

## The Five Facets of Movement Teaching and Practice:

Knowing WHY you practice can turn you into that rare and desirable being, a great teacher

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There are at least five distinct paradigmatic ways of “seeing” and working with the body. Most people never stop to think about this (which only proves that what I’m about to tell you is of precisely zero importance as to whether the world goes around. The world is going to go around just fine whether or not you read this paper. Plenty of people are going to keep working with the body, just as before. The body is -- as a concept, material reality, living being, or social construct -- highly resilient.).

On the other hand, mixing these paradigms together, or basically ignoring them, is a disservice to human intelligence, both the “mind” kind and the somatic kind, body intelligence.

Right now, the jumbled-up, cobbled-together notion of what “body” means is making it extremely difficult to compel otherwise intelligent people to take up or advocate movement or body-awareness practices. Such practices provide paths to vibrant health and well-being, and what’s more, these paths completely by-pass the heavily paved and highly trafficked road of drugs and surgeries now the mainstream of modern medicine. A person even starting to regain health, self-esteem, and confidence often discovers more loving relationships, greater career and financial success, and, overall a richer, more exciting, sometimes miraculous experience of life, encompassing both light and shadow. Truly, one of the most valuable gifts of a steady, ongoing movement practice, is being able to see life and death as part of a larger whole and good.

So, what are these five facets?

First, let me be clear that when I say “body” I mean the physical, flesh-and-blood body. I know there is a “subtle” body, as well as other “bodies”, energetically powered and full of consciousness, discussed in some respectable traditions. I don’t mean to supersede these distinctions (as if I even could improve on systems that have been around for thousands of years!). I simply want to classify what I have learned so it may be useful to anyone who starts to investigate, through felt experience, the meaning of “body”.

Perhaps the most important point is that none of these facets is somehow an “out of body” experience. That is not what we are talking about here. I hope someday to have out of body experiences, but so far the in-body, embodied experiences have been fascinating enough and full of teaching.

Briefly, the five facets are as follows:

1. The body is the location of personal here-and-now experience, sensation and health.
2. The body is the unconscious – the holder of personal history, family legacy, and social-cultural identity, beliefs and values.
3. The body is part of nature; it exists on an evolutionary continuum of life on Earth.
4. The body is part of the physical universe; it is a location of refined energy transformations.
5. The body is the access point of connection to greater Self, Spirit, All, or Oneness.

In any experience – indeed in any position or gesture -- all of these layers are present. What is different is the context in which the experience we are having is taking place. What is different is also where we direct our attention. Our attention is influenced by the context we think, feel, or imagine ourselves to be in. The teacher of a movement class (or the therapeutic practitioner) establishes, consciously or unconsciously, the context.

Think about it for a second. Our very breathing is affected by things like how safe we feel, and the ground of safety is knowing where we are -- as in, what universe, what reality, what context. Get in the shoes of a

new participant in a class. What are the expectations here, what are the goals, what are the rules, what does it mean to be “good” here, is this like other environments or different. What is my role, who is the leader, do I like them, do they like me, and so forth.

So, for each of these five facets, we can identify distinct features of the context and notice both their inner coherence and how they shape our purpose in being here. That is, a person chooses a class because of what they are looking for and how likely they think they are of getting it. Truthfully, many people may not know what they are looking for (which only proves that we are lucky that people’s bodies are capable of taking them to movement classes, because our society/culture is quite completely out of touch, on a conscious level, of why this might be a good thing). It is actually not their job to know. It is our job as teachers to affirm, first, and then help them decipher, their sometimes subtle inclinations. This is the most basic aspect of awakening body intelligence.

1. The body is the location of personal here-and-now experience, sensation, and health.

WHY: to recover health, often by reducing stress, foremost.

What: use attention, lying down, sound, & subtle movement as the foundation of a conscious rest practice, for everyday life, using a minimum of effort and tension while expanding awareness.

- This the first and most accessible facet of the body and movement practice.
- In this context, lying down means de-stressing the heart, calming the sympathetic nervous system and activate the parasympathetic nervous system.
- Sounding is used to deepen the breathing and direct attention to the motions of breath and other sensations in the body.
- Micromovement is introduced as a means to wake up new sensory-motor pathways of the nervous systems, bring tiny muscles, nerves, and blood vessels “on line”.
- Expectations: By repeating the practice one can expect to feel better and gain skill in regulating their breathing so as to regain calm and clarity, opening the path for insight, leading to changes in life-style and thought patterns. The parasympathetic mode allows the body to heal itself in a wide range of ways.

