Our Sensational Body Part I
by Holland Franklin

The Body Doesn’t Lie

The body is an amazing creation. It is a finely tuned mechanism, designed to support us through the extended adventure of our entire life. In addition to all the practical functions of the body, our body also has the capability to help us to know our deepest selves. Our body fulfills all of its functions for us by communicating to us constantly, telling us about what leads to a life filled with greater expression, balance, and fulfillment and what doesn’t.

Our body will reflect back to us exactly what our relationship is to anything in our lives. The body reveals information to us through the language of sensation, and it never lies. The mind can have more than one point of view about something which can make it unclear as to what is true for us. The body always reflects our true relationship in the moment.

The Body’s Language is Sensation

There is a river of changing sensation flowing through our bodies, day in and day out. Most of it goes unnoticed, or least is not consciously noticed. Sensation consists of many different qualities of experience, all of which have some presence on the screen of our bodies. What is most familiar are the larger sensations of heat, cold, pressure, rough, smooth, heavy, light, pleasurable or painful, etc. If we have exercised hard and have sore muscles, it's very noticeable. If it's 100 degrees of dry heat outside, the feelings of perspiration and dehydration get our attention too. These larger sensations tell us a lot about how to be in our bodies during the day, how to dress for the weather, how much to eat to satisfy our hunger, when we are tired, and so forth.

Beyond the very noticeable body sensations are many others that tell us about more subtle experiences we are having. In our busy lives these often get overlooked, which is a loss because the feedback system of our body is always providing information that is applicable to whatever life-situation we are in. Imagine having an expert at your side who is constantly giving you useful information, and then ignoring 80% of what you are given. So it
is with the flow of sensations in the body for most of us most of the time. In our particular culture we have learned to value thought processes over sensory input as our source of meaningful intelligence.

**The Benefits of Being Aware of Sensation**

Sensation is a doorway to intimacy with ourselves. Most of us have been trained over many years and by many people to relate ourselves to the world outside of us and to fit ourselves appropriately into it as opposed to noticing what is true for us and acting on it to remain in integrity with ourselves.

People develop strategies for being with family members, mates, in school and job scenarios, at the gym, etc. I remember a comment my mother made one day when I was a teenager when we had gone shopping downtown. She looked at a number of well-dressed women milling around the clothing racks and make-up counters and said, "They're buying clothes to impress each other when they go shopping." Whether she was right or not, it still impressed upon me that we spend an inordinate amount of energy on matching ourselves to what is going on "out there" as opposed to what is going on "in here". But how can one be aware of what is going on inside, if one's attention is usually elsewhere? All of these strategies perpetuate divisions within ourselves, resulting in an inner noise of many voices that makes it difficult to become centered and aware.

It is possible to be in integrity with ourselves and appropriate in the world at the same time. Self awareness through paying attention to sensation is one key.

**Learning the Language of Sensation**

The sensation language requires interpretation. It isn't the verbal language we're used to and it takes some time, patience and practice observing the correlation of sensations to experience to get the sense of what means what. Practice is always needed when mastering any new language. With the information available from our bodies it is easier to stay in the here and now. The investment in the time it takes to become familiar with your own changing inner landscape of sensation is well worth it.
Be aware of trying to make what you notice make immediate sense right away. A headache might be related to what you ate, how much sleep you had, the conversation you just had with your mother, the chemicals that are outgassing from the new furniture in the office, detoxifying from the green juice you've been drinking for lunch, a nutritional deficiency, your response to the information presented at the last business meeting, staring too long at a computer monitor ... you get the picture. If you observe with an intention to know what you are responding to, the information will make itself known to you. Just keep noticing what you notice until the sensation-messages start to become clear. A door will open.

**Sensation and Personal Effectiveness**

Another huge benefit to paying attention to the experiences in the body is increased intuition and problem-solving ability. A lot of what is called intuition is unacknowledged input from the body - we sense it and interpret it so fast that the process of "knowing" itself is just below our awareness. We can come up with a correct intuitive flash and not know where it came from. The more developed the resource of sensation becomes, the greater our intuitive awareness will be of what is important, necessary or useful. We won’t have to sit and try to figure it out, we will know. This isn’t to say that thinking isn’t useful, because it is and it is also essential. But when it is unsupported by the in-the-moment input from the body, thinking tends to become a lot of recycled concepts from the past which don't actually fit current needs.

**One person’s inquiry into the body's language:**

"Some time ago, I noticed an itchy place on the top of my thumb. It didn't seem like much of anything. After a few days, the area became extremely itchy and slightly raised so I decided to treat it with an ointment and then another one and then cover it was bandages and then soak it and then more ointment. Nothing seemed to relieve the problem.

Then I woke up. I know that most ailments are symptoms of something. Physically, nothing was different; no new foods or detergents etc. As I
paid attention to how my thumb was, emotionally I realized very clearly that I was avoiding the 'hard talk' with my boyfriend, who, though, a nice person, was not a good fit for me. I didn’t want to feel the loneliness of letting him go nor all the feelings of disappointment and loss, so I had been putting it off living a counterfeit life. By knowing one thing and doing another, I set off an automatic internal 'warning system alarm' which showed up in my thumb.

At the first opportunity, I did the 'hard talk' with my soon-to-be-former boyfriend. The amazing thing is that my thumb's nasty skin problem, which by then covered the whole area between the two joints, healed completely by the next day. I had no idea the body could heal that quickly, but it did.

I see that my mind/body system has strategically placed alarm systems in it; no batteries needed. I had the choice to disregard the sounds and flashing lights as this warning system engaged. Once I recognized the mind/body's 'smoke alarm' and extinguished the problem, the system went back to neutral, just like the one in my house turns off when the air is once again clear of smoke. It was good to find out that I had that choice."

