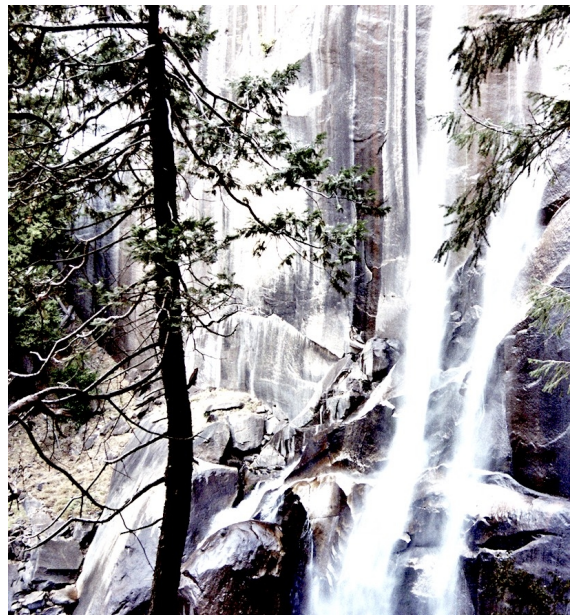


Body-mind integration exercises

A resource for people wishing to get more in touch
with their own inner wellbeing

"We may go to the moon, but that's not very far.
The greatest distance we have to cover still lies within us."
(Charles De Gaulle)



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<http://www.body-mind.co.uk>

version 2.0, June 2020

Why integration?

Probably the common factor behind every “alternative” healing technique is that the body only becomes unwell (“dis-eased”) when it loses its internal integrity.

Parts of the physiology no longer work together, and/or parts of the self and identity are in conflict. The simple exercises below (and the resources listed at the end) are ways in which you can use to explore your own internal integration, and use your conscious awareness in a constructive and intelligent way to assist you own inner healing.

When your body and mind are in full cooperation and mutual respect, then everything you do becomes almost effortless. Healing takes place naturally and spontaneously. The emphasis is on the *mutual* – because we have come to think that the mind is superior and can do whatever it wishes. However, the true relationship between the mind and the body (like the relationship between the human being and the Earth) is not one of a slave-master and a slave, but one in which we are two beings that have grown together, and can be each others friend and equal. Each has its own sphere of responsibility and strength, and there is a proper relationship in which the conscious will should decide what you as a whole organism are oriented towards. But the body also has to take part in that. It does so willingly. But if the conscious mind does not maintain the friendship and calibrate the body to its present circumstances, then the body goes off and attempts to survive. And in doing so it removes much of itself from the domain of the will, to the point that eventually the mind is run by the body. You may not believe that description, but I would ask you to have an open mind and to notice your experiences as you treat your body with respect and re-open important communication channels between the mind and body.

I have personally used all of the exercises described below, and have found that they accelerate and strengthen the effects of the various therapies I have received. Furthermore the exercises are safe; and require very little in the way of “belief” – other than believing that we have internal bodily senses (interoception), that we can hear ourselves, and what and how we say things to ourselves is as important as what and how we say things to everyone else in our lives.

At the very least they form the basis for a structured pain management programme and a resourcing guide for recovery from PTSD. At their greatest potential, they can be life-changing.

Sources for the “exercises” include Sensorimotor Psychotherapy (a body-based approach to treatment of PTSD and other serious traumas), the Sedona Method, the teachings of Bruno Groening, the work of Milton Erickson, Max Freedom Long, HeartMath “Freeze-Frame”, Marshall Rosenberg’s Non-Violent Communication, affirmations taught by people such as Shakti Gawain and Jack Canfield. And about 20 years of personal experience applying these for myself and teaching them to others to help them heal from physical pain and various kinds of trauma.

Some background information

These exercises are designed to connect your waking conscious awareness with the healing resources in your body and, more generally, to help you to become more body-aware.

This body awareness is important, because the physical body needs awareness to help it to be at its most healthy.

This might be an unfamiliar idea. One way to explain it is that there is a template of health, which is not physical. This template needs consciousness to anchor and align it to the body. Another explanation is more psychological – in that much of what we consider to be our “personality” is driven by the workings of the physical body. A second is to note that there is a strong interaction between mind and body – so physical pain, injury, diet, exercise (or not), illness etc. can affect how the mind works. And mental expectation (e.g. placebo, nocebo) can affect the health of the body. Looking at this constructively, it is possible to use the mind to increase bodily health, and the body to stabilise the mind (and help it to be less noisy, more peaceful). A third explanation is more associated with traditions which say that “energy follows the mind” – or in other words, wherever we put our attention is affected (even if we physically do nothing other than move our attention!) A fourth explanation might be that the body responds to how we “wield” our awareness of it, plays out whatever we think of as if we are personally doing it, and takes note of the activity and focus of the mind as a guide for setting its priorities at a midbrain and hindbrain (i.e. non-conscious) level. So how we use our mind and attention moderates, informs and eventually educates instinctive and reflex actions.

