

Mind of the Body

By Robert Yehling (first appearing in *Science of Mind* magazine, December 2004)

In June 2001, Eric Weihenmayer stood atop the world, but he did not see the snow-capped Himalayan peaks beneath Mt. Everest. His blindness prevented him from viewing his greatest conquest, but his body gave him plenty of sensory stimulation.

Weihenmayer's ability to trust the internal communication between body and mind points out the limitless potential of the body to lead us to the pinnacle of our spiritual, physical, and creative potential. "I've had to rely on what my body told me," he said. "You have to be ultra-present."

Another ordinary person who accomplishes the extraordinary is Pam Reed. This 43-year-old mother of five has twice beaten top men and women distance runners in the world's toughest foot race – the 135-mile Badwater Ultramarathon from Death Valley to the trailhead of Mt. Whitney. Racing in blistering July heat, she set the current women's record.

"Everyone has something they can excel in," she said. "I like to tell people that if you can run a half-marathon, you can run a marathon. If you can write a story, you can write a book. Why? Because you can. It's right there inside of you, waiting to come out."

Yet, the vast majority of us won't go into the vast depths of the body-mind relationship, where Eric Weihenmayer, Pam Reed, and other achievers have ventured. Why not? We allow our intellects to tell us that "we can't," that our bodies can't possibly attain such a feat. "I think most people are frightened about what's going to happen to them when they break through a threshold," Reed said. "They think they're going to die, and they might die – to their old way of looking at things. Really, they're going to live more fully."

Whether the target is health and medicine, spirituality, women's issues, education or athletics, we continue to sever the relationship between mind and body. The concept of separation, fostered by western religion, is the blueprint of modern medicine and a governing force in the industrialized world. How can this be, when Jesus Christ, Krishna, Buddha, Mohammed,

and other spiritual masters identified the body as the temple of God in which our soul resides?

Overwhelming evidence from cellular and energetic medicine supports the masters' contention: Our bodies are the intelligence and spiritual centers of our being. Our intellect and bodies are teammates, not adversaries.

“For myriad reasons, we now live with mind/body fragmentation more than ever before,” says psychologist Dr. Gerald Sinclair. “Our urban lifestyle is almost purely intellectual. We have degenerated into human doings by overriding our physical consciousness with intellectual performance and function. We are a culture of minds with fewer and fewer experiences of the body relationship.”

Body/Mind and Health

Frequent complaints of the modern-day achiever are headache, neck, and shoulder tightness, inability to concentrate and feeling overwhelmed. These symptoms, if left unaddressed, can lead to arthritis, neurological conditions, or depression. We attempt to be in the present and the future at the same time all the while dragging around bits of the past with us. There is only one place we can really physically be that is in the present—right here—right now. Centering ourselves in the moment pulls our power into our every action. That allows our consciousness to drop down out of our heads into our hearts and other energy centers of the body.

The direct link between brain and body, for millennia the province of natural healers and indigenous cultures, reached modern medicine in the 1980s, when Dr. Candace Pert pioneered the understanding of chemicals that travel between the brain and body. She named the brain's opiate receptor “endorphin,” a hybrid word for “endogenous morphine.” Endorphins are released and carried through the body on strings of amino acids that bridge communication between brain and body at the cellular level. According to Pert, every cell in our body carries a receptor that picks up these communications. Consequently, every mental or physical act affects the entire body. In 1993, Pert revealed that endorphins and similar chemicals are found in the immune system, endocrine system, and cellular material, as well as the brain.

Deeply influenced by Pert, Dr. Randall has taken the work into the chakras, cerebrospinal energy centers that run from the base of the spine to the top of the head. "Science has shown us that the same neurotransmitters and informational molecules that function in the brain are also highly concentrated in the chakras. The most ideal balance would be to have all of our seven chakras open interacting with one another and sensing the external world and our internal environment," she said.

Nothing travels along this network faster than emotion. Emotions can awaken, inflame, expand, block or lodge into body cells. Since they are both mental and physical, emotions link mind and body—for better or worse. According to Chinese medicine, negative emotions are particularly damaging because they lodge into vital organs. When Chinese doctors, acupuncturists and massage therapists see patients, they focus on two areas before all others—the energy flow, or "chi" of the body, and the predominant emotions. They proceed to aid and abet the body's natural healing process. "Our cells know how to heal. We need to learn how to allow them to do what it is they already know," Randall said.

The individual who operates from strong mind/body awareness enjoys a steady flow of vitality and treats the body as a finely tuned organism from which all life experience emanates. "The mind creates the body, just as the body determines the state of the mind. When we fully understand this interdependence, we can have wellness without restriction—we become wellness and balance itself," Sinclair said.

Body Mind and Creativity

Whether an artist, homemaker, or CEO, the person who enjoys an open, healthy relationship with the body as a temple, center of intuition, and intelligence tends to be highly creative. Various western societies have often frowned upon these people as "irresponsible," "miscreants," or "non-conformists." However, when breaking away from limited definitions governed by the expectations of others, another word springs forth: integrated. People who live fully in their bodies tend to be more animated, creative, inventive, and willing to live what late musician George Harrison called the "soul's intended purpose."

