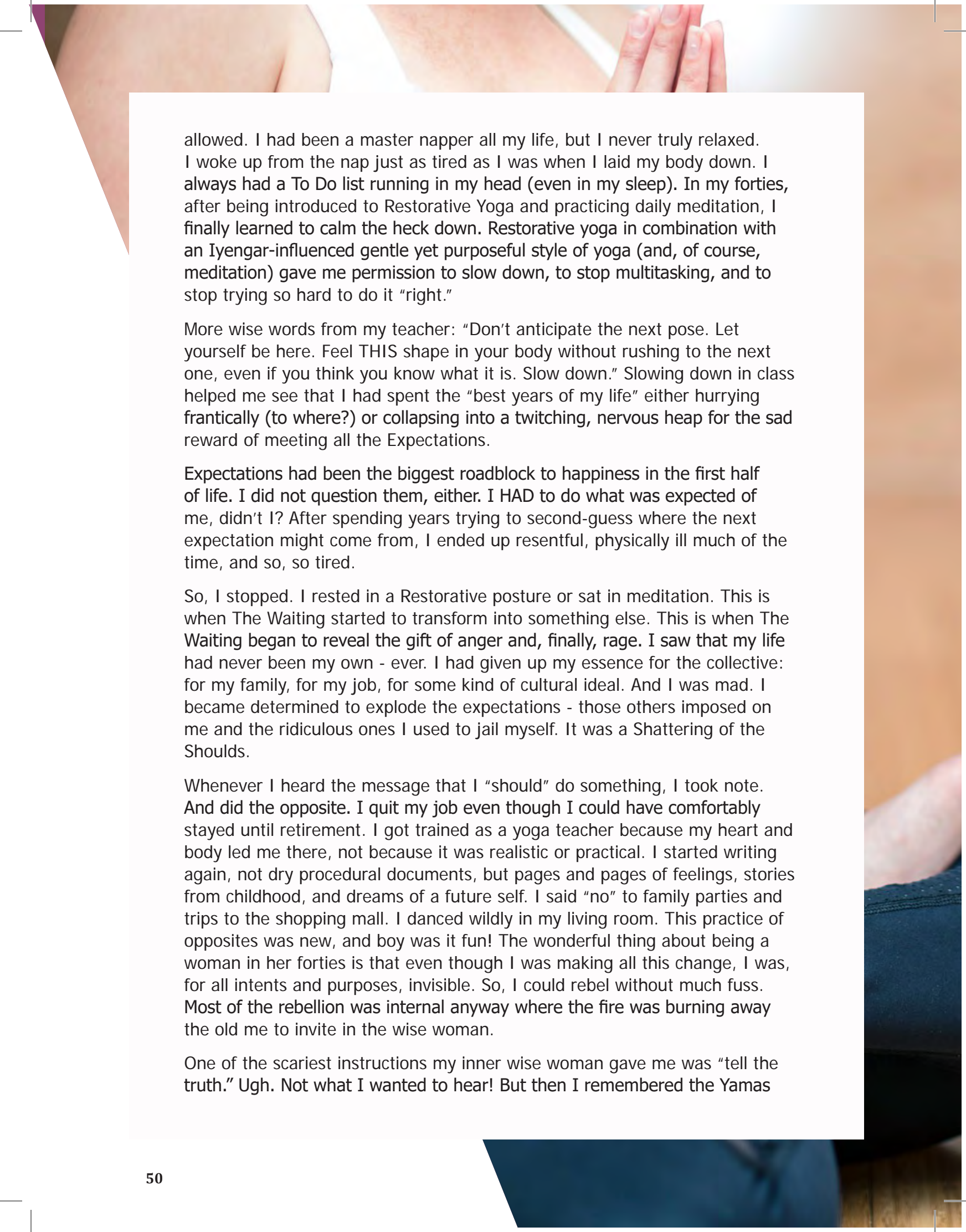
It started with a supplication, a kneeling plea, forehead on floor. I cried in Child's Pose. But just as quickly as the release happened, so did the putting myself back together. My teacher once said, "Yoga isn't about feeling good. It's about feeling." She was right. Of course, she was right. Still, I resisted. It was such a slow process. I had brief glimmers of emotional freedom in class (like that time in Child's Pose), but mostly I stuffed unwanted feelings back into my body, thinking I was being strong, a "good" student, well-behaved and contained. This is what most of us are taught, right? Suck it up. What are you crying about? So, we stop expressing. We stuff. And our bodies become stiff.

The trick in midlife is to keep moving, to breathe through it, allowing the muscles to soften, the mind to begin to rest, and the heart to begin to open. Keep practicing. As I dedicated more and more time to my own practice, sadness began to move through my body and into consciousness with each hip opening. Fear fluttered in my belly as I kicked my legs up the wall in my first handstand since I was 12. And joy! So many moments of joy as my body had another "aha moment" of recognition. Asanas, the funny shapes we make in yoga, were a secret portal. Yoga had invited me to feel all my feelings, and here they were. I didn't have to talk for hours; I didn't have to "share." I owned my experience, embodied my feelings, maybe for the first time in my life.

I remember the first time we were instructed to place one yoga block under our heads and one under our upper backs, pressing the shoulder blades into the ribs and "opening the heart." This was the first time I had heard the phrase "heart opening" even though I had taken yoga classes in other studios and from other teachers since I was in my mid-twenties. When the student is ready, the teacher (and the teaching) arrives. This and other heart opening poses were an invitation to unarmor myself. I needed the gift of draping my body over hard, rectangular squares, and not resisting. This was part of The Waiting. I needed to learn to melt. To trust. To rest.

This is one of the most important lessons I learned in my midlife exploration of yoga: Rest, true rest, is

*Continues on page 50*



allowed. I had been a master napper all my life, but I never truly relaxed. I woke up from the nap just as tired as I was when I laid my body down. I always had a To Do list running in my head (even in my sleep). In my forties, after being introduced to Restorative Yoga and practicing daily meditation, I finally learned to calm the heck down. Restorative yoga in combination with an Iyengar-influenced gentle yet purposeful style of yoga (and, of course, meditation) gave me permission to slow down, to stop multitasking, and to stop trying so hard to do it "right."

More wise words from my teacher: "Don't anticipate the next pose. Let yourself be here. Feel THIS shape in your body without rushing to the next one, even if you think you know what it is. Slow down." Slowing down in class helped me see that I had spent the "best years of my life" either hurrying frantically (to where?) or collapsing into a twitching, nervous heap for the sad reward of meeting all the Expectations.

Expectations had been the biggest roadblock to happiness in the first half of life. I did not question them, either. I HAD to do what was expected of me, didn't I? After spending years trying to second-guess where the next expectation might come from, I ended up resentful, physically ill much of the time, and so, so tired.

So, I stopped. I rested in a Restorative posture or sat in meditation. This is when The Waiting started to transform into something else. This is when The Waiting began to reveal the gift of anger and, finally, rage. I saw that my life had never been my own - ever. I had given up my essence for the collective: for my family, for my job, for some kind of cultural ideal. And I was mad. I became determined to explode the expectations - those others imposed on me and the ridiculous ones I used to jail myself. It was a Shattering of the Shoulds.

Whenever I heard the message that I "should" do something, I took note. And did the opposite. I quit my job even though I could have comfortably stayed until retirement. I got trained as a yoga teacher because my heart and body led me there, not because it was realistic or practical. I started writing again, not dry procedural documents, but pages and pages of feelings, stories from childhood, and dreams of a future self. I said "no" to family parties and trips to the shopping mall. I danced wildly in my living room. This practice of opposites was new, and boy was it fun! The wonderful thing about being a woman in her forties is that even though I was making all this change, I was, for all intents and purposes, invisible. So, I could rebel without much fuss. Most of the rebellion was internal anyway where the fire was burning away the old me to invite in the wise woman.

One of the scariest instructions my inner wise woman gave me was "tell the truth." Ugh. Not what I wanted to hear! But then I remembered the Yamas



& Niyamas, the ethical principles of yoga. The second principle on the list is Satya or Truthfulness. The first is Ahimsa or Non-Harming. I combined the two and did my truth-telling with as much integrity and kindness as I could. I wrote my truth. I moved through my truth in yoga class. I danced my truth in a new movement class called Qoya. And, finally, I learned to be compassionately truthful with those I loved. I told old friends that I needed an overhaul of the relationship. I told my husband how I really felt. I told my mom I was a grown-up now and could make my own choices, but I still needed her love.

I forgot to be nice and learned to be kind. I declared that I was changing with every word, with every step. I was learning how to be myself in a new way, and this did not always go over well. Some people preferred the person I used to be, not this in-between person who raised her voice from time to time and even said the dreaded "no." Not everyone is ready for change when we are. I had to surrender to that truth as well. People might not like the new/old me, but I felt her rising in my body. It was a complete shattering. She was coming through the cracks whether or not they (or I) liked it. I could not explain it with a PowerPoint presentation complete with graphs and charts, but I was coming home to myself.

And it all started with the breath. Something so simple. The practice of moving air in and out of the body helped me release old patterns and expectations. The practice of opening my body from the inside out created a newly stable foundation. From here, I have a place to step. From this place of balance and integrity, I can move forward with grace.



## Life Notes

**Holly Holt** is a writer/ storyteller with a deep devotion to practices that heal the body and wake up the mind. For most of the early 2000s, she was a performing singer/songwriter who recorded a well received CD of original music. Currently, she is working on a novel, teaches yoga, blogs, and leads Word Gathering Writing Circles in Sacramento, CA.