Clinically, I would say that all those explanations are correct, and there are probably lots of other equally valid ways to describe aspects of the mind-body phenomenon. My observation as a therapist is that body tissue does not fully heal as easily and quickly as it might unless it is fully accessible to consciousness and the conscious mind has a positive relationship with it. As an example, I once saw someone struggle for about a year with a knee operation that had gone wrong – there was a lot of pain and very poor mobility. Nothing worked until I finally persuaded them to start to love the knee and thank it rather than hating it for the pain it was causing. Two weeks later, it healed itself.

Modern medicine has coined the term “psychoneuroimmunology” to describe the multiple interactions between the mind/emotions, the nervous system, the immune system, and in fact every physiological system of the body. The conceptual medical model of a human as a machine, some 300 years old, which reached its height in the 1950’s has started to wane and gradually be replaced by a model which is far more holistic. Scientific research has clearly shown that the emotions affect the rhythms of the heart, the production of hormones, the longevity of cells, and the effectiveness of the immune system. So the simple exercises presented here contain several themes which are far larger than this small manual.

The themes we will touch, but which are far too large to discuss in any depth include :

- The nature of consciousness
- The relationship between consciousness and the body
- The different types of awareness and how these work together to form waking consciousness and the personality
- The relationship between psychological identity and the physical body
- The presence of a cellular, animal-level wisdom within the body
- The presence of an “inner wisdom” that you may possibly wish to think of as a connection to a more universal Consciousness

Fundamental ingredients

The exercises below fall into several broad categories which overlap, and are combined in recipes as ingredients of different proportions :

- the use of very specific word/language patterns to create a desired effect
- the deliberate use of awareness to highlight certain features or explore certain areas, or add emphasis in a particular way
- the deliberate cultivation and use of genuine heartfelt appreciation
- the use of intention
- an intention to communicate with, activate and cooperate with the self-healing forces of the body
- deliberate choice to focus on “resources” rather than “problems” or pain

Language patterns

Milton Erickson was confined to a wheelchair for all of his adult life after almost dying from Polio at 17 years old. He devoted his life to studying and practicing psychology. His observations of human behaviour made him realise that

“the unconscious is highly separate from the conscious mind, with its own awareness, interests, responses, and learnings”.

For Erickson, the unconscious mind was creative, solution-generating, and often positive. He found that there are very specific rules for language which is intended for use by the subconscious (i.e. for instructing the subconscious to act in a particular way). e.g. One of these is that the subconscious does not understand a negative – if you say “do not think about pink elephants”, then immediately some part of the brain (and the subconscious) hears the instruction “think of pink elephants”...

Ericksonian “clean” language is used in hypnotherapy, NLP, and Focussing, is one of the influences behind the Sedona Method, and is a strong influence on Marshall Rosenberg’s Non-Violent Communication. It is particularly useful in that it offers “neutral” (non-directive) suggestions – i.e. it does not force any particular response. Rather, the question opens up possibility and bypasses the simple yes/no polarity. In doing so, there is an implicit trust that there is an internal unconscious wisdom which will make greatest possible use of the opportunity provided – far beyond what the conscious mind thinks to be its limitations.

The idea of “neutral” suggestion is particularly important in all of the exercises. When trying to have a particular effect or achieve a particular task, it is possible to be prejudiced, biased or neutral. If you are prejudiced, you will attempt to force the result you have pre-decided. If you are biased, you are saying that you think you know what you want, and you begin to move in that direction, but are open to some better option if it comes along. Neutrality is to have absolutely no agenda – which is not easy if you are in pain – so neutrality is an ideal rather than an absolute necessity. A neutral suggestion is in reality almost always a very lightly biased suggestion – we think we know which general direction we need to go in, but are very open to listening to the response that our body/subconscious has and are prepared to trust and go along with what arises when we initiate a change. So at the least in these exercises we aim to be lightly biased, and not prejudiced.

When working with body wisdom it is important to always start, continue and finish from a position of near-neutrality. The body knows how to heal itself, knows how to do that, and needs your willing cooperation to make that possible. The task is to initiate a change and then cooperate with the “inner healer” until it has completed what it needs to complete.

The language of illness

Also, it is important to recognise that many “illnesses” and pains have a purpose which needs to unfold before healing can take place. So another purpose of these exercises is to set up a communication channel between the conscious mind and the body. There are many, many advantages to this which richly reward a small amount of patience.

