



ANODEA JUDITH:

The Body Is the Unconscious Mind



When Ellen walked into my office, the pain in her body was palpable, yet she was unaware of it. She walked stiffly and nervously, her eyes darting about frantically, hypervigilant for her own safety. She spoke rapidly as if with great fear, and the urgency of her words revealed a deep suffering that in forty-six years had never been relieved. Her body was constricted, her limbs thin and wiry. As she told her story, she revealed a number of self-destructive tendencies, including anorexic starvation in an attempt to annihilate her body and live entirely in her mind. She was now developing numbness in her extremities. Her hands, cut off from the waters of her soul, flitted nervously of their own accord, like fish on a line. She could not tell if she was hungry or sleepy, warm or cold. Disconnected from her body, it was no surprise that she felt disconnected from life itself.

This woman was clearly an individual, yet her suffering had common roots with many clients I have seen over the years. She had tried psychotherapists who served the ideals of “mental health” and looked only at her mind. She had seen a variety of doctors who probed and tested her body, prescribing various medications. She had approached her church but felt like an outcast. None could touch the severe separation of mind and body from which she suffered.

Her plight is common to many, in varying degrees of severity. Disconnected from our bodies, we are separated from our aliveness, from the experience of the natural world and the truth of how we live. This tragic division creates a dissociative state. Ruled by the intellectual over-

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ride of our body's messages, we unwittingly harm ourselves with annihilating jobs and routines, toxic substances, and a disembodied lifestyle.

Disconnection from the body is a cultural epidemic. Of all the losses rupturing the human soul today, this alienation may be the most alarming because it separates us from the very roots of existence. We lose the joy that arises from the dynamic connection with the only living presence we are guaranteed to have for the whole of our lives: our body. Out of touch with the body, we become out of touch with the earth as well, and this epidemic is seeping into every aspect of our civilization.

The alienated relationship between mind and body has its roots in the archetypal divorce between spirit and matter. This wound separates culture and planet, for it devalues the body and anything physical, giving greater power to the mind. As a result, the shadow aspect of the physical world—materialism—looms its rapacious head. Only by recovering the body can we begin to heal the world itself, for as mind is to body, so culture is to planet. Healing the mind-body split is a necessary step in the healing of us all. It heals our home, our foundation, and the base upon which all else is built.

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Many are the clients who come to me from years of traditional therapy and say, "I've done all this work on myself and learned all about how my problems are connected with this and that from my childhood—but *it still hasn't changed.*" This is because traumatic experiences are often stored within the tissues of the body as chronic holding patterns, unconscious ways of defending against life and its possibility of hurt or disappointment. Known as *body armor*, these patterns keep us from feeling fully present, vital, and at peace with ourselves. Unless we address the "issues in our tissues," the unconscious responses stored in the body habitually recreate patterns that the conscious mind desperately wants to avoid.

Traditional psychotherapy can be helpful in understanding the source of these issues, but may do little to change health problems or dissolve chronic tension held in the musculature. Bodywork therapies, on the other hand, may relieve tension, restructure one's alignment, or make contact with deeper issues, but if this material is not processed into consciousness, the mind cannot implement the deep changes needed to make this healing permanent. Thus we return each week to our bodyworker with the same sore shoulders or aching back, for another temporary reprieve from our painful patterns.

Mind-body therapies work both sides of the equation at the same time—uniting the physical and the spiritual as an integrated whole. They link our psychological problems to the experience of the body and link our physical problems to the experience of the psyche. This gives us an

embodied experience of being whole in the world—fully present, active, and aware.

There are many systems for working the interface between mind and body, loosely associated under the heading of “Somatic Therapy.” The art of moving energy through the body and dissolving body armor originated when Wilhelm Reich broke away from Freud. It then expanded to the US through Alexander Lowen, who called it *Bioenergetics*, and John Peirrakos, who called his work *Core Energetics*. Techniques involve using movement or standing postures, some massage, and focus more on the breath.

The ancient practice of yoga, specifically *hatha yoga*, or physical postures has become so popular today that new therapies are arising using yoga postures to access and release hidden emotional issues. Known as yoga therapy, the client merely enters into any of a number of postures or asanas, and observes what arises within the tension that forms their “edge” in the posture. Arising from within the yoga system, the *chakras* (energy centers in the body) are also points where the mind/body interface takes place.