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[www.facebook.com/hollyholtwrites](https://www.facebook.com/hollyholtwrites)  
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# EMBODIED



BETH HAESSIG, PHD

## BALANCE

**“Balance is a process of continuous integration.”** Philip Shepard  
(p. 431 in *New Self, New World*).

**B**uilt into our biology are mechanisms of mind which continuously assess value (+ or -) to our experience. The biological necessity of such mechanisms is obvious: we are designed to survive. To assign value (+ or -) allows us to make decisions in childhood, (the most vulnerable time period) that support our physical or psychological survival. For example, Mom is angry. We assign a value (- or +) and therefore we engage in specific behaviors which support our understanding of what we need to do to feel safe/survive. Assessment informs our action: we move toward + and away from -.

**T**here can be no balance in adulthood, if we follow our value-laden thoughts and beliefs which developed when we were young. But how do we tackle our biology—the propensity to label good/bad to everything we experience?

### *Moving Beyond Survival*

**Y**es, we want to survive, but is there an additional way we may



# AWARENESS

perceive that is not derived from our learned appraisals (+ and -) coming from childhood? Our current assessments are based on lessons/knowledge coming from the first 20 years of life, when we were taking in experiences, based on significant limitations of power and cognitive and/or traumatic experience. To maintain the same assessments as adults, is to stay as powerless as a child, as reactive as a child, as needy as a child, and as helpless as a child.

**E**xperiencing something *for what it is, rather than for the value we place on it*, removes our conditioned history from our vision. For example, our view of others would be infused with balance as we would no longer view another through the lens of + or -. "I'm mad because you're not doing this for me" would be replaced by "there you are, as you" (i.e. seeing you for you rather than seeing you for me). Or, it's raining outside—automatic reaction "oh bummer it's raining (-) and then an experience that today is not as good as another non-rainy day (+). The assessments happen so quickly—we rarely notice their driving force. Without assessment, we give ourselves the chance to experience a bigger picture—one that takes in everything, leaving you standing firmly in equanimity rather than continuously moving toward (+) or moving away (-) from experiences.

**B**alance is about letting go of our assessments and living from a place that is beyond what we THINK. Balance is groundedness as you take in the wholeness of an experience. Balance is freedom to fall, to move around a bit, to rise, and to fall again without labeling any of it. Balance is letting go of what you know and existing at the edge of this moment, without an agenda. Balance is not wanting this or that, being pulled here and there by assessments, but standing maybe like a tree, in the movement of "continuous integration."

**Beth L. Haessig, Psy.D.** is a licensed psychologist, a certified body-centered psychotherapist, and a certified yoga therapist. She is the former president of the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy. She works privately with children, in schools and in an urban hospital as an integrative health psychologist. [www.bethhaessig.com](http://www.bethhaessig.com) for more information



In honor of  
**Emilie Conrad Da'oud (1934-2014)**

A pioneer in the somatic field, a visionary, and the founder of Continuum Movement®



" It was the vision of a universal human that beckoned me. I had no map to follow except my strong urge to experience our essential bio-lineage and my certainty that our existences were fed far beyond our cultural moorings. It is my belief that we carry in our cells, in our tissues, in the very throb of our existence an underlying flow that urges, inspires, flares our nostrils and beats our heart. This encompassing atmosphere of love has its own destiny - perhaps using humans as its messengers, this love has arrived on Earth."

Emilie Conrad

Her work is being continued by the organization she founded and loved so much.  
For more information go to [Continuummovement.com](http://Continuummovement.com)

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Denise Gross  
Denise O'Connor  
Elan Freyderon  
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Lara Michele  
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Salomeh Diaz  
Sam Berne  
Sarah Grace  
Sherry Pae  
Susanna Knittel  
Sylvain Meret  
T'mimah Ickovits  
Tania Boyd  
Yoko Oinuma  
Yoshitaka Koda



## **Sunshine Smoothie**

*Packed with vitamin C, sweet and tangy citrus smoothie!!*

*2-3 freshly-juiced tangerines*

*1 ruby red grapefruit (juiced)*

*A handful of frozen strawberries*

*Peel and juice the tangerines with the grapefruit, and puree the blended juice with the frozen strawberries.*



## **The Iron Maiden Juice**

**Feeling weak??? This juice will renew!**

**2 large beets, peeled and sliced**

**2 carrots, trimmed**

**1 small apple, peeled, cored, and sliced**

**a handful of spinach**

**1/4 cup of water**

**Juice in order end with a bit of water.**

**Iron-rich and also a liver cleanser.**

# BOOK REVIEW

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Winston, D. (2019). *The Little Book of Being: Practices and guidance for uncovering your natural awareness*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True. ISBN 978-1683642176.

*Written by Diana Winston*  
*Reviewed by Kathryn Metro*



Diana Winston's new guide, *The Little Book of Being*, draws on her twenty-nine years of experience to describe the concept of natural awareness through mindfulness. Natural awareness is the ability to perceive, sense, feel, or be cognizant of an experience or situation. The book is geared to anyone who wants to try meditation and to experienced meditators who want to try new methods.

The book includes chapters that instruct people new to meditation on the basics, as well as practices that can augment or invigorate the existing practices of experienced meditators. Winston writes in short, concise chapters and uses simple vocabulary to make the book feel accessible. She also includes "glimpse practices," which can be included in a daily meditation.

The first part of the book focuses on

the foundations of natural awareness, providing a basic overview of what, why and how it works. The second part discusses techniques for both mindfulness and natural awareness meditations, using classic mindfulness as a starting point. In the third part, Winston writes about tools for recognizing existing natural awareness and how living a life of natural awareness can be fulfilling.

Winston describes awareness as a "capacity of the human mind." It is the ability to perceive, sense, feel, or be conscious of an experience. Natural awareness is an awareness in which the focus is on the state of feeling aware, rather than what we are being aware of. In the first part of her book, Winston lists some markers of natural awareness, noting that it might feel like "your mind is completely aware and undistracted without you doing anything in particular to make yourself aware" (13). The reason



Winston refers to this type of awareness as being “natural” is because this is natural or inherent to all humans, because we have all had experiences during which our mind feels at ease. It is also natural because the awareness is perpetually available so long as we can find it. Winston points out that meditators likely have already experienced natural awareness and have probably been working too hard to achieve it.

The techniques’ section of the book includes simple guidelines for successfully achieving natural awareness. Winston specifies the best length, time of day, location, and frequency for natural awareness. She also emphasizes the importance of clarifying and setting intentions before beginning to meditate. I’ve found it can be helpful if you set a motivation for meditation and deliberately state what the practice is about. Some people might want to meditate to benefit not just themselves but people around them because “transforming our own minds impacts our families, work, friends, neighborhoods, communities, and the institutions of which we are

*Continues on page 58*





a part" (60). Setting motivation might make meditation meaningful when it feels difficult or banal.

The embodiment section of the book provides tips about how to maintain and augment the practice of natural awareness. Winston points out that "the cultivation of natural awareness takes ongoing, regular practice, both formal and informal." Therefore, in order to master the art of natural awareness, we must integrate deliberate meditation and informal practice. The two methods mutually support each other. Winston advises readers to spend time in nature because of its rejuvenating and peaceful presence. She believes that nature somehow helps us tap into our natural awareness, by taking us back to a preindustrial stage. Even if the closest natural setting is a park, Winston claims that being outside can positively impact our ability to be aware and our quality of life. Another strategy that Winston mentions is "fake it till it's real." At times when natural awareness seems unreachable, Winston encourages readers to pretend it is here, repeating the phrase "it's already here, I'm already aware." Repeating this phrase can help one to recall that natural awareness exists even when it's not exactly apparent.

Winston's new guide offers helpful advice for both novice meditators and experienced meditators looking to improve their practice. The concept of "natural awareness" can seem vague at times, and Winston repeatedly defines it throughout the book. However, her "glimpse" exercises and anecdotes help the guide feel more engaging and the concept of natural awareness to feel more accessible.

**Diana Winston** is the Director of Mindfulness Education at UCLA Semel Institute's Mindful Awareness Research Center (MARC) and has taught mindfulness since 1999 in a variety of settings. She is a founding member of the International Mindfulness Teachers Association. She is one of the early founders of meditation programs for youth and is currently focusing on mindfully parenting her daughter.

**Kathryn Metro** studies applied psychology at New York University and is set to graduate in 2021. She has worked in various classrooms around the Greater New York City area, and is interested in writing, communications and Spanish.





# What if mindfulness were called a pause?



“Wait a minute!” The hand is rising forward as if it were a dam on a mighty river. Not so much to block the river, as to allow for some regulation.

It takes such a pause to interrupt the flow of our thoughts. Or to give ourselves a chance to have a different perspective on our interactions.

When we replace the word “mindfulness” with the word “pause,” we set aside the expectations that can be associated with “mindfulness.”

We just focus on what happens when

we pause, i.e. when the interruption allows for something new to emerge.

The Active Pause® project features podcast conversations as well as stimulating articles and mindful practices.

Membership is free. You can “pay forward” by sharing these ideas with your clients and other people who might benefit from them. And, of course, you are welcome to contribute your ideas to this collaborative process.

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**Serge Prengel, LMHC**, has been exploring creative approaches to mindfulness in therapy and in everyday life. He is in private practice in New York City (<http://ProactiveChange.com>), and is the editor of *Somatic Perspectives on Psychotherapy* (<http://SomaticPerspectives.com>). He is a graduate of France's Sorbonne University and HEC School. He is certified in Focusing, Core Energetics and Somatic Experiencing, and also draws from Systems-Centered theory.