One reward is that we start to become aware of the times when our body is trying to tell us something important that we have been trying to ignore. It is surprising how often a pain or tension in a particular part of the body is expressing an emotion which the bearer does not want to feel, and once the cause of the pain is recognised and the emotion “felt”, the pain just disappears. Of course, this is not true for every case of pain or muscular tension, but it is always worthwhile keeping an open mind and not discarding this possibility. This is just one practical example of the importance of neutrality/bias rather than prejudice. On the same lines, it is equally important NOT to assume that the pain is your fault for somehow not being aware of something that you should be! My experience of working with chronic pain is that there is often (i.e. not always, but usually) an initial psychological element, as well as a physical one – and that non-physical component is the often (but not always) main reason that the pain has not gone away. Added to that is the inevitable psychological response to a pain-filled body over weeks, months and years – called “central sensitisation”.

Use of focussed awareness

Conversely, the body also needs your conscious direction, which brings us to the use of will, focus and awareness. Many types of meditation and many “new age” spiritual practices (and old world religions for that matter) offer little practical advice on discrimination – what it is useful to be aware of and/or allow, and what it is NOT useful to be aware of and/or allow. It is surprisingly easy to tune into the body/unconscious and allow it to begin to move and express itself. This is a very powerful but two-edged sword. I see quite a few people (and have been one myself) who have developed unusual physical twitches, by thinking that they are allowing healing to take place, but in reality they have got in a loop which then becomes habitual. If the same response occurs again and again, then you have reached a point where a higher level of skill is required than you currently have, and at this point you probably need to get some external help to develop that skill, or at least ask yourself what new questions you might ask yourself. There are also many issues which require an external observer/witness and/or which require such subtlety of attentive power that it would take most people many years to develop adequate skill. So, like any other task, it is important to be both optimistic and positive, whilst being also aware of our limitations.

The Inner Healers

We have evolved and survived as a species for hundreds of millions of years, and that has left us with an enormously powerful birthright. We have several layers of intelligence in our bodies that are capable of healing us on many different levels, and which are continuously available. In fact, it could be argued that almost any chronic debility or illness is essentially caused by a lost ability to acknowledge, listen to, “embody”, welcome and cooperate with these layers of body-intelligence and wisdom.

The Attention-Bubble

Imagine yourself in a bar or restaurant with someone whom you wish to have an important conversation; and suddenly the background music is turned up very loud. You are so interested in the conversation that you ignore the noise, and suddenly notice in the back of your mind that the noise has almost disappeared as you focus on what your friend is saying. This ability to focus strongly on anything is a skill which is very useful.

So – what is it most useful to focus on? The first answer to that is that the body must be the first focus. But if there is pain, this is not an easy thing to do. So we make a choice.

First, we acknowledge the area of our body that is in pain (or whatever else is calling our attention), because after all it is there, and any attempt to deny it or get away from it or push it to one side will inevitably cause tension - and tension almost inevitably increases pain. And then we very simply and matter-of-factly choose to “look” for pleasant/warm/alive sensations in the body. Instead of allowing our attention to be dragged by the most noisy thing there, we choose to find the parts of our body that are totally healthy, and which know that fundamentally you are OK.

With this intent to connect with physical sensation then other things might come into your awareness – such as images, emotions, thought, memories; but the sensations in the physical body ideally retain at least 30-40% of your attention. Furthermore, the quality of that attention makes a big difference – see later for a more complete description of this important topic.

In addition to the usual noisy sensation of pain (etc), I include in the term “body sensations” qualities such as heaviness, lightness, warmth, tingling, buzzing, density, shape, position, soft/hard, depth (skin, muscle, bone, etc), quality (if it were made of something what would that something be?), volume (how big is that sensation, and how far does it extend?), colour, etc etc... the list of possibilities is very long. However, it is important to always look for a “**What**” – a qualitative sensory experience in whichever sense(s) you are using; and a “**Where**” – where is the presence of that experience coming from?

I include states of consciousness – clarity, sleepiness, heaviness/lightness, alertness, intensity of sensory connection, sensory balance (between the senses, internal/external, and between the skin, muscle and viscera, etc) in this experiential field. Sensations also include things like being aware of the expression of the face (both emotionally and how the muscles feel in that position – stretched, loose, hard, soft, etc), contact with a chair or the floor, movement of the body with breathing, etc. There is a vast range of combinations, and – generally speaking (provided that the curiosity is not so effortful that it cuts you off from sensation) - the more you can exercise your curiosity and find the exact detail, the more effective will be your use of this exercise.

Appreciation

It would seem (from scientific studies of heart rate and the immune system) that your body's physiology has evolved to be optimised when you are in a loving state. Putting that in a more easily understood form – your heart rate, breath and many other important rhythms of your body can (if necessary) work more or less independently of each other, but they work best when they are all “pulling together”, working to the same rhythmic pattern. Just like a troupe of circus trapeze artists, the organs and systems of the body can complement each other and support each other when they are “swinging together”. The thing which creates that “swinging together” is the emotion of LOVE. When you are in a loving state, your heart works far more efficiently, and works in time with your lungs and lymphatic system and autonomic nervous system (ANS) and the Krebs (chemical energy/ATP) cycle – in fact the heart has to perform 15% less work when it is swinging in time with the ANS - and it does that when you feel the emotion of “love”.