The chakras, as organizational centers for the life force energy, help to distribute energy through the body, and awaken the corresponding consciousness within. The chakras can be accessed through movement, yoga, meditation, sounding or any number of techniques to reveal and heal the deep core issues that help or hinder our life journey. Together, the seven chakras, form a systematic link between the earthly orientation of physical survival, through the egoic realms of interpersonal relationships, and into the spiritual realms of transcendent consciousness—seeing them all as integrated steps along a continuum. To work through the chakras is to systematically work through the various levels in which mind and body connect.

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Dance, movement, various forms of massage, and martial arts, are also forms of somatic therapy in that they often address body and mind simultaneously. All can be used as healing modalities to enrich our experience in the world and help us to “get out of our heads,” and more in tune with the body. All provide a simultaneous spiritual experience—but one that is grounded in the body rather than intellectual abstractions

Body Armor: The Costly Defense Budget

The body is the unconscious mind. Filled with nerve endings that are the sensory receptors for that central processing unit called the brain, the body records everything that happens to us, and then speaks to us in its primal, cellular language. Diseases are ways of telling us what the uncon-

scious mind remembers, but that our waking state has ignored. When these messages come to awareness, the body can be released from having to hold that message. If we heed the messages and change our behavior accordingly, *as well as address the physical symptoms*, tension or disease can be free to dissolve. The emphasis here is on treating the whole person in body, mind, and spirit.

Body armor is the physical component of our psychological defense mechanisms. Defenses cut two ways—while they protect, they also deny. While defenses may minimize the impact of a painful experience, they also create separation, numbness, isolation, distortion, and rigidity. The vital core energy within the psyche is removed from the many sources of energy that surround us, such as love, beauty, communication, information, human touch and consciousness itself. Defense mechanisms literally restrict the life force energy from its free flow of reception and expression.

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Sensations are repressed, both from within and without, limiting the amount of information coming into the system, as well as the passion of life. When the body armor is excessive, we lose our sense of reality and the inner core becomes energetically imbalanced.

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 Body armor is a costly defense budget that robs us of our life force, similar to the way our national military defense budget diverts funds from other programs that may be more socially beneficial. The result is a kind of “energy crisis” that manifests physical and psychological symptoms of varying degrees of severity. Is it merely coincidence that a social system that supports, and at times even requires, the denial of the body creates a culture with such a massive military budget?

Solving the Energy Crisis

The interface between mind and body is *energy*. One way to view this energy is to think of the body as hardware, as in a computer, and the mind as the software that is “installed” in the body’s hardware, consisting of the beliefs and programming that we have collected throughout life. In a computer, the hardware and software are absolutely useless unless there is electricity running through the system. If there’s a power failure, nothing works at all. If the current is not flowing smoothly—if the voltage is too high or too low—the programs will not run correctly, and the hardware itself may even become damaged.

So too with a human being. It is the *life force energy* that forms the interface between mind and body. The body runs that energy through its cells and muscles, and converts it into action. The mind, both consciously and unconsciously, holds the programs that tell the body *how* to channel

that energy—when to hold it in, when to let it out, which muscles to move in order to accomplish a task, and how to behave in a given situation. The programs we hold in our minds—such as feeling unworthy, unsafe, or compelled to perform heroically—all run energy through the body in particular ways, creating varying combinations of success, failure, repression or exhaustion. In order to balance the energy economy, we must understand the root of the programs running our lives, and simultaneously retrain the deeper structures within the tissues that have become hardwired for these programs. These deeper structures are the chronic holding patterns of the body armor, bound by the energy used to maintain our defenses.

This life force energy has been described by many disciplines and cultures. In yoga philosophy it is called *prana*; to the Chinese it is *Chi*, the Japanese, *ki*. Wilhelm Reich called it *orgone energy*, and Luke Skywalker of *Star Wars* called it *the force*. I like to simply call it *charge*, as that is something we can all relate to. We feel *charged* when we are excited about something or when we are sexually aroused. We feel a *charge* around certain issues that make us angry or upset. If we are afraid, we notice that our fear has a great deal of *charge* that runs through the body. *Charge* can make us alive and happy, or it can make us tense and anxious—depending on whether that charge flows freely or gets locked up in body armor. If we don't have enough charge, we can feel lethargic, depressed, or hopeless.