The following is something I have presented in workshop form, but not written about. So, even more than usual, I welcome your comments and questions. See end of article for how to send them.

In this article, I will talk about mindfulness, and the mindful pause, within a context that's different from the way we usually think about these things. Essentially, I will be describing how something similar to the Threat Response Cycle seems to be happening when we take a mindful pause.

Because these concepts are an unlikely pairing, I am devoting a lot of the article to why I would even consider it.

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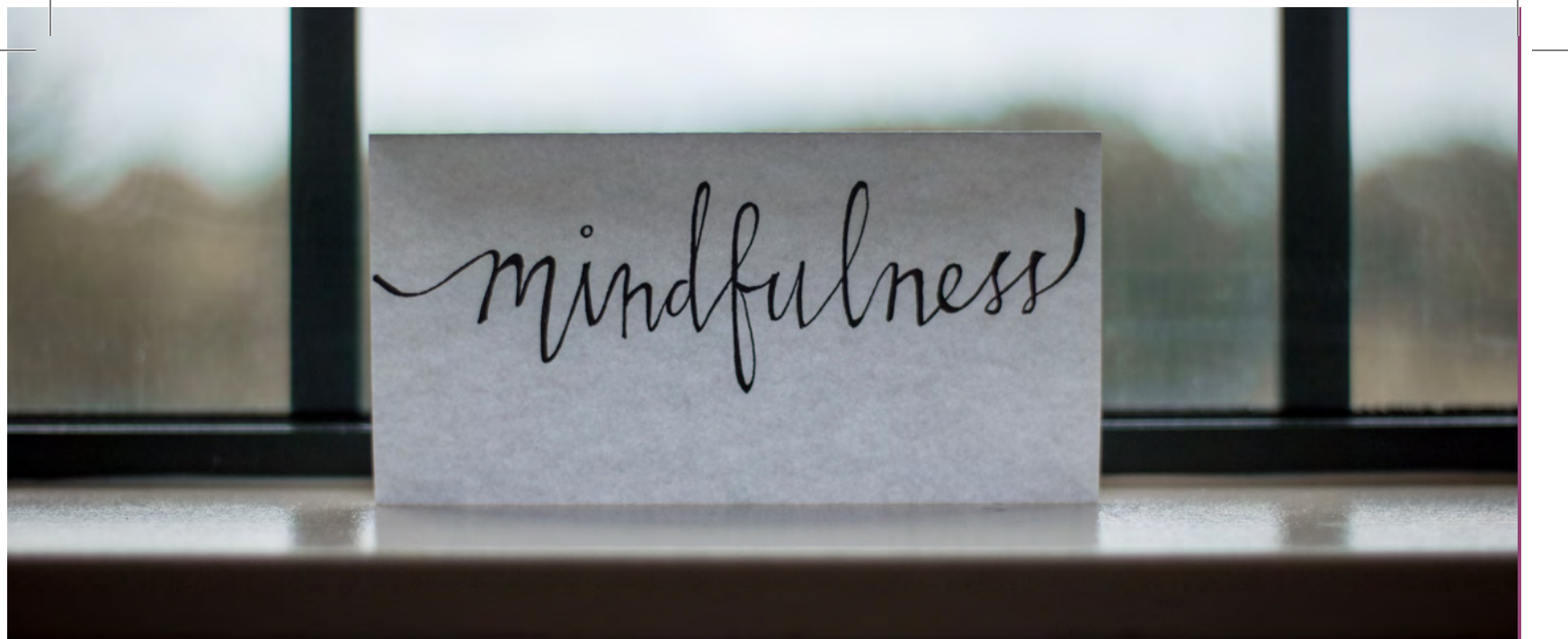
The Threat Response Cycle is something that has been observed by ethologists, people who study animals in the wild.

Peter Levine paid attention to this process as part of his work on understanding trauma. He approached this within the context that there is a continuity between human beings and other animals, i.e. we respond to threat following the same cycle as other animals. Trauma is when we cannot fully accomplish the response that is required in order to deal with a given threat. Then, the implicit movement, and the energy that would be necessary to complete this unfinished business have no place to go and are stored in our body. So, to understand trauma, it is interesting to know the normal sequence in which we respond to threat, in order to better understand where this cycle of response has been interrupted.

When I talk about this topic, I often encounter some degree of confusion: I seem to be talking about mindfulness, so why did I suddenly introduce the notion of threat, and animals, and also

*Continues on page 62*





mindfulness

trauma? Is this actually about trauma as opposed to what happens when we take a mindful pause?

Well, I'm just mentioning trauma to explain how I, as a therapist, got exposed to the Threat Response Cycle. And only talking about animals because that's how scientists observed the cycle.

But then, what does this cycle of response to threat have to do with mindfulness? Are we talking about mindfulness as a way of dealing with threat? No. The only reason I'm bringing up the Threat Response Cycle is because it is a way of processing information that has been deeply ingrained in us through evolution. Not just as human or hominids, even much earlier stages in our evolution.

It's something that structures the way our organism functions. Evolutionary psychology and neuroscience have led us to pay much more attention to those bottom-up processes that we share with animals. To not just pay attention to what happens top down, i.e. consciousness or thought. Seeing the much more elaborate processes that we have as human beings as complementary to the more basic processes, allowing us to perform in a more subtle manner, especially when we're in a place of relative safety. But, under stress, the more basic processes come back to the fore.

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So far, I haven't yet talked about the topic itself, which is as follows: The Threat Response Cycle, which is the way in which we as well as other animals respond to threat, is a deeply ingrained process through which we deal with what happens to us. Understanding this process can shed some light on what happens when we shift from mindless to mindful.



When I talk about mindfulness, I'm talking about everyday mindfulness as opposed to something esoteric: Mindful as the opposite of mindless. Doing something mindlessly means your mind is not engaged in it: there is a mechanical, or a passive quality to it. It's not that "mindless" is synonymous with "passive" and "mindful" with "active". It's more like giving a sense of some broad circles of meaning, with one that encompasses notions like "active", or "engaged" (the "mindful" concept), and another that encompasses notions such as "passive" or "disengaged".

These "mindful" qualities are part of our genetic potential because they had high evolutionary value. Imagine our remote ancestors, living in the wild, in a place where they have to pay attention to finding food and to not becoming food for other animals. There is an obvious advantage to being able to pay attention to what's happening, and to be alert in a sustainable way. Not hyper alertness, but relaxed alertness. Which is the nervous system state that the Polyvagal Theory ascribes to the ventral vagal branch of the parasympathetic system.

Compared to the way those ancestors walked in the wild, let's think about how we wander in the woods, say in a state park. We really don't need to be very engaged in order to follow the path. And so, in a civilized life, there are many times where we don't have the need to engage very much. I'm not just talking about present times; I'm talking about ever since we have been living in

societies more complex than the small tribes we evolved in. People in the time of Buddha had already noticed the same thing.

Now, it's not that being "mindless" is inherently bad. Being mindless is also part of our natural skillset honed by evolution. If we had to be conscious about everything, we would quickly go on overload. In fact, "mindless" is our default mode, in the sense that the vast majority of our processes occur below consciousness. Something comes to attention only when there is a need for it to come to attention.

And so there was a need for something to jolt us out of our natural mindless mode. It takes a disruption to wake up our attention. Now you see why I am putting this within the context of how we respond to threat. Essentially, because our attention is triggered when we are confronted with a potential threat.

A parenthesis: I do not mean to imply that facing danger is the only time when we pay attention. We get very stimulated by the opportunity of something good. We get engaged in the pursuit of it, and this engagement gets reinforced through the satisfaction we get from it, though the rewards circuits. So, it is not part of what I am talking about here, which is how we shift from "mindless" (i.e. more passive, more disengaged) to "mindful" (i.e. more active, more engaged).

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So, what we're talking about here

*Continues on page 64*

are situations when there is a need to trigger this shift. We do this by introducing a disruption: the mindful pause. I will describe the stages of the threat response to show how the mindful pause can be seen as a similar process.