Love is quite a complex emotion. Just as anger can be felt as rage, irritation, frustration, indignation, irateness (not just different words, but also qualitatively different feelings), Love occurs in a “spectrum” encompassing the feelings of compassion, appreciation, acceptance, deep empathy, quiet joy, gratitude and forgiveness, and fades out into something else when the emotions of enthusiasm and excitement are reached. Of all this spectrum of emotion, the feeling of “heartfelt” (i.e. genuine) Appreciation is the most easy to access in a “pure” state. Loving feelings cannot be made up – if they are forced then it is essentially a form of fear. However, it is possible to practice connecting to them – like learning how to walk to shops near your house, the route soon becomes easy and familiar.

A list of the basics

Place your attention on/in your body – become aware of your body...

Look especially for the parts which feel alive, comfortable, warm, pleasant, enjoyable. If you can't feel your body, or can't find anywhere at all (not even a tiny little patch of skin) that feels comfortable, then think of something natural and beautiful, like a waterfall or a forest, or a sunrise and then observe whatever effect that has on how you feel – either emotionally or physically or both.

Take your time – the body works slower than your brain!

Consider that (in becoming aware of your body) you are giving time to be with and talk to a good friend who you haven't seen for years

Remember that the body wants to protect and help you! In return, it is your job to look after it and teach it what is happening in each moment.

Make yourself comfortable ...either (ideally) sitting with the back straight and unsupported, or in a comfortable chair, or lying down with a cushion under your knees. It is important to be comfortable – if necessary you can use lots of cushions to support you. I originally practiced this lying down, but now would personally prefer sitting upright (not slouched) or even standing because it helps the mind to be more clear. You choose which position is best for you.

The room you are in should also be comfortable, or at least feel “safe” – the door closed, nobody likely to barge in.

It is sometimes useful to play music – if your mind is so busy that it won't give you peace, then music provides some respite from this. In which case, some sort of classical music is best (Bach, Mozart, Vivaldi, Tallis, Barber etc are all suitable). Drifty music will just end up, well, drifty, and most folk and/or rock/pop music is not helpful for this kind of exercise because it stimulates the adrenal glands. However, if at all possible it is better to do the exercise in silence. Another useful “prop” is to have some flowers (or a picture or photograph of a beautiful scene from nature) nearby, which you can look at occasionally if your mind demands a change of scenery.

A caution

Not everyone can easily be aware of the body. If there is trauma, then placing the attention directly on the body is not necessarily a good thing, because memories may be released. In that case – or if you experience over-strong emotions or memories – focus on more external sensations (contact/support) and consider seeking professional help.

Affirmations as a way to introduce yourself to body awareness

The exact wording is important. I provide some graded alternatives which should NOT be mixed or changed. Start with the first one, use it for (e.g.) a day or two, or a week, then go on to the second.... Whenever you connect verbally with a part of your body, it is also particularly useful to make a sincere attempt to connect to that part from your heart. I would call this “appreciation”. This is done by SIMPLY by sincerely appreciating it for everything it has done for you, and being lightly curious about the what/where details of the sensation. If you get a sense of “trying” or effort in this, then you are making it too complicated, not trusting yourself to be able to do it.

A few possibilities are (choose one) :

SIMPLE AWARENESS : “I now allow myself to be aware of this, my ___ as best I as can in this moment.” *(and place your awareness on that part of your body, being aware of whatever comes to your senses).*

POLARITY AWARENESS : “I now allow myself to be as aware of this, my ___ as much as am in this moment... *(pause, feel whatever there is) ...* “ now allow myself to not feel this, my ___ as much as I do in this moment *(pause, be aware of the possibility of absences in your awareness, and allow them to be there).*

AWARENESS WITH LOVING ACCEPTANCE (OPEN) : “Could I now allow myself to love and accept this, my ___ as best I can in this moment.” *(and place your awareness on that part of your body, being aware of whatever comes to your senses).*

AWARENESS WITH LOVING ACCEPTANCE (AFFIRMATION) : “I now love and accept (or appreciate) this, my ___ exactly as it is in this moment.” *(and place your awareness on that part of your body, being aware of whatever comes to your senses).*

AWARENESS WITH GRATITUDE : “I now give thanks to this, my ___ for the support it has given me throughout my life.” *(and place your awareness on that part of your body, being aware of whatever comes to your senses).*

CURIOS OPEN AWARENESS : “To what extent am I aware of ___ in this moment...?” *(and place about 30% of your awareness on that part of your body and spread the remaining 70% everywhere else , being aware of whatever comes to your senses).*

Allowing the information *to come to you* (instead of using the senses like a laser or a torch) is a skill that takes time to develop. It’s a letting go and trusting that you are actually aware of what you are aware of, and that is enough.