Ideally, a person charges and discharges throughout the day in relative balance. We take in energy from around us—whether as nourishment, stimulation, or stress—and we discharge this energy through activity and emotions. Food, breath, touch, conversations, noises, or entertainment generally tend to increase charge. Crying, getting angry, dancing, working out, or just plain working hard all tend to discharge.

Body armor develops through repeated difficulties as a way to maintain an *economy of charge*. As in a bank account, you make both deposits and withdrawals, but try to maintain a balance that allows you a feeling of security—a balance that is higher for some people than for others. In the same way, a given person has a customary level of charge in which they feel most comfortable—too much and they feel anxious, too little and they feel depressed.

Just as someone might freeze their assets when times get tough or uncertain, body armor binds the energy in the musculature of the body to keep the level of charge within an individual's comfort range. It shields the core from adverse energy coming into the system and prevents core energy from moving out of the system. Binding the internal energy creates

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repression of the life force. Armoring against the outer world creates isolation and depletion. Both can lead to imbalances.

Because of body armor—and the stressful circumstances of the modern environment—human energy systems can become chronically overcharged or undercharged. If someone is typically overcharged, they tend toward stress, hypertension, and organ dysfunction, your typical high-strung, type-A personality. If someone is undercharged, they experience, depression, passivity, fatigue and lowered immune response.

Forging a New Relationship

The beauty of working the mind-body connection is that the therapist can enter the client's inner domain from either the physical or mental end of the spectrum. For instance, during psychotherapy, as a client talks about an important issue, there is inevitably a response in the body of heightened charge: perhaps sweaty palms, fidgeting, tension in the face, or change in the breath. By weaving a thread of awareness between the "issue and the tissues," the body can appropriately soften or discharge. Once the message from the body is received by consciousness, the body is free to quiet its cellular communication and can relax. Old patterns are released and both the body and the consciousness within are more able to

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enter wholly into the present, rather than remain compromised by the past.

Mind-body healing can also be worked from the physical side of things. A client may be unaware of their psychological "issues," yet have a physical complaint or a symptom, such as a chronic pain or illness. ("Symptom" comes from a Latin root that means "to fall together.") By directing awareness to focus on the *experience* of the symptom, one can often recover awareness of the issue to which it is related. This

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occurs best through a technique called "focus and exaggerate," in which one pretends to worsen their symptom by taking it to its logical conclusion. This might be exaggerating a contraction or an impulse, such rolling up in a ball on the floor, expressing the need to hit or cry, or overcoming the inhibition to reach out for someone.

Ellen, for example, found that she had long inhibited her inner sensations and impulses due to an intense shame about having discovered at a young age that she was gay. Because she had grown up at a time when there was no support or understanding from her family or her peers for her sexual orientation, she had felt that everything within her was inherently wrong or bad. By the time she came to see me, thirty years later, much of the world had evolved its understanding of gay issues to

embrace more tolerance and she had been comfortably out of the closet for some time. In her *conscious* mind, she no longer held a negative view of her sexual orientation, as she had found social environments that accepted and supported her. Yet the habits of repressing her most basic urges so long ago and for so many years had worn a deep groove in her psyche and these habits were still acting upon her body.

As we began to bring attention to the subtlest of impulses in her body, such as the unconscious flitting of her arms, allowing them to be magnified enough to be recognized, we uncovered a deep urge to reach out to others. This urge had been so repressed it had rendered her arms nearly numb and lifeless. As her arms came back to life, her breathing deepened and her initially pale color grew more rosy. As we worked toward drawing forth the repressed communication in her throat from decades of hiding and secrecy, her neck pain dissipated. In her life, she began speaking out for gay rights and in so doing found her creativity in writing. As she continued to reclaim lost parts of herself, she became increasingly more alive.

The body doesn't lie. It records everything that happens to us. When awareness is brought to the body's innate wisdom, insights can be direct and profound. When buried unfinished impulses are allowed to complete, the energy caught up in inhibiting these impulses is literally freed from the past and made accessible for the present and future. The heart of this healing lies in the experience, a felt sense of waking up to truths that cannot be denied.

The relationship between one's mind and body is the primary relationship in each of our lives. It is the one that occurs within and precedes all others. Like any relationship, it is ultimately brought into harmony through love. And like any relationship, this love is enhanced through communication, compassion, acceptance, and understanding. Since this relationship is the only one that is guaranteed to last for our entire lives, it is the path underlying wholeness.

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