2. The body is the story-keeper – the holder of personal history, family legacy, and social-cultural identity, beliefs, agreements (in the sense of pacts or contracts), and conflicts – full of emotion.

WHY: to get unstuck by uncovering & shifting emotional blocks, deeply held beliefs or highly impactful events, which have become part of a person’s reality.

What: the process is to uncover stories containing important (suppressed) emotional content, that once brought to awareness can be worked with, bringing a sense of wholeness and emotional well-being.

- This is listed 2<sup>nd</sup> because the next step from here-and-now physical experience is to the emotional experience and personal past experience, positive or negative.
- Here, bodily sensation is the link to emotion, memory, and/or the unconscious (also called the subconscious or preconscious).
- The process is eventually going to produce words or artwork to bring to awareness and outward expression what has been held inside. Witnessing can be an important element.

3. The body is part of nature; it exists on an evolutionary continuum of life on Earth.

WHY: to explore the full range of what it means to be human (rather than assume humans are the pinnacle of evolutionary achievement or no further evolution is possible, necessary, or desirable).

What: the process is to become like nature, especially like water, using breath, sound, and movement (as in Continuum Movement) to explore possibilities of shape, orientation in gravity, and dynamic range.

- Water is the body’s essential make-up and expresses the mutable, changing, connected, sensitive, and innovative quality of evolution.

- Theodore Schwenk, Hans Jenny, and others inquire into the “intelligent” qualities of water and other fluid systems – sensitivity, self-correction, intra-circulation (circulatory currents within bodies of water like rivers and oceans, as well as in the blood stream), self purification, and so on.
- Sounding creates greater fluidity in the tissues of the body -- this can be felt over time.
- Micromovement also increases fluidity in the tissues – it seems to loosen the fascial network and promote/allow more easy fluid flow and exchange throughout the body.
- The fluid body can be sensed as an integrated whole, so that stimulus in one area travels quickly through the body. Wave motion, spirals, and pulses arise out of the practice.
- Changing orientation in gravity creates new challenges and thus increases adaptive capacity.
- All creatures are touched by water, via life-cycle and/or habitat.
- Bio-genesis is essentially a fluid process involving involution as a response to boundaries and other “field” level responses to physical, chemical, electromagnetic and gravitational gradients (that is, not just individual cells, but all cells in a group respond at once in the same way).

4. The body is part of the physical universe; it is a location of refined energy transformations as well as the Unknown.

WHY: to explore physical experience as a means to create solutions to vexing problems of a personal, social or global planetary nature, including the problem of surviving the Great Extinction.

What: the process combines the facet #1 with facet #3; in other words we start with as few preconceptions as possible and then add to that the suggestion that that body is a complex system demonstrating NET, non-equilibrium thermodynamics, like an ecosystem. The focus here is how far from the everyday use of the body can we get, still on the path of minimum effort and tension.

- Sound offers a new imagery to accompany sensation, making it possible to imagine new forms, make unlikely connections, and see completely new possibilities.
- Movement can bring new forms to awareness through sensation, interpretable via cognition.
- Extremely slow, subtle movements and long suspensions of positions that would otherwise tire the body -- while the body is at almost complete rest -- suggest that the body is operating “close to equilibrium”, that is, making highly efficient use of tiny energy transactions within cells and possibly increasing its mitochondrial count and/or capacity. This is a property of mature natural ecosystems, which benefit the entire planet by reducing the production of heat (energy in a non-useful form) and delaying the increase of entropy.

5. The body is the access point of connection to greater Self, Spirit, All, or Oneness.

WHY: to link to God/Self; to align with the higher or greater order; to retrieve instructions on how to live.

What: the process is to create and enter sacred space, undergo “incubation”; participate in Mystery School aka initiation; treat every act as ceremony – attention, breath, sound, movement.

- Breathing expresses the universal motif of dissolving form and taking on form.
- Repetition of sound & movement sequences evokes eons of human ceremony and symbology.
- Sound and movement are used in re-enactment associated with symbols such as the ouroboros and the cross, as well as pyramid and other structures.
- Retreat settings, darkness and silence (not allowing speaking or singing for extended periods of time) lower external stimuli and assist attentional shift from the everyday to the sacred realm.

Note: For the ideas in #4, I acknowledge Schneider, E.D. and Sagan, D., *Into the Cool: Energy Flow, Thermodynamics, and Life* (Chicago, 2005).