Thanking our body is particularly important. Parts which are healthy have usually worked 24/7 without recognition for many, many years. Parts which are unwell are nevertheless trying their best, but are often disliked because of the pain which is present in them. Remember to notice and thank the healthy, pain-free parts too!

Go systematically and steadily through each part of your body in turn, saying the phrase you have chosen, listening to the sound of words, feeling the sound of the words inside yourself, and feeling the internal response. Speaking out loud is best (you can feel the vibrations of the sounds in your body), but this can equally be done in silence with an “internal voice”.

This is also a ritual, and so the intention you come to it with is particularly important. One of its major purposes is to give you an opportunity to sense what each part of your body is like, and what its’ (and your consciousness’s) response is to the words. As such it is time to be savoured and enjoyed – as best you can, find a sense of lightness rather than seriousness. You’re giving yourself time to appreciate yourself. The whole exercise is best done at least once every day for at least a couple of weeks.

What do I mean by “each part of your body?”

There is the physical body (limbs, torso, head) – which can also be subdivided into different parts. The joints are as important as the large bits!

There are the internal organs (Lungs, heart, liver/gallbladder, spleen/pancreas, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, bladder, kidneys). These are particularly important. If you’re not sure where they are, look at a simple anatomy book :

- Brain and nervous system; Sensory organs (eyes, ears, nose, taste); Immune system
- Hormone system. Pineal gland, pituitary, thyroid/parathyroid, Thymus (heart area), Adrenals, genitals
- Arteries, veins, lymphatic system and all the fluids of the body (I usually do these in one lot, or add the blood/circulation to the heart). Also the cavities and spaces in the body!
- Skin, muscles, connective tissues, fatty tissues, bones. The spine is particularly important, and I would always mention it specifically.

I usually would finish off by doing one round for “all the cells” and then one for “my whole being” to bring everything together

Start short and simple

As you can see from the above list, this could get to be quite long. Start by working with large chunks of your body at a time, so that the whole exercise only lasts about 10 minutes.

Then, as you settle into the exercise over a few days or weeks you can become more detailed as you wish. I would usually expect to apply this for a minimum of 10 minutes. If done very thoroughly the exercise can take over an hour, and so I would usually vary the detail to suit the time available and what I want to achieve.

Everything is good enough as it is

Although you could call the phrases “affirmations”, they are NOT instructions. You get most benefit by allowing ANY response that IS - to happen. This includes pain, blankness, numbness, stiffness, or nothing, and also any mental/emotional responses, as well as things you would perhaps more normally expect. The important thing is to use the statement to set an intention, and then bring your consciousness to the REALITY of the moment. When you practice whole-hearted acceptance, you can open up extraordinary new depths of integration in yourself. You are sensing what your body is like IN THE EXACT MOMENT – not some memory of how it was yesterday or last week, or even a few minutes ago. If you sense it in each moment, you will begin to notice a surprising amount of change. This change happens of itself, NOT because you have forced it. Generally speaking, any attempt to force an outcome (prejudice instead of bias) will make the exercise ineffective. We all would like to feel happy, pain free and all that. You have to start with what is there (also - see “polarity” below).

However, you don't need to stay in pain or discomfort. One of the big points of this exercise is that pain and discomfort (and distress) take over if we give them too much attention, so the idea is that you acknowledge and honestly feel whatever there is, and then move onto the next whatever. And you are perfectly free to choose to spend more time in parts of the body in which there are interesting and comfortable/healthy sensations.

In fact, I would VERY STRONGLY recommend that you choose to focus more on sensations that say something like “I'm alive and I'm OK” rather than blank/numb sensations or big uncomfortable ones.

Also see the “**Positive Body Awareness**” document, and the workshops I run online at <http://www.body-mind.co.uk/>

You should include parts of your body that are “unwell” or in pain

...as a natural part of the whole “scan”. This is because you have probably up to now not had a particularly good relationship with them. Recognise that – as parts of your living body - they are doing their best.

But other than that, do not give them any attention which is particularly different from any other body part. You might or might not notice a different internal response to them (which could even be as extreme as fear, or blanking out) – and the best thing you can do is to notice that response (whatever it is) and accept that too along with the more physical sensations. It is particularly important to be self-honest as much as you can be, and to recognise that this part of your body has served you well for years and years. Settling into an acceptance of whatever symptoms are there will allow you to let go of attaching any importance to them - to let go of any mental resistance to that body part, and so will release the full power of your inner healing resources. Sometimes the unwellness is a perhaps misguided attempt by your body to perform a function “in your interests” that you are consciously unaware of. This affirmation process will open up the communication channels between your body and conscious mind, again because you are letting go of mental conflict.