**There are five stages to the Threat Response cycle.**

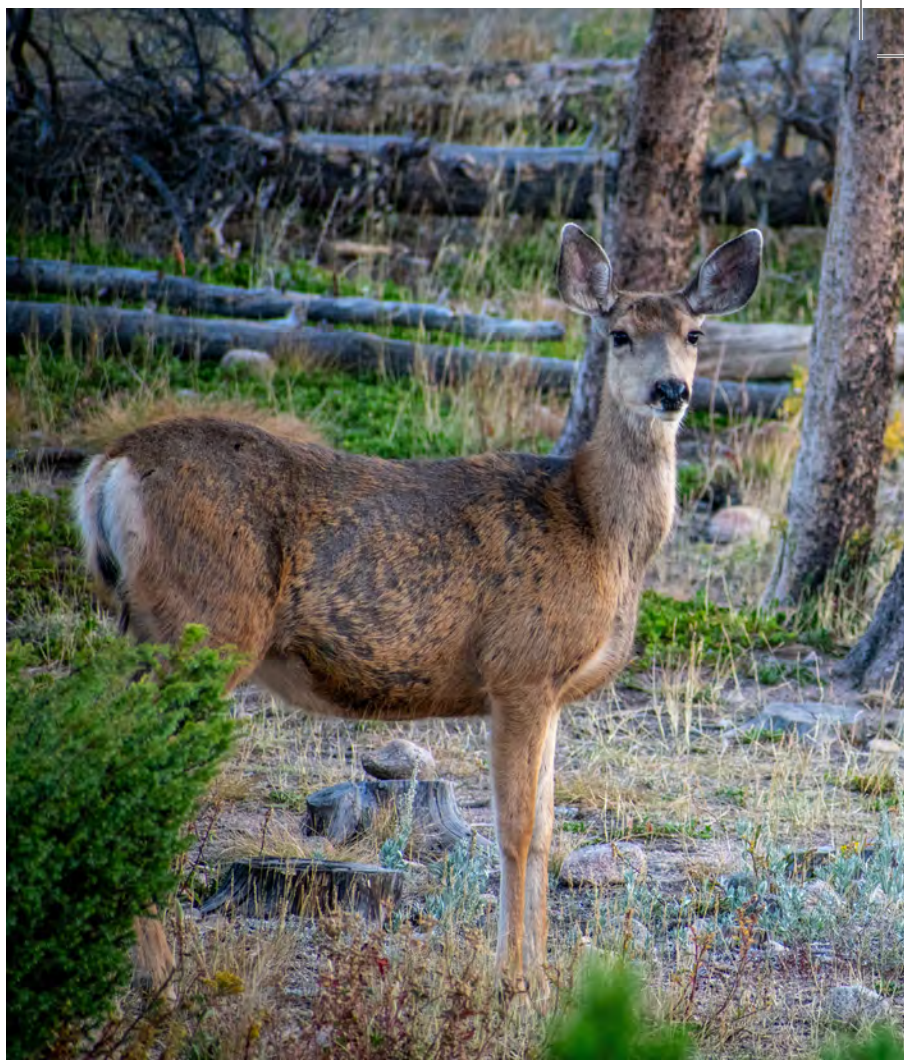
The first one is that we stop in our tracks as we notice the disruption. Arrest and startle: Imagine a deer in the woods. The leaves are rustling. The deer stops. Or imagine an animal reacting to a new smell...

Something is different in the environment, and warrants attention. If there was no disruption, we would go on our merry mindless way.

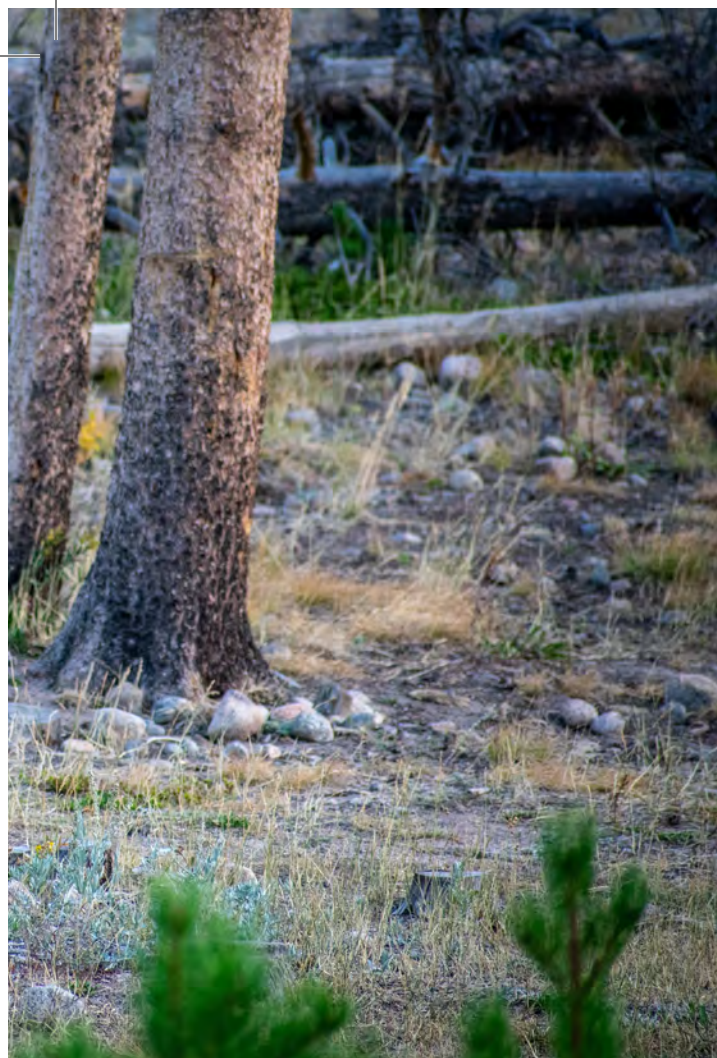
Then comes the second step in the cycle: Orienting, scanning, exploring the environment. The deer is looking around, listening. Or the dog is sniffing. The animal is searching for more clues about what is happening, orienting toward what might be causing the disruption. Of course, all of this takes place very rapidly.

The third step in that sequence is assessing whether the situation is a danger or not. For instance, the deer might see that there is nothing threatening, the rustling was just the wind. Then things can go back to normal. If so, the threat response cycle has found a natural end, and life goes on. It may also be that the deer sees something, for instance a human being. If there is actually a danger, then the cycle goes to stage 4, which we are going to talk about soon. But, first, I will make two comments.

One is that these stages are occurring extremely fast. Talking about them as stages makes them seem much longer than they actually are.







The other comment is that, when we talk about evaluating the threat, it seems like a cognitive process, and it's not. It's whether or not what the animal sees (or hears, or smells) triggers something in its database of experience and instinct that is associated with danger.

So, let's say that there is a sense of danger. Now comes stage 4, which is how we respond to danger. There is a hardwired instinct to protect ourselves and our loved ones from danger. The sympathetic nervous system is activated, and the animal goes into flight/fight mode. A lot of energy is mobilized to deal with the emergency situation, to evade or to fight.

If we cannot do that successfully, and perish in the process, that's the end of it. If this stage is successful, what then happens is there is a fifth stage. It's about completion and discharge. It is no longer useful to keep in the body the energy that allowed the

animal's fight or flight; it would actually be harmful to keep it. The energy is physically discharged, for instance through shaking, trembling. That's the transition between the emergency and normal life, "the war is over": it's the completion of the cycle.

Obviously, the animal is not processing this verbally or conceptually, but simply processing it at a physical level in terms of discharging the energy that is no longer appropriate. It is then being able to go back to its normal mode of functioning, which is relaxed alertness.

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Let's now go back how this relates to mindfulness and the mindful pause. I gave a hint of that earlier, by positioning it the issue in terms of mindless vs mindful. The general concept here is that mindless is the default mode, and it takes a disruption to alert us that something warrants attention. This disruption is something I equate with the threat in the cycle.

Sometimes, at this point, people ask me: So, are you talking about actual threats in the process of mindfulness? No, I am not talking about a threat or a disruption in the sense of actual danger. I am talking about how taking a

*Continues on page 66*

mindful pause is a way to game the system into perceiving a disruption, i.e. something that the system perceives as a kind of “threat” because it is no longer the “same old, same old”.

The Threat Response Cycle is a process that is so deeply ingrained in us that it is triggered when there is a glitch, a disruption, something that implies the possibility of

something warrants attention.

Stage 2 is Orienting. Having a sense that something warrants attention automatically triggers stage two, which is to figure out what it is that might warrant attention. Mixing metaphors for a moment, I would like to suggest an analogy with what happens with a GPS. If you take a wrong turn somewhere, the GPS has to re-orient and recompute the itinerary. This is similar to what happens when we take a pause: we interrupt the ongoing process, and this triggers a re-orienting.

Stage 3 is to the stage of assessing whether there is danger or not. Of course, in this process, we are not talking about actual threats. Remember, we’re talking about mindfulness, and taking a mindful pause. To take a concrete example, let’s say that you want to be more mindful of how we feel about the situation you’re in. You did step 1 (you took an intentional pause). This triggered orienting (your organism scanning for sensations). The assessment of stage 3 is simply whether there is something that warrants attention, or not. In other words, this is not a very subtle tool. The question is just whether, based on your implicit database, this warrants further action or not. The default mode is going to be that things are “normal”. Why? Because, otherwise, the alarm system would have been triggered without the intentional pause. This is why, when we ask people to sense into

danger. We take a mindful pause, and this is enough to disrupt the status quo. Like the rustling of leaves for the deer. Like the deer, this stops us in our track:





what's happening inside, their answer is "nothing".

Something similar happens when you try to explore a hunch, an intuition, a felt sense. Your mind automatically finds a handle for it, something you already know, and hangs on to it: "Problem solved". But the point of taking a mindful pause is not to confirm your existing preconceptions, it is to give yourself the opportunity to find fresh meaning. So, you need to gently override the default diagnosis of stage 3, "I know", and stay with the unknown.

Why is it that we have such a strong bias for quick assessment over lengthy contemplation? There is survival value in the ability to have a quick assessment. It works well in nature. Not so much in our more complex civilized lives. The point is, when you get to step 3, if you just pay perfunctory attention, you find that nothing is the matter, and this ends the cycle. In order to go through a mindful process, you have to game the system. That is, you need to disregard the "no problem" response and intentionally stay with the inquiry. You do this gently, of course, with a sense of curiosity, and the intention of allowing what there is to come up, as opposed

to forcing anything. But you need to stay with it to avoid automatic closure of the cycle.

This is what makes it possible to get to stage 4 and actually engage with the issue. There's a lot of energy there. You may notice it in its positive, pleasant aspects (a sense of feeling stimulated) or its less pleasant aspects (feeling fidgety or even agitated). The agitation may have a lot to do with the default mode, which is flight. There is a difference here compared to situations of actual threat, where you can use all the energy that you can get. Here, for



it to be effective, the energy needs to be contained within the mindful bandwidth, otherwise it distracts from the process.