A wondrous trek into the body always reveals surprises and opens into parts of ourselves we forgot we had or haven't entered into as yet. It's an adventure into our larger and more wondrous selves, connecting, illuminating and fulfilling.

**Sensation-al experiments.**

1. First, take your attention and slowly scan throughout your entire body and notice what you feel. Try to name what you notice. This is not always easy at first because we are not accustomed to doing this. The words that describe sensations could include the following and more:

   heavy dense restless rough hot blank loose constricted
   peaceful airy rushing prickly icy flattened floating numb
   disconnected activated smooth weak cold unbalanced
   refreshed rotated light full split jammed open elongated
   light empty blocked energized bubbly spacious tight flowing
slimy relaxed springy longing rising resilient strong capable ...

These descriptions are not an evaluation of what you feel, just a description in detail, as if you were describing the features of a new part of the country you have traveled to to a friend who hasn't been there. The difference is that you are describing the inner landscape of your body to yourself.

Next, think of something in your life, such as your work. Focus on the topic for a moment, and then scan throughout your body once again. Slowly, taking your time. Try this with a handful of subjects, such as people you know, places you've been, your relationship to money, political figures, the different choices you have if you are trying to make a decision - any subject is great to focus on. Just notice what you notice in your body without judgment, because there is no wrong or right response. Also, notice what you notice without trying to change what you find. This is important. And notice what produces a greater sense of life within or any feeling of diminishment.

It is the sensations you notice that tell you that you are feeling something, that tell you what your experience is of anything you place your attention on, if only for a moment. If there were no sensations, how would you know what your experience was? Notice the variety of different sensations you experience. Did anything surprise you?

When you know better what your experience is, choices become available that might have gone unnoticed before. For instance, suppose you notice that focusing on your work produces a heaviness in your shoulders, a sinking feeling in your belly, or an airless feeling in your chest. Step One would be to simply be aware for a relaxed while without judgment. Then if you become aware that you would like to be having a different set of feelings when you focus on work, then you can begin to inquire into what is needed to produce light shoulders, a happy feeling in your belly, an inspired feeling in your chest. See what comes into your awareness as you ask, and again wait quietly and calmly for what occurs next. And so forth. This inner inquiry can help to produce creative solutions to daily situations in a very organic way.

2. The next time you feel an emotion, such as joy, anger, or sadness, ask
yourself these questions:

“How do I know that I am feeling ______?”

“What is it that tells me that I am sad, or happy, or fearful or confused, or...?”

Ask with a sense of loving curiosity as a demanding attitude will make the body shy. After you ask the questions, take your attention, and once again slowly scan through your body and notice what sensations are there. Notice where they are, and describe them to yourself. What is anger for you in this particular moment? A tightness in the back of your neck, a pulsing in your jaw, a gathering of strength in your upper arms?

3. When you are feeling an emotion, keep your attention on the sensations in your body as they change and move, and then "track" them, much as you would follow wild creatures through the woods to see how they move and how they live. Include noticing your breath as you track the sensations. If your mind begins to grab your attention with its thoughts, gently place your attention back on your body's sensations, letting your mind think what it thinks without trying to squelch it. Just track and breathe. Your mind will usually calm down on its own.

For many a typical way of dealing with intense feelings is to try to make them stop somehow, even a lot of the more pleasurable ones. While growing up intensity often becomes associated with many negative judgments as which makes it harder to simply be with our feeling experience as it is. When we think of intensity we usually think of intense anger, sadness or fear. But intensity could also be intense excitement or joy. If there is some experience of loss of safety around these feelings they can be judged as bad or wrong, etc., so doing whatever produces these feelings can also be bad or wrong. Growing up a child might witness an enraged adult who may be verbally or physically abusive. Anger then gets associated with fear and therefore loss of safety. Or, how many times have you seen a small child running around with great energy only to be reeled in by a parent who says "Stop that! You're being too wild" accompanied by a disapproving look, and maybe a jerk on the arm to hold the child in place. Excitement in that case might get linked up with disapproval, loss of love and a sore arm. That loss of safety actually gets "incorporated" or included in the child's physical sense of him/herself in the world. The unsafety is
actually in the body in an ongoing way. Judging an experience as bad or wrong is a mechanism for trying to create safety through controlling feelings and behavior, but it doesn't restore true harmony within. It becomes a binding system of rules to live life by that makes living more and more narrow and lifeless.

Attempted ways to stop these feelings might be through ignoring them, overeating, working too hard, getting into an argument, going on a spending spree, diving into or out of a relationship, trying to analyze them, etc., anything to bleed off the internal buildup of energy, to distract oneself, and stay within a narrower "safe" range of experience. This is suppression of vital energy. Usually the energy of the intensity does quiet down for a time, but the core energy of the emotion is still in our bodies somewhere because we haven't fully had our aware experience yet. When it gets restimulated (which is inevitable), the cycle will play out again, unless there is a different response.

Emotions are "energy in motion", and if they get stuck inside thru suppression, they then reverberate throughout our systems in the background as quiet stress until they are restimulated at a later date when they again come to the surface. Having a safe way to be with feelings can help to restore internal peace and vitality.

Tracking the sensations without judgment provides a gentle way to stay with the experience so that it has a chance to complete itself. Simply feeling what occurs in the body, as sensations, without trying to either change the experience or judge it, allows the energy to move through like a wave, and it flows outward and is gone.

Whatever the experience was, this experience of "integration" reveals the enrichment from it, because the wave leaves behind the wisdom that was hidden within the experience. Then one can go forward more whole, more satisfied, more in touch with who one is, and feeling more connected to life.