Universal Law 15(b) subclause (ii)

One very important rule that it is always useful to remember is that **you get more of what you focus on**. The temptation is always to seek out the problem and try to quick-fix it. Just remember that you actually don't really want any problems or pain or illness – you want to be completely healthy. So look for the health. I'm not telling you to deny the non-health – yes – it needs to be acknowledged – but that takes very little time. It is true that there are techniques for dropping into pain and coming out the other side, but please do not be tempted to mix these up with this particular exercise. They might superficially appear to be the same, but they are NOT. Most people have repeatedly fallen into these problems for many years, and so they have cut a groove that continues to un-necessarily drag them back into it. I urge you to do something different – look for the health instead. Stop falling into the hole.

Language – particularly the English language – may draw you into “problems” in quite subtle (and therefore unnoticed) ways. English tends to objectify everything, and it is no surprise that materialist cultures have arisen in the English speaking countries. Instead of saying “this body's immune system is processing/ colding/ measling”, we say “I have a cold”, or “I have measles”. Not

only does an open ended process become a hard “thing”, but it becomes a possession as well!!! You can let go of these illnesses and “problems” – they do not belong to you. Even worse is the identification with an illness : “I am ill” or “I am a victim” : the illness or “problem” is confused with core identity... making it even harder to let go of.

Ritual

From one point of view there exercises describe a recurring ritual of

- 1) **Gesture** (say something, intend something, place your attention somewhere)
- 2) **Curiosity** about what response there may be from the body-mind to that gesture... Some patience is necessary ... Often the response can take a minute or more to unfold and fully evolve.
- 3) **Response** (what positive form of relationship do we wish to cultivate with whatever as responded?) - this can be a felt appreciation/gratitude/smile, or a “thank you”, or (as in the **Positive Body Awareness** document) something like “Here we all are together” or “Welcome Home”.
- 4) **Let go and move on to the next Gesture**

Variations

If there is a specific issue which you are aware of the details of, and are also aware of the areas of your body which respond when you connect with it, then there is an additional possibility. You could add to the above affirmations such as :

“This XXX has been here for at least XXX years – this is long enough - its time to let it go”.

Remember that attempts to deliberately force something in your body-mind (that you don’t like) to change are usually worse than useless, and can sometimes even reduce rather than increase the willingness of your body-mind to communicate with your conscious mind! Careful, clear, positive and respectful negotiation is required.

However, sometimes a direct approach (i.e. giving your body a direct instruction) will work, and you will be aware of a response (from your body) to the suggestion – either “positive” or “negative” – either of which are useful information. It’s important to recognise that your body will not necessarily obey direct instructions of this kind. So the idea is to **give it an opportunity to do something it might not have realised was possible** – rather than thinking that you can be lord and master of everything. If you don’t believe me, give your body

direct instructions and see what happens. If you're fortunate, a few of them might be "answered", but very soon that particular well will dry up.

Another potentially useful phrase is :

"How much of this ___ is no longer necessary and could be released now?" ... *(pause, feel the response, and then to the body)*

or...

"To what extent can we safely let go of all of this...?" *(pause, feel the response)*

or even ...

"What useful purpose does this still serve?" *(If it no longer has a purpose I thank it for whatever it has done, and now let it go.)*

Resourcing

If you experience numbness or blankness or unpleasant reactions to the exercise, it would be useful to "resource" yourself by identifying places in your body which feel comfortable and strong, and keep returning to them (i.e. specifically focussing on them) occasionally. In fact, it is particularly useful to concentrate far more on the sensation of breathing, and on areas of the body which feel good. By "good" I mean things like comfortable, alive, warm, pleasant, supported, enjoyable, strong... etc. Pain and discomfort (both mental and physical pain) are like loud music – they draw the attention. But it is possible to focus past loud music to a quiet and interesting conversation – and similarly, you can deliberately CHOOSE to feel the "good" feelings in the body (instead of just listening to the noisy neighbours).

Numbness and blankness are often things that draw the attention because we want to feel something. Remember (a) that numbness, blankness and absence are themselves three different sensations – they are sensed qualities, just as the more obvious sensations (tingly, heavy) are. However, numb, blank and absent parts are less well resourced than the parts that feel pleasant. In fact, speaking as an experienced practitioner, I am very clear that it is generally better to focus on pain than to focus for any length of time on numb/blank areas. This is the main exception to the rule of being curious. Leave these areas alone for now, as best you can.