*Continues on page 68*

So, you notice the energy, and you remember that this is happening because the Threat Response Cycle is activated. You also remember that there is no actual threat, and that helps you engage the mindfulness circuit, the ventral vagal network, which helps lower the activation. This helps you stay mindfully engaged with the situation. You stay with it, and an idea, an insight comes up.

Now you're in stage 5. As the insight comes up, the "aha" moment comes with a sense of energy coming down, settling. The experience of meaning comes with the sense of the energy coming down, of feeling more grounded. Even if you hadn't felt the energy in stage 4, you now know that your energy was up then, because you experience how it is coming down now. And that is the experience of finding meaning and completion.

Is this the end, the "happily ever after?" This is just the end of a cycle. As you stay with the sense of completion, you may notice it naturally shifting into another instance of step 1, the beginning of natural curiosity. Or you may foster that with another intentional pause, to deepen the inquiry. Just as, for animals in the wild, the Threat Response Cycle is not a one-time adventure of a lifetime, but it is part of how we deal with the challenges of life.

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What is it that I get out of thinking about mindfulness in terms of the Threat Response cycle?

It puts the mindful pause, and the shift from mindless to mindful, into a more down-to-earth perspective. We all have the innate ability to be mindful. We tend

to be mindless as opposed to mindful, not as a design flaw, but actually as part of the elegant simplicity of our functioning. Attention is not something that we have to strive to achieve, but something that arises naturally out of certain circumstances. Knowing that helps





us game the system to be more mindful when we want to be. And the way we game the system is through a deeply ingrained process that has been essential for our survival, the Threat Response Cycle.

Seeing the continuity between such a basic process as the Threat Response Cycle and the practice of mindfulness gives me a sense of spiritual and existential grounding – the sense of our humanity as part of something larger.

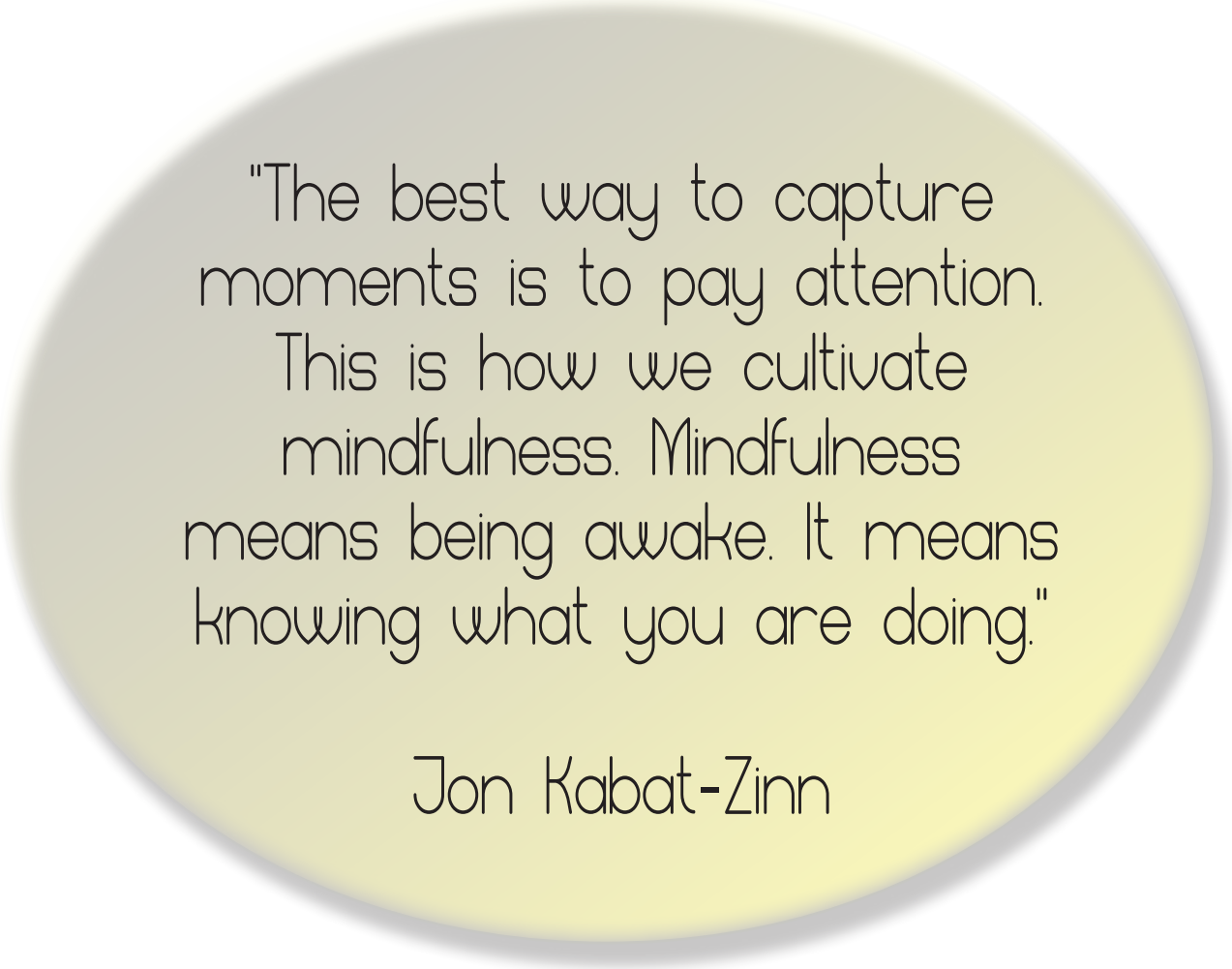
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I welcome your comments and questions. You can use the feedback form at:

**<https://somaticperspectives.com/feedback/>**

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"The best way to capture moments is to pay attention. This is how we cultivate mindfulness. Mindfulness means being awake. It means knowing what you are doing."

Jon Kabat-Zinn

# THE POWER OF ATTACHMENT:

## HOW TO CREATE DEEP AND LASTING INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Written by Diane Poole Heller, PhD  
Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn, PhD



Do you long for connection? To feel that special moment of meeting when someone feels into you, when they resonate and attune to you?

Do you wonder what it might feel like? Have you felt it once, long ago, but feel as if it's gone, a distant memory?

Is someone in your life already offering you that sense of connection but you're not able to let it in?

Perhaps you push it away? Avoid it at all costs? Maybe it's too scary? Maybe it's too uncertain, that sense of, *why get close when they're just going to abandon me, anyway?* Maybe your disconnection from yourself, done during a war-zone-type-childhood to survive the fracas, is limiting your ability to be close, to feel the closeness that you crave.

The fear that comes during a childhood marked by rejection, neglect, withholding of love, threats and abuse leaves its mark. As adults we're left longing to be felt, seen, held, witnessed in our entirety with love and compassion and to return those same feelings to another human being. Most people yearn



to be in a close, lasting, loving relationship.

But, is it possible to change at this point in our lives? We're not children anymore. We're adults living adult lives, trying to maintain adult relationships all the while feeling empty, alone, lost, isolated, disconnected.



## Can it be different?

According to Diane Poole Heller, a pioneer in attachment theory and a leading expert in Adult Attachment Theory, we can learn how to have meaningful lasting relationships despite complicated formative years that may have impacted our attachment style and our willingness to risk close ties, including those that are intimate and/or platonic.

She is clear that “beneath scars and maladapted behaviors, we all have an attachment system that’s oriented to trust and togetherness with loved ones” (pg. 9).

## How does she know?

Heller was in an accident days before her wedding (in 1988). She was driving (at 55 mph) and noticed the bride-and-groom wedding-topper her soon-to-be mother-in-law had given her slipping toward the passenger floorboard. Not wanting the precious gift to fall and break, she clipped off her seat belt and leaned over to grab the figurine. In so doing, she pulled on the steering wheel, her car swerved and smashed head-on into another car.

While the driver in the other car walked away “relatively unscathed”, Heller suffered a traumatic brain injury. The wedding went on, but the impact of the accident created long lasting shock waves of disconnection, pain, dissociation, memory loss, and memory flashbacks from a traumatic

childhood that had long been buried. She sought help. Thus, her life’s work began.

## Healing: Self and Others

Meeting Peter Levine and working with him via Somatic Experiencing brought release, change, aliveness and wellbeing. Heller continued as an SE student and with time she became an SE facilitator. She has taught SE worldwide for more than twenty-five years. These experiences supported her personal and professional goal to help herself and others to “reconnect in relationship in the face of isolation and dissociation that can accompany traumatic experiences” (pg. 3).

Questions have guided Heller’s explorations and in turn the answers form the body of her work and this book. The major topics that keep bubbling to the surface include:

“How do we heal broken connections to our self and others, and how can we come back to a sense of wholeness?”

How do we integrate our diverse experiences and all the parts of our self that feel so broken and fragmented?

How do we emerge from incredible loss, fear, and powerlessness to regain empowerment and resiliency?

When trauma robs us of our physical self through dissociation or loss of boundaries, how do we

*Continues on page 72*

become embodied and safely connected again?  
How do we reclaim our birthright to feel grounded and centered, to feel connection and compassion, to have access to all the facets of our humanness and our spiritual nature?" (pp 3-4).

The answers, according to Heller, come by way of attachment theory. As we decipher our early attachment history and explore our different attachment styles to determine our dominant patterns, we can heal our attachment wounds.

## The Book

Heller provides a clear discussion to help readers understand attachment theory in general and the different attachment styles, noted as secure, anxious, ambivalent, and disorganized. At the end of each chapter there are questions to help readers assess which style they may align more with. I appreciated the direction to answer the questions, twice. First, when you are imagining a relaxed situation and second when you are tense, feeling defensive, upset. The results are indeed different. I also thought it wise to let readers know that our attachment style is not fixed in one category or the other. Our attachment style is individualized, and fluid, flexible. In some relationships we may have a sense of a secure attachment while in another we might feel more avoidant or ambivalent. The key is to consider your patterns, the consistency of the connections you experience, and with which sorts of people.

