



InterPlay
unlock the wisdom of your body

An Invitation to Embodiment

embodiment
what is it??

by Phil Porter

“Being in your body”? What could that possibly mean?

Isn't the body a temporal shell that we will cast aside like the carapace of a molting cicada? Won't we move on to something more noble, more ethereal like those toga-ed gods in the movies wafting around clouds pumped from an off-stage fog machine? Won't the true beauty of our souls finally be revealed at the end time so we can cast aside our concern for our wrinkly skin, lumpy thighs, hair that grows only where it shouldn't, and all the unseemly burps and urges of day-to-day life? Won't we finally be light and lithe?

Don't you wish.

A few hundreds years of accumulated culture and language have convinced us that the true “us” is separate from our bodies; trapped in the envelope of our skin, our beautiful spirits bouncing from edge to edge, edgy to escape. But face it—here we are, all arms and legs akimbo, full of snaky veins and fatty corpuscles. We are firmly rooted on, in, and of the earth, try as we may to rise above it and ourselves.

To be in our bodies is to embrace the fullness of physicality. We stroll, we jog, we lean on the frame of a door. That is physical. We stroll and dance and recline and fart and make love and it is all physical. We imagine and we compute and we analyze and we fantasize, plot, and plan; even when we do this sitting absolutely still (which we rarely do) it is still physical. We feel and fear and love and have the greediest desires; we rejoice and lament and tremble in our boots and it is all physical. We face the darkness,

the awe overwhelms us, we commune with infinity, our hearts murmur with the most mysterious God talk and it is all physical.

Body, mind, heart, spirit—it is all one. Not kept in separate compartments like the knives, forks and spoons in the silverware drawer, but all jumbled together. Our experience is as specific and varied as the potato masher, the cheese slicer, the garlic press, and hundreds of other kitchen utensils that we can hardly identify by name or function. We are a delightful mystery, full of inexplicable surprises and the simplest of pleasures and pain.

But how did we get where we are today, all self-conscious and gangly and embarrassed of ourselves? We should be plumped up like an arrogant rooster, our fullness ruffling every feather; instead we slump in wobbly shame not quite ready to claim the “all” of who we are, have been, will be.

At some tragic point in our life, mere months after birth, we passed out of that all-too-short phase where everything we did was adorable, charming, and amusing and into the land of “no.” From then on someone or another was telling us “don’t do that.” Parents, teachers, preachers, bosses—all had expert opinions about what we shouldn’t be doing.

“Be good” they would say before they trotted off, leaving us with the baby sitter. But what did that mean? “Being good” was really about what we shouldn’t do, not what we should. We did less and less or faced the consequences.

If parental figures weren’t drawing the lines, erecting the electrified fences of respectability, then our peers were defining the boundaries of “cool,” the disdainful glance and the cutting comment their weapons of choice.

Is it any wonder then that over time our physicality became more and more restricted and restrained? Slowly but surely the ropes were wrapped around us until we could barely move. Yes, sitting still is a valuable skill to learn, but did we have to stop breathing as well?

The number one excuse for not being in one’s body turns out to be self-consciousness. If we ask of ourselves anything more than the bare minimum we might do something silly, and then where would we be? Fortunately, it turns out that our self-consciousness is a tiny curb to step over, not a fortress wall. There may be a little bump there but step lively and you will be over it in a minute.

You have so little to lose and so much to gain.

Life is far too complicated and stressful to try to be living it somewhere other than in our bodies. We are bodies. To try to escape this essential fact is futile. Eventually we pay the price of denying our physicality—lethargy, illness, dull minds, dull spirits, lost opportunities for wonder or joy, for insight or information. To ignore the fullness of our physicality is to cut the threads in a many colored, multi-layered tapestry of knowing.

The wisdom of the body is a huge resource for living. Of course, you must be in your body to access it.

Breathing deeply would be a good beginning. Try it right now—it is so immediately gratifying. I never fail to feel more relaxed after one simple deep breath, especially if I follow it with a nice sigh. From there we can shake ourselves loose, stretch a little, check in with the lively surface of our skin, massage our ears and then breathe again.

This is only the beginning of being in our bodies. What follows can be an incredible journey. Are you packed? Ready to go?