"I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars" (Walt Whitman)

Take time during your day to focus on what wellness feels like

(This is in addition to the “integration exercise” above). Imagine stepping out of yourself into a you that is totally happy, light and healthy – use a physical movement to do this if you are able to (i.e. literally step into a different place on the ground). Get a physical sense of the lightness and strength that is present in this wellness. Your body remembers what wellness feel and/or looks like – you are simply accessing that “sensory” memory. This is a particularly important step, since it will give you a sense of what you are moving towards. If there is no “towards”, then the only motivation is “away from” – imagine what would happen if this was applied to a job or a house... there would be a great feeling of dissatisfaction, but without an image of what you wanted, you might end up in a different job or house which was just as bad, or worse. So begin to sense what you are going towards. This is literally “looking forward” to good health and happiness.

The above is particularly important. A common trap which people fall into is to identify an illness as being something that they possess, or think that it is part of who they are. So it is common to hear “I have arthritis”, or “I am arthritic”. Throw all this out – let it all go – and just allow your own health to manifest itself. We have evolved for hundreds of millions of years to be healthy and capable of survival in the most extreme circumstances, and our bodies to be capable of self-healing. If this were not the case, we would not exist on this earth as a species. So this exercise is a way of tuning in the conscious mind to the requirements of your intelligent self-healing natural body. Health requires that the body – which is either healthy or not, as the case may be – is appreciated and understood.

As you deepen in this practice, you will find interesting things happening – your instincts for what is good (and not so good) for you – food or whatever – will grow and become more conscious.

People are disturbed not by things but by the view they take of them

(Epictetus, c 200 AD)

It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye

(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry)

Polarities

Polarities dominate our lives, our language and our experiences. High does not exist without low, difficult has no meaning without easy.... Polarities create a fixed relationship of polar opposites, to the extent that each may not even exist without reference to its partner. When there is something that we do not want, the most usual response is to try to make it go away. We either get into a battle with it, in some attempt to force it out of our life, or we desperately claw our way in the direction of something that it isn't – both of these are aversion. The effort to get away from the source of discomfort creates a polarity. And like any fight, the result is a relationship in which each protagonist reflects and responds to the moves of the opponent. If this kind of polarity is set up with pain or an emotion, then the mental battle creates an environment in which the normal progression of healing is locked up. Wounds and infection heal less easily. Emotions become a feature of our personality and identity instead of something that is capable of coming and then passing again in a few seconds or minutes. So one very powerful tool that we all have access to is to decide to let go of the polarised relationship with the problems that afflict us. This is usually called “Acceptance”, but that single word does not really describe the subtleties of this approach, or the many and complex ways in which this polarity can be investigated, dissected, dissolved or simply discarded.

Many religions talk of embracing or loving something – and forgiving - rather than hating and trying to push away. Clearly this may neutralise the polarity if we are capable of reversing our instinctive emotion. A simple example of a polarity-neutralising dialogue might go something like...

- 1) Could I now allow myself to be aware of how much I feel/am/want ___ in this moment?
(and then focus on the somatic sense that arises when the question is asked)...
- 2) Could I now allow myself to be aware of how much I DON'T feel/want/am NOT ___ in this moment?
(and then focus on the somatic sense that arises when the question is asked)...

...and repeat many times, continuously observing the body's response to the question and changes in your awareness, memories, etc etc..

So “accepting” something to let go of it is not a matter of shrugging or condoning it, or forcing ourselves into believing that it's OK, or giving in to it - but is more a matter of finding a way to stop fighting it so that it is no longer locked in place by the battle we have started with it.

With all aspects of body integration, we intend to step outside polarities by adopting the position of a curious observer. In neurological terms this focusses brain activity in the frontal cortex. This simple act of curious observation brings us into now because we are observing how it is *in this moment* rather than remembering how it was or how it has been. In polarity terms, we neither

accept or reject it, but instead allow it to be as it is. When we allow this “being” sufficiently, then we are not fighting it, so it is no longer locked, and it starts to change of and by itself.

Additional notes on Acceptance and Appreciation

There is a huge difference between acceptance/ forgiveness vs stoicism/ defeat/ powerlessness. Acceptance is about starting from NOW – saying, “that’s how things are”. It is not always possible to start everything in our lives from a place of where we wish we could be! Acceptance is also about allowing for the fact that whatever is happening may have a “rightness” of its own – even if that is not easy to understand. Something about your life has brought you to this point here and now – some current in the ocean of life has carried you to this particular patch of water. In order to use life’s energy, we first must stop fighting it enough to be able to be curious – so we can feel its pull, its source, its different directions and eddies.