Exercises throughout each chapter involve reflection, meditation, writing, directed visualizations. They are designed to help readers identify the root causes of their issues as well as potential difficulties and strengths within their relationships. Heller sets the groundwork so readers can grow stronger and move forward from what's holding them back in isolation and loneliness.

Peter Levine offers his thoughts in the Foreword, talking at length about hero's and healing. He notes that Heller's exercises "will certainly help you rediscover your true, embodied self, and will guide you to renegotiate your own obstacles to connections with others" (pg. xii).

Heller then spends time in her introduction setting the stage for the exercises she shares and grounding attachment theory and its place in our adult lives today. The following four chapters are devoted to the attachment styles: secure attachment, avoidant attachment, ambivalent attachment, and disorganized attachment, and then she discusses attachment styles and romantic partnerships. She ends with acknowledgments, notes, a selected bibliography, an index and the 'about the author' information.



I appreciated her introduction of the term 'contingency'. It's an important concept within attachment theory and it's the word that captures the feeling that many people crave: *a relational experience where you feel understood by another person; you feel this person is attuned to you, resonates with who you are* (pg.10).

## Cognitive Development, Brain Science and Attachment Theory

To help readers understand how disruptions/disturbances in our early attachment experiences result in attachment adaptations, Heller shows how the brain shapes itself around our relational environment. She



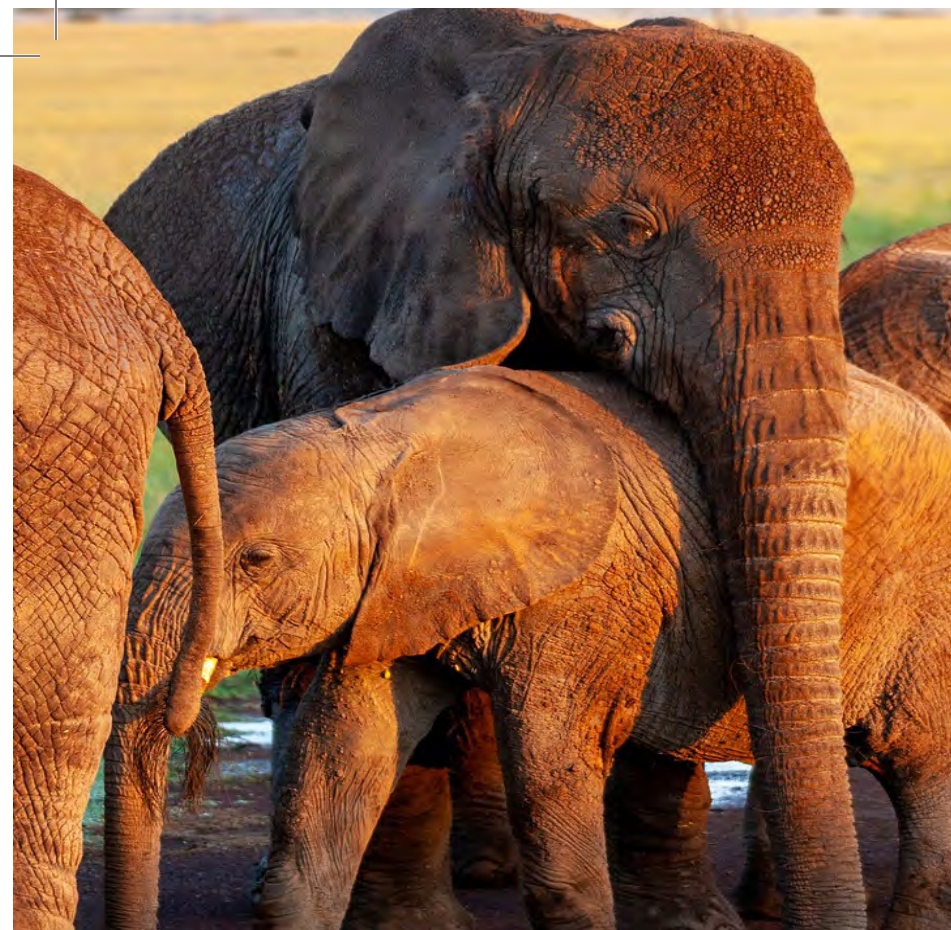
clarifies the concept of neuronal pruning noting that our "brain is born fat . . ." meaning it comes with lots of extra cells, aka extra potential, in case we need them. This way, if things are positive and safe and people are responsive as you grow up, "the parts of the brain aligned with secure attachment are highly structured, evolved and easy to access" (pg. 17). Whereas, a child's brain growing up in a less-than-ideal home will prune away the parts aligned with secure attachment and emphasize its own defensive mechanisms (i.e. flight, fight, hypervigilance, etc.). Because our brain is built

for growth and adaptation (neuroplasticity), as adults we can "affect our neural pathways and steer them in the direction of secure attachments" (pg.18).

## Attachment Styles

As mentioned previously, each chapter covers one attachment style. The writing is easy to stay with. Heller paces information with stories, examples, and exercises. She explains that while doing the exercises, old wounds may surface, you may feel as if something is happening now in the present moment (when you connect with a sensation stored in the amygdala, memories surface without a story but fresh as if in the

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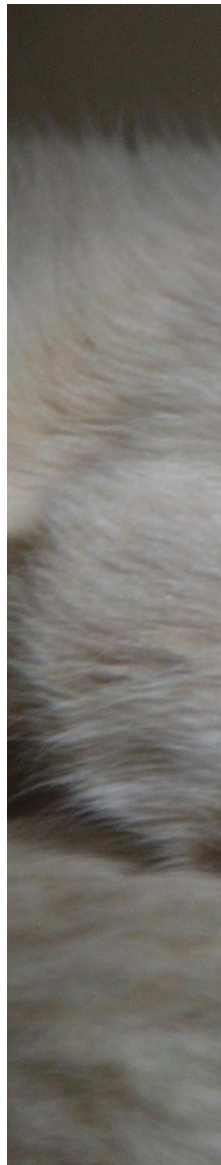
moment). She offers ways to mitigate this situation, to titrate what is happening, or to stop the process all together.

She offered that one way to read the book was to simply practice the Secure Attachment Skills offered in Chapter 1. She starts the chapter explaining what secure attachment is not and then delves into what it is . . . in short, secure attachment is attunement. Heller writes that it "reflects

a positive-enough environment that creates and engenders basic trust". It comes when children grow-up feeling taken care of, protected, when they have compassionate parents who are on their side, who understand them, who get them. These parents offer their children autonomy as well as interdependence and they're safe enough in themselves so everyone can let their guard down, play, be close, touch (appropriately), and have fun together (citing social engagement and Stephen Porge's Polyvagal theory). Resiliency was also mentioned.

There are 12 Secure Attachment Skills (SAS) offered in Chapter 1 with definitions, descriptions and exercises to do solo and in relationship. They include: Listen deeply, practice presence, attune, engage in joint attention, maintain contact, be mindful of comings and goings, use your eyes, play, un-automate, repair, build and expand your resources, and attend to the good.

I offer a caveat. While some readers scanning this review might think they know how to do all Secure Attachment Skills, I counter that they're not what you think. Heller's descriptions and exercises are clear, concise, and at times challenging. The meanings of each word in the Secure Attachment Skills list might sound familiar but when you do them in relationship with yourself and others the words change from nouns to verbs. You are engaged and connected and sensing and feeling, and at times it might be vastly different than your preconceived definition of





the noun experience.

### Coming to a Close

There's much to read and do and experience and learn in this book. I've barely started the Secure Attachment Skills. I want space for practice and exploration. Sections need rereading, especially the chapter on romantic partnerships. This is one of those books that having read it once through, I can now pick it up, open to any page at random, and find something intriguing, informative, energizing.





*VITALITY shows in NOT only the  
ABILITY to PERSIST but the  
ABILITY to START OVER.*

*~ F. Scott Fitzgerald*



*photo credit: Lucas Favre Unsplash*



# Love & Imperfection

## A Therapist's Story

*"This book is a rich offering, full of wisdom and insight."*

Dr. Richard Strozzi-Heckler



by Clare Myatt LLB, MA



Portrait photograph by Cordelia Noble

Clare Myatt is a seasoned practitioner specialising in trauma, shame and addiction. She celebrated thirty years sobriety in 2018.

**Love & Imperfection: A Therapist's Story**

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This book is an intimate memoir about the brave journey of a seasoned practitioner and her client Bill. She dares to use the word love to describe their mutually healing relationship, where they delved deep into emotion, empathy and compassion. Both struggled with trauma, shame and addiction. *Both changed.* Relying on profound honesty, transparency and vulnerability, together they unwittingly experienced the healing power of agape. This revealing, poignant story will inspire those in the healing profession, as well as anyone interested in personal transformation.

"I deeply appreciate this brave book. The writing style makes this book one of the most accessible and effortless accounts of the work of therapy and the life of working as a therapist that I have read. The level of transparency is inspiring, deeply honest and I can imagine many readers, whether clients, therapists, students or the general public, being touched, enlightened and relieved by the candour and insight into the world of therapy."

**Dr. Greg Madison**

Author of *Theory and Practice of Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy*

"Through her personal, poetic story of a therapist's journey to self-awareness and growth, Clare has woven a memoir of mutual help and change through the shared power of AGAPE – the selfless love of one person for another without sexual implications. Clare shows us that the deepest experiences of help and of change occur when both therapist and client have a commitment to truth and authenticity with each other."