Dale Norton, visiting writer at Seattle's Pacific Lutheran University, offered a riveting description of the creative process at work when fully integrated into the body:

When we write fiction or creative nonfiction, we are riding the crest of a wave of knowing, and the body is our guide. It reminds us of what we deem to be important. It locates like emotions in the great sea of emotion, brings them down, and we write them. We merge with the divine, thanks to the body and its direction. As in meditation when we still the everyday world and tap into the larger knowing available to us, when we write, we merge the wisdom of the body with universal wisdom. Hence, we find a doorway to the heart. This is where great art exists.

"To rely on strictly intellectual mind is to grossly short-change the fullness of life," added University of Tampa creativity professor Dr. Terra Pressler. "If we allowed this emotional-physical knowledge to guide us, I suspect our authenticity would deepen, and genuine communication flourish."

During the past five years, in order to improve her health, Pressler turned the spotlight on herself and focused on full-body conscious living. Now in her early fifties, she practices a lifestyle that would cause most people half her age to hyperventilate. She is a mother, tri-athlete, songwriter, author, musician, playwright, life counselor, and student of various healing and spiritual disciplines. Her secret? A mid-life realization that the body is not a mindless machine, but a vehicle for heart, mind, soul, intimacy and full expression that loves to touch and be touched.

"Many people are drawn to the performing arts where the stigma attached to bodily expression is overcome, per se, but there are other ways—deep hugs, soft touches—to communicate with one's body," she said. "Sensual expression isn't just a nice idea; it's critical to human development. When behavioral psychologists studied primate babies, they found the infants would rather have the comfort of a terrycloth 'mother' over food, i.e. the drive for physical expression proved stronger than even the drive for food. We're no different."

By allowing the memories and experiences of our bodies to feed like a river into our inspiration, and setting the intellect in its rightful place as servant to the larger mind/body, we can shift from being mechanical "human doings" to

creative, expressive “human beings.” A simple exercise: Write down any experience in your life, then visit it from your memory, your mind, your heart, and your body. After writing these perspectives, close your eyes, feel and visualize the experience as it sits in your body now, and write the story. The integrated richness of emotion, feeling, intelligence, and insight can be self-revelatory. “Connecting with our body consciousness and memory is the creative process,” Pressler said.

Body/Mind Performance

Distance runners, athletes, meditation practitioners and artistically inclined people seek very similar results: a state of automatic body response. The runner calls upon tired and taxed muscles for the final push to the finish line; the meditator seeks to quiet the body and mind for divine immersion that can last hours. Artists and musicians yearn for inspiration to flow through their bodies and minds, where it commingles with their life experiences and presents itself on canvas or in compositions.

Meditation, like the word “medicine” (which comes from the Latin “to cure”) is a major key to accessing full body consciousness. Its purpose is to disconnect the mental chatter and influence of the physical world, and to awaken and amplify our connection with the divine. Meditation addresses various practical goals as well: to access deep inner resources for healing, function more smoothly and effectively in the world, adapt to whatever situation presents itself, reduce stress in the body/mind, and engage more fully in everyday life. As the ancient yogic saying goes, “Center everywhere; circumference nowhere.”

Dr. Randall’s approach to her patients expresses the ancient holistic relationship between meditation and medicine at its best. “I listen to everything my patients have to say to me,” she explained. “I see their energy react to different things they are exploring. I see their bodies move, how they sit, breathe, speak, and resonate. I listen intently to the spaces between the words and I allow my own intuition to sense their energy fields. At the same time, my mind acts like a recorder or a computer, observing by holding back on analysis and away from judgment or attachment. In so doing, the truth reveals itself. My job is really easy. I just listen and wait for the truth to appear.”

Experienced competitive distance runners will almost always close out a performance workout—no matter how difficult—by pushing the last one or two miles at a fast pace. Many others “negative split” their workouts, running faster during the second half of the run than the first half. By doing this, the body cells, muscles and fibers sense the proximity of the finish line, or the need to exert beyond normal means, and take the exhausted runner beyond what his or her intellect thought possible.

Sinclair, who has run a Boston Marathon, also addressed the so-called “runner’s high,” a wave of euphoria that often sweeps over distance runners well into workouts and races. “Long distance runners enjoy the mental well-being from endorphins that give a runners’ high,” he said. “It is not a chemical ‘high’ at all but the balance of a body/mind in motion. The awakened body knows that is creating itself.”

Integrating Mind and Body

The act of the body creating itself spills into all endeavors in which we feel that we’re “in the flow” or “it seemed to come together without any effort on my part.” One doesn’t have to be an experienced runner to experience such body/mind consciousness. Besides its physical stretching benefits, hatha yoga achieves body/mind flow with its emphasis on using consciously directed breath to release tension and stress from specific body parts. The balance can also take place when writing a story, playing with your children or grandchildren, walking in a natural setting, remodeling a home, tending a garden, staring at the stars, or listening to a beautiful piece of music.

“Body without mind or mind without body, is like a jet operating without one engine,” Norton said.

You can get along for a while on just brain power. You can get along for a while just following the impulses of the body—until you crash. To be wholly effective you have to integrate them. They are yin and yang. They are dark and light. They are sacred and profane. Together they are the wisdom of God operating through man.

The reward of employing integrated body and mind—and utilizing the resultant enormous power and intelligence—is the life of peace, serenity, balance, expression, and relationship with nature for which we have all

strived, consciously or unconsciously, since we were born. "As we realize our own personal connection to our own physical self, we also realize our connection to everyone and everything in life," said Sinclair. "We are not separate from the realities of this planet; we are the realities of this planet."