

Embodiment Project: Introduction



How can we inhabit ourselves more fully in everyday life? This course presents an introduction to sensing, movement and breath as the essential skills to join with the life that is constantly seeking to emerge from within us.

Welcome to the Embodiment Project. Over the next nine weeks you will embark on a journey into your body, your identity and the space you take in the world. Each week will explore a theme with an exploration of embodiment practices that enhance the focus of that week, and an introduction to simple experiments that you can begin to integrate into the rhythm of everyday life.

The Embodiment Project highlights a way of connecting to yourself as an embodied being while supporting you in meeting the world as it is. Each week will bring one part of your functioning to the foreground.

This is a journey in community. To support your practice throughout the week, I will supplement handouts in each class with additional material that will be uploaded to the Embodiment Project web page. This will include a summary of each week's learning theme, summaries of the traditions that engendered the embodiment practices of that week and concepts underlying their use. Background reading and resource lists will provide opportunities for you to dive a little deeper into underlying concepts related to the class theme. Related biology will help you move into the sensory and imaginal landscape of your body.

The web page will also give you access to an on-line forum. Through the forum, you will be able to support one other's exploration of the practices, sharing the insights of your own process while experimenting with approaches others add to the practice themes of each week. In addition, each class will be video recorded and uploaded to the web page, providing you with a resource you can access throughout the week.

As you begin your journey, I would like to share some basic principles and practices that will be referenced throughout the

Embodiment Project: Introduction

course. Take time to read them now but also keep them for ready access, using them as a guide to the course.

Principles and Practices that Guide the Embodiment Project

Each unit informs the learning in the next. I hope that the information in this introductory chapter will become dog eared with constant reference as you explore the learning in the following weeks. You will also find that each week's experiences will be enhanced by the practices of the weeks before it.

Each week is a movement between foreground and background experiences. While each week will build on the experiences of the prior weeks, you will also notice that each week is a more detailed focus on aspects of a prior week's focus. A particular week may focus on an aspect of breathing, the experience of our breath will always be affected by a week that focuses on movement.

An attitude of inquiry will be your guide. Approach your practice with curiosity. An experimental approach allows space to notice what is actually happening with the least interference. When you ask, "what would happen if...?", you leave space for possibility.

Curiosity with *life as it is* gives space to what is wanting to emerge to naturally respond. It encourages a natural response from within ourselves, a reorganization that, even under the most restricted circumstances, will be an attempt towards greater functionality. And it is a shift that has an affect on all levels of functioning in our biological and psychological being. This is the principle of truth and reconciliation as it applies to the life of organic being.

The body becomes a mirror when we are curious about the sensory functioning of our body. We also notice our tensions, our contorted postures and restricted movements...and all the discomforts that come with them. To a large extent these are the artifacts of how we have stopped our natural responses to life. Our organism shows your habitual patterns of response, and is a mirror that shows your attitudes toward yourself.

In this course, you will be encouraged to use the attitude of inquiry to be curious about each experience as a sensory event without applying our habit of 'fixing' things within ourselves that we don't like.

The challenge of our time might be put: How can we be connected in ourselves and not withdraw from an overwhelming world, and how can we be in the world, and not lose an authentic connection to ourselves?

Embodiment Project: Introduction

It can be easy to get overwhelmed with all the dysfunctions you will notice, the very tensions and discomforts that we spend so much of our time distracting ourselves from. You may also have a heightened awareness of your habits of distraction - the fast pace we set ourselves, repetitive movement patterns, anticipating what is about to come rather than noticing what is, or addictive habits with digital screens or food. *Be patient with yourself*, returning once again to the simple wisdom of each practice as an experiment.

Naming your experience is a powerful technique that helps move you from being entangled in the habits of your inner life to being present to it. Through noticing, and then naming, a part of you stands separate from the stuck parts of your life, but in a way that is engaged, that says to it, “I see you”, and I am here with you.

Pacing is essential to integrating your experience. In the same way that a pebble dropped into a body of water sends ripples endlessly across its surface, the more you can be present to the subtle affects of each practice, a deeper integration will happen.

Working the charge cycle is an essential part of the learning process. Sensing and movement awakens the stuck patterns in your body. As they start to move, there will be more energy. It takes a while to learn to ground that energy so that you don't go into a recontraction. Go slow, give yourself lots of integration time.