You might think that acceptance is a recipe for hopelessness. It is not. Once there is acceptance, then we start to become in touch with our inner heart-wisdom, and we know far more clearly what is right, and what we want. Once there is acceptance, the right course of action becomes obvious, and action becomes easy – or at least easier. That action might equally be to let go of some situation and move on, or to do something about it or confront someone or something. Or just do nothing because we realise it will pass and is not as big a deal as we thought it was. The value of acceptance is that, the internal conflict resolves and so external conflicts can be viewed and dealt with objectively – and when viewed objectively they often become small, easy, and even trivial. This point is particularly easy to mis-understand. I am NOT suggesting here that you accept illness or problems, but rather that you stop fighting yourself and denying where you are right now, and start literally at NOW in its completeness. You can only consciously choose to NOT have something if you are truly clear what it is that you are wanting to get rid of – which is not necessarily as straightforward as usually appears.

Appreciation is the right hand of acceptance. It is about deliberately choosing to allow the beauty around us to touch our hearts. It is a quiet, heart-centred celebration of life – a recognition that life is fundamentally joy-ful. Without true acceptance, it is impossible to appreciate something, because it has not been truly seen. Without appreciation, acceptance has the potential to revert to numbness.

Acceptance/appreciation are also about love and compassion. Eventually we all die. There is nothing we can do to prevent the eventual death of ourselves or any other person. If you consider the different options available given this fact, then the only logical response is to love

ourselves and everyone without condition – we may not be here tomorrow, and all the effort we may put into trying to avoid this brings a subtle danger of losing touch with the ability to love. Acceptance/appreciation is a heart-centered emotion. It feels warm, nourishing, awake, balanced, still, calm (with perhaps a tiny touch of excitement), aware, soft. Strangely, coffee sometimes creates the same physiological response (which is why so many people like drinking coffee, and sit in coffee shops chilling out). However, after a couple of minutes it over-stimulates the adrenal glands, and that “frazzled” hyperactive feeling begins. So the bonhomie that comes out of coffee is a fix – a “hack” – and in the long term, acceptance and appreciation are much, much better than coffee!

Centering Exercise

Make yourself comfortable in your chair, with your feet on the ground and your spine and head vertical, and your hands comfortably supported in your lap.

Spend a short while allowing yourself to become aware of your breath, the contact your body has with the ground, through your feet, and through the chair. As you become more aware of your body, could you allow yourself to feel the motion of air as it enters and leaves your nose and mouth... the feel of your ribs belly gently moving, being conscious that the movements of breathing not only take place at the front, but also at the sides and back.

Allow yourself to settle in the chair, becoming more comfortable, and at the same time allowing your upper body to be light, allowing the head and shoulders to be softly balanced on your spine, weightless, floating. One way of achieving this is to become aware of the space around you, and its lightness, and to choose to be lightly aware of that lightness. With a lightness of concentration – a lightness of being - the heaviness of the body falls away.

With each breath you are becoming more deeply connected to your body, and more aware of the space around you. Allow this to be for a few minutes.

Now bring your attention deep into the physicality of yourself, so that you are hardly aware of the outside world. Notice what that feels like. And now take your awareness from that place and expand it outwards, softly, without force – like your senses are the scent that has just been released from a rose, and are expanding effortlessly to fill the room. Again, spend a short time noticing what that feels like, and return to a place where you are, to some degree, aware of both your body and the space around you.

Now place your attention on the right side of your body and the space around it... It is as if the left side of you has almost disappeared. Notice what you feel and sense.

Now allow your attention to come back to your midline, and, continuing to shift to the left, your attention now becomes focussed on the left side of your body and the space around it.

Again, come back to a midline so that you are to some degree aware of both left and right. Notice, without having to change anything, what each side feels like compared to the other.

Now place your attention on the rear of your body and the space behind it... It is as if the front of you has almost disappeared. Notice what you feel and sense.

Now allow your attention to come back to your midline, and, continuing to shift to the front, your attention now becomes focussed on the front of your body and the space in front of it.

Again, come back to a midline so that you are to some degree aware of both front and back. Notice, without having to change anything, what each feels like compared to the other.

Deep in the core of your body, there is a midline which you have now moved yourself around and come back towards. Just as best you can, allow yourself to be aware of this line connecting the earth with the sky.

Now place your attention on the bottom half of your body, from the pelvis down, and the space around it and below it... It is as if the upper half of you has almost disappeared. Notice what you feel and sense.

Now allow your attention to come back to your waist, and, continuing to shift upwards, your attention now becomes focussed on the upper half of your body and the space around and above it.

Again, come back to the waist so that you are to some degree aware of both top and bottom. Notice, without having to change anything, what each side feels like compared to the other.

This change of awareness has now defined a place where your vertical midline meets the plane of your waist. Allow yourself to settle into that place, softly, whilst still maintaining as much awareness as you can of inside and outside, left and right, front and back, lower and upper.

Allow yourself to become aware once more of your breath, and the support you have from the chair and floor. Become aware of the noises in the room, the space around you, your hands and feet, your fingers... Whenever you are ready, gently open your eyes and begin to rub your hands and fingers together. Use your hands to smooth your face and hair backwards; make a tight fist a few times. You can now move around as normal.