**Dr. Stephanie Brown**

Director, The Addictions Institute and author of *Treating the Alcoholic: A Developmental Model of Recovery*

"I loved this book. It is a profound, brave exploration of humanity in the therapeutic relationship, and the role of love and spirit in that endeavour."

**Pete Hamill**

Senior Teacher at Strozzi Institute and author of *Embodied Leadership*





## **DR. DIANE POOLE HELLER**

*Be sure to listen to Diane's Podcast conversation with Michael Ostrolenk as they discuss **The Power of Attachment**.*

*For more information visit our subscriber's forum online at [www.SomaticPsychotherapyToday.com](http://www.SomaticPsychotherapyToday.com)*

# AUTHOR REFLECTIONS

## THE POWER OF ATTACHMENT

When I began speaking with Sounds True about a written book following my audiobook, *Healing Your Attachment Wounds: How to Create Deep and Intimate Relationships*, I wasn't sure what to expect, as I have always considered myself more proficient with the spoken than the written word. Nevertheless, we started the journey to *The Power of Attachment*, which I actually started over 12 years ago, but somehow, it never felt finished to me. I found that progress often stalled with new research and trying to contain everything about attachment theory between the covers of a single book.

For years, I had a vision that encompassed providing valuable clinical knowledge for therapists while making content about attachment theory digestible for the average partner, parent, or friend who was looking for answers about attachment, as well. I believe that sharing information that helps each of us move toward secure attachment can not only improve our individual lives, but also improve the communities where we live and provide global healing, as well.

This knowledge is so vital, and I am so grateful to have worked with Sounds True, whose competent staff helped me design the architecture of the book and sculpt it into an organized guide for anyone seeking the tools to heal attachment injury for themselves, loved ones, or clients.

Because so much of our trauma or attachment injury becomes stored in implicit "not conscious yet" memory, it was important for me to include experiential exercises for the reader to become more in touch with an embodied sense of their wounding and also to highlight their experiences of a healthy relationship.

Creating specific *Corrective Experiences* to address the core wounds at the heart of any insecure attachment patterning gives us a direction to heal old wounds as well as a way to meet unmet needs that may have occurred in childhood or later. One of the challenges in doing this in written form is making sure people understand that it's not meant to replace therapy when needed. It's also meant to build in some safeguards that encourage the reader to take steps that are manageable and not too overwhelming.

By engaging experientially in the Corrective Experiences, we can discover and build experiences that can help us integrate secure attachment knowledge into our personal lives. Learning Secure Attachment Skills (SAS) changes how we walk around in the world; we can exude a sense of attunement, safety, and support for our relationships as well as cultivate a healthy internal relationship with ourselves. As readers become more familiar with

*Continues on page 80*



what attachment style or adaptation they most relate to—and many of us have a mix of styles—the attempt is to also give them more awareness as well as many ways that they can help themselves and/or support others. We begin to see each other in our relationship struggles with more compassion and can practice more appropriately supportive responses that lead to growth and healing for all concerned.

### My journey from teaching to writing

Most of my professional life has been in a teaching role. I'm a visual learner and incorporate many visual examples into my live teaching programs to help the audience remember the points I make about trauma, nervous system arousal, connection, and brain function. Many therapies focus on putting pressure on the attachment system, usually for diagnostic reasons. This approach never sat right with me for therapy with clients. It was essential for me to address the attachment injury more gently to avoid re-traumatization.

Sometimes, I find it helpful to use physical objects or even toys as metaphors for teaching concepts related to healing. One example is using a toy Slinky to demonstrate a client in a high-arousal state. If you imagine holding the slinky in a way where it's tight towards the center to reflect the constriction of trauma, it's wise that you don't release it all at once, or it will spring back out forcefully and snap back like a rubber band that could create even more constriction and exaggerates the contraction. We practice releasing it just a little at a time from each end. Many therapies start in the middle where the impact of the trauma is most intense, but by unwinding a little at each end until you reach the center—ground zero of the trauma, it creates a safer and more contained way to manage and release the over-arousal related to the trauma. No one forgets the Slinky demonstration, but writing a book takes the visual element out of the equation.

Years of teaching in front of an audience has allowed me to test a variety of approaches, gauge the response of the participants, and instantly adjust my strategy if it's not landing in the way I expected. Writing a book is committing to a single approach that feels final. And one huge factor that impacted me during writing *The Power of Attachment* was that finality. I was concerned that the book would not reach people in the way that I hoped because everyone learns differently. I found myself thinking about how different people would consume the book and if my message was clear.

I'm honored by the response so far and the feedback that I've received from readers, including my colleagues.

In order to move from the live teaching process to the writing process, I pored over many of the transcripts from workshops and programs I've presented, pulling resources that would translate more effectively to the book.

Sounds True was invaluable during this process. They helped me shape the sections of the book, formulate the most intuitive organization, and polish the final product. They

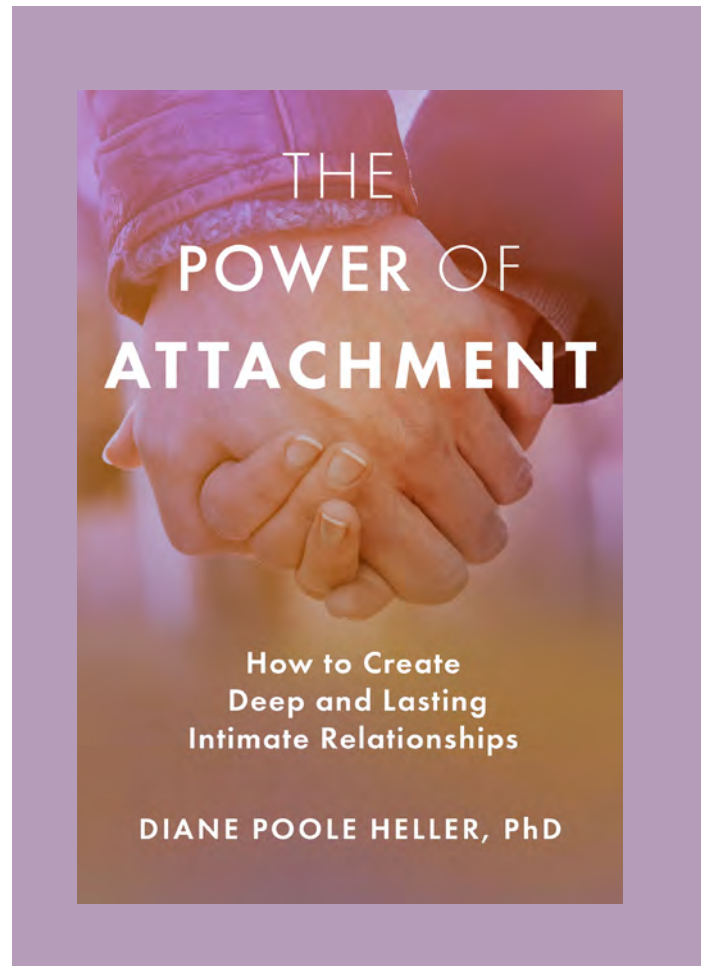
also had the knowledge necessary to promote a book by supporting me in gathering endorsements, initiating promotions, and suggesting content for marketing videos.

### *Why now was the right time for **The Power of Attachment***

Attachment is germane to the human experience whether you are talking about spirituality, religion, relationship . . . everything! Trauma work is essential to help us navigate hurdles and the bumps and bruises of relational experiences. It's my belief that we increase our capacity for love and intimacy when we heal trauma and learn to develop and enhance secure attachment. People do the best that they can, and with the tools to reshape our relationships and heal trauma, we increase our ability to have profoundly intimate and long-lasting relationships that support and heal ourselves and each other.

When we tap into our capacity to heal ourselves, we can begin to heal on a larger, global scale that can impact and reshape the future of the human experience. I obviously believe that this work is essential and have dedicated most of my professional career to spreading the word through my attachment program for therapists called DARE (Dynamic Attachment Re-patterning experience), which is a progressive four-series approach to healing each of the attachment adaptations for our clients in a safe, supportive way that helps heal attachment injuries toward regaining skills and capacities for Secure Attachment. We have regular live trainings in the Boulder, CO area each year and around the country.

It's my hope that everyone this book touches will connect with it in some way and that it will help people on the road toward healing the trauma wounds and attachment injuries that keep us from connecting on that essentially deep human level that fuels the soul and nourishes our lives.





# The Embodiment of Primary Respiration: Order, Organization and Transparency



**Michael J. Shea, PhD**

***STILLNESS IN THE MIDST OF MOTION AND  
COMMOTION IS FREE OF WILL, DIRECTION,  
AND TIME.***

***IT IS A COMPLETE LETTING BE OF WHAT IS  
FROM MOMENT TO MOMENT.***

—Toni Packer, “Unmasking the Self”

## Introduction

Biodynamic practice is a study of embodied perception of primary respiration (PR) which is the experience of living moving slowness in the body. This discussion will include an attempt to define terms. It is not so easy to give words to embodied experience, but we need a starting point! At the same time, I must lay out the ground of perceiving such slowness by elaborating a set of principles I rediscover every time I am in practice with a client or even waiting in line in the grocery store. These principles are the groundwork for a personal discovery of the stages of perceiving PR as it unfolded in my own experience. They culminate in an embodiment of *transparency* such that PR is free to move in the body and mind of the practitioner with minimal restriction.

## Definition: *Embody* – a verb

1. To be an expression of or give a tangible or visible form to (an idea, quality, or feeling).
  - “She embodies compassion and loving kindness.”

- Synonyms: personify, incorporate, give human form/shape to, realize, manifest, express, concretize, symbolize, represent, epitomize, stand for, encapsulate, typify, exemplify.
- “He embodies what everybody takes to be typical of the mindfulness meditation movement.”
- Provide (a spirit) with a physical form.
- “Nothing of the personality of the enlightened Heart as embodied in the Buddha will be lost.”

2. To include or contain (something) as a constituent part.

- “the changes . . . in attitude and intention as embodied in the perception of primary respiration”
- Synonyms: incorporate, include, contain, take in, consolidate, encompass, assimilate, integrate, concentrate.

## Embodiment

The embodied perception of PR as I use the term is *the felt sense of order and organization in the body*. Order and organization are episodic on a daily and lifelong basis. It comes and goes, waxes and wanes like the moon and the ocean tide. We are linked to a much larger intelligence in the natural world that permeates our body and is our body. To become embodied is to experience the vascular pulsations and breath in their shifting locations internally and their unique everchanging rhythms. It is through the perception of PR that order and organization become embodied. Everyone has his or her own unique experience of the natural world inside and outside of the body. Like an embryo, we are constantly informing and outforming with a multitude of sense perceptions and trillions of metabolic processes occurring right now, mixing us together with the outside world. It is said in Buddhist Tantra: “as with out, so with in.” Every molecule must become still for transformation.

## Wholeness

Embodiment implies wholeness wherein the parts are unrecognizable at any level. Wholeness is our aliveness. To embody wholeness is to have a felt sense of *the mind and body being synchronized*. Conscious awareness automatically shifts between being in the mind with its cognitions, the environment, and the internal body with its sensations. Thus, embodiment is on a spectrum of interconnection with our mind, body and its relationship to the natural world via the senses. We have a mind sense (thoughts, cognitions and emotions) and a body sense (sensation and feelings that precede emotions). Typically, *there is too much mind sense and not enough body sense*. Embodiment of wholeness strikes a balance that is constant. It can be buoyant and dense, earthy and airy, fluid and fixed, hot and cold, vulnerable

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82 courageous. It seems like it is always automatically shifting. This is the embodiment of aliveness.

Again, as embodied beings *we are constantly informing and outforming* with the senses and with our mind. “There is a tide in the affairs of men,” according to Shakespeare. These phases of our bodily moon and ocean tides are experienced throughout time, from mere seconds to years. Embodiment is developmental because of its changeability over time. It is not one thing or one experience like a plateau that is finally reached. It is a gathering and sorting, a type of ongoing integration of the total features of our body’s experience of vitality and aliveness.

To embody a mindful attitude is an exploration of the present moment no matter how complex that moment is or seems to be. The present moment is the supreme spiritual teacher.

Integration allows for different life qualities to become embodied, for example, what we accept and what we reject, both biologically and psychologically (and spiritually). We embody dietary choices, attitudes and emotions. In this way, everyone has his or her own unique aptitude for embodiment. There is a constant loss and gain of somatic experience, like putting on a pair of shoes to see if they fit or trying on a shirt that didn’t fit originally but fits now. Order and

organization, however, depend on how we set the sails on the mast of our ship to catch the wind of PR. It is a slowing and becoming mindful of which way the wind is moving. We occasionally pause and become still to verify the direction of the wind that moves through us.

## Mindfulness

To sort through life experience and embody our preferences (if the shoe fits, wear it now or later or not at all!) further implies a degree of mindfulness. Mindfulness is attention to the present moment of experience. Wherever one is at during this or any other moment on the continuum of embodiment, it is viewed initially from a position of non-judgment and non-interpretation. Originally in somatic practice, mindfulness was called *attending*. It is a quality of attention that contains the subtle emotional states of equanimity and non-attachment. Thus, body and mind can synchronize with discernment and panoramic awareness into a regularly unfolding new becoming. To embody a mindful attitude is an exploration of the present moment no matter how complex that moment is or seems to be. *The present moment is the supreme spiritual teacher*. And mindfulness of the body specifically can be cultivated,

which enriches the *being* aspect of a human being, thus allowing for deeper and fuller felt states of order and organization.

The somatic experience of embodiment is an ebb and flow of both conscious awareness (mind sense) and our sensory systems. This includes our inherent fluid nature that precedes the nervous system of the body in early development. Our sensory systems are perceiving the density of the inside of the body and the environment outside on a living moving continuum of interconnection. To embody a sense of buoyancy or floatability within this continuum might take some somatic practice (there are many somatic methods from which to choose). When the interconnected whole of our universe is experienced internally with mindfulness and gradually over time with PR, then its natural order and organization becomes embodied.

## Stages and Principles of Primary Respiration Sensory Awareness

I want to share my perception of PR within the context of what I call the Long Tide Model of Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy. I teach several biodynamic *sensory awareness principles* regarding PR. These principles transform into stages of sensory exploration. The *first* basic principle of sensing PR: It is the *highway upon which embodiment of the whole moves*. It is the wholeness and its pathways and distribution networks at the same time. Its only interest is to have each individual experience the felt sense of embodiment over time, and everyone in his or her own way *without fear*. In this way, PR is the activity of kindness and gentleness.

Embodiment from a biodynamic perspective is a very gradual and lifelong learning transmitted by PR to a willing receiver. We have forgotten our entire preexisting library of embodied wholeness and replaced it with a sensory library of seemingly disconnected parts associated with stress and trauma, likes and dislikes of sensation (and fast food of all kinds).

*Secondly*, PR in all its nuances is the *instinct for the reunification* of the parts. It only seeks to become embodied. In order to embody as a living breathing moving reality, a ground of attending to the body must be established through *mindfulness of the body* - the density of *being* on the earth as the earth. There are many such mindfulness practices that I have written about and teach. PR is not given as an automatic perception. It is uncovered by the quality of the practitioner's attention to the aliveness in his or her body. Aliveness is the totality of inner experience. This also includes the world of nature as an interconnected continuum with the body. The loss of embodiment is the loss of the instinct for healing via the natural world. PR wakes up and retrains that deep instinct. The sensory language of nature can be understood. Just as a pilot has a long check list to go through before takeoff, we too must go through the

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checklist for the embodiment of PR and to experience its priorities. As Thich Nhat Hanh says: “We Inter-Are.” We are one body.

The *third* basic principle: primary respiration and dynamic stillness are one thing constantly exchanging places with each other in a perceptual dance. Dr. Becker called it “the rhythmic balanced interchange of Primary Respiration and stillness.” It is the foreground and background of our perception constantly exchanging places in an endless dance of embodiment. There are no smaller subdivisions of life other than the whole, the totality. It is all one drop, one taste. This is not a model of causality. There is no cause, only the movement of our perception to thoroughly, periodically rest in a natural peace called stillness that permeates our hearts, blood and mind. When I use the term Primary Respiration, I am always referring to both PR, the sense of slowness and stillness. They are one thing because the stillness is not inert. It is alive and vibrant. With many students and practitioners able to sense it in their own way, different nuances are emerging, different experiences of the practitioners through continuity and connection to the environment and to their clients via their hands. My personal experience continues to mirror the collective worldwide community of PR practitioners.

*Fourth*, PR is a *broad category of generative phenomena and interconnecting sensory experiences*. PR has a thousand faces. It generates and maintains the ebb and flow of embodiment over time by connecting sensory experience to a living continuity and interconnection that includes the environment outside the body through our mind located in the heart. Its aliveness becomes embodied and yet remains formless, embedded within the trillions of cellular processes constantly occurring in the body. So, *embodiment is the reunion of form with the formless nature of PR*. Much of the science of the human body is in the domain of the unseeable, from molecules and cells, neurotransmitters and hormones to immune factors and the gut microbiome. In the same way, this submicroscopic core of the body is form and formless coming together as one thing with PR. “As with out, so with in.”

## Transparency

It is important to state a *fifth* basic principle here: *primary respiration is a polyrhythmic phenomenon*. This means that it expresses itself many ways simultaneously because it is formless and yet embodied; it is thus constantly and automatically shifting its appearance to one’s inner sensibility and needs (a thousand faces). Clearly, the majority of such perceptions are nonlinear. Thus, a different type of knowing (order) oriented to the expression of PR organizes and allows us to become embodied through its formless eyes.

We embody transparency and become the next face. Our heart becomes transparent to life and the Tide of PR. Transparency is thus the starting point, not the end point, of our exploration.

## The End - Embodiment Practice

PR has its own unique therapeutic progression and healing outcomes. It is simply a question of the correct sequence of perception for each practitioner. There is no universal method for everyone to embody PR. We all have an innate aptitude for the path of embodiment. In my classes I offer embodiment practices in which students are free to accept or reject my language and direction in favor of their own.

*First* is to establish a posture of not too tight and not too loose in order to feel the whole body as it is breathing.

*Second* is where to place one's attention, which is usually in one of the numerous embryonic fulcrums of the body and, specifically as I teach it, the movement of the heart. Its movement and the felt sense of its potency. This also includes respiratory diaphragm movement.

*Third* is to develop the skills of noticing where one is located on the spectrum of embodiment in the present moment as the ripples of PR start to become waves breaking on the shore of one's perception. I call this the *cycle of attunement*. The Tide of PR begins to spontaneously move the practitioner's attention between his or her body, the hands on the client and the world of nature. Thus, transparency and its embodiment with PR is the starting point rather than the end point of life on earth. Transparency is a state of embodied relaxation.

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