What does that look like? The basic form is similar to yoga resting pose, shivasana, that allows to you to feel more grounded. An enhanced form of grounding is to lie with your knees bent and your feet on the ground.

Pick a period of time in your day to do a practice. Start with a short period of time, perhaps five minutes once a day. It can be helpful to stop at the end of your agreed upon period of time, even if you feel like continuing with the practice so that it is easier to trust the agreement with yourself the next day.

The practice time can be at a specific time of day, perhaps in bed when you first wake up, or it can be inserted into an activity such as having breakfast or taking a shower. It can also be a practice specific to the focus of that week.

Over time, you may find you begin to experiment with activities throughout your day as an embodiment practice. Let them

Embodiment Project: Introduction

naturally come to your awareness, and let them naturally complete as they lose your interest. See what it is like to keep an attitude of curiosity about what will happen during each episode of experimentation.

Set baselines about how you function in everyday life. How well do you sleep? Do you have areas of chronic aches, pains, movement or posture limitations? The purpose of this course is not focused on changing your physicality or functionality but to inhabit yourself more fully *as you are in this moment*. However, this process can have an effect on how you engage with yourself that shows in subtle changes in all the above areas, changes that can be so slow and subtle that you might not notice that they have happened unless you record them.

Keep a record of your journey. A journal of your engagement with the process is a helpful way of naming your experience and is a companion to the conversation you will have in the forum. It allows you to follow the arc of your movement through the journey, comparing original baselines to where you are, and giving space for insights about your experience that are a natural outcome of reflective writing.

And finally...a little background reading

How much are you present to each moment of the day? Much of the answer to that question lies on your body. Your rush to the next moment shows not just in thought but in your body. Your mind may be already thinking of an answer to someone's thought, not letting it fully penetrate you while your body sits on the edge of an action that anticipates anywhere that is not here.

A body that cannot be held by the moment it is in builds tension between conflicting impulses, pacing in cage that doesn't feel like home. Meanwhile, with too little sensory information available from this moment, the mind gleans what little information is available to it as it tries to understand this moment and plots the safest pathway to the next.

In my work as a body centered practitioner, people most often come to see me because of those penetrating experiences - a back that goes out, a shoulder in chronic pain, a chronic headache - but it has become clear to me that the experience has most often been part of a slow disintegration of our ability to sublimate and cope with the effects of the disconnections of our lives. And even in the effects of a sudden injury or illness, that the path to functionality will challenge the habits of our ways of functioning in

Embodiment Project: Introduction

life. A healing of the body is always accompanied by a deeper sense of connection with oneself.

This course is about a journey into this landscape where body and mind, so often absorbed in conflicts between the parts of itself, cannot be fully present to the unfolding world of its path through the world. Distracted by the internal dissonance, our ability to experience ourselves, each other and the world around us is diminished in a blur of second hand sensation and the 'monkey mind' of strategizing that can have us skipping like a stone across the surface of our life. Until those moments when life's experience becomes so intense that it penetrates the field of disconnect.

These are not new ideas. This world has a rich lore of embodiment and mindfulness practices. What is unique is the time we are in. Our world is infused with a culture that bombards our organisms with increasingly high levels of sensation whether it is sound or light, the high speed of movement including the rate that images are introduced to our awareness, and with an expectation of a pace of response that leaves little room for reflexion and encourages reactivity. We would not expose any other animal species to such an experience and not call it abuse.

In this environment, traditional body centered and contemplative practices have been challenged to translate techniques that were, like t'ai chi, yoga or meditation, a natural expression of the cultures they evolved within. More often we are reduced to using these practices like pit stops for the soul, stepping from a yoga class into rush hour traffic, or a sudden phone call about a sick child in a daycare that is half a city away.

In the journey that you will be joining me on, we will be drawing upon practices that began to emerge a little over 100 years ago as a response to the challenges of Western culture. The work of sensing pioneer Elsa Gindler was tested by women who walked to her classes through the streets of war torn Berlin. Her student, Charlotte Selver, asked her American students to read the headlines in the morning paper while being present to the experience in their body.

Al Huang taught his students to use the essence of t'ai chi to explore movement in space as it applied to everyday life and Eugene Gendlin showed how sensing could be a guide to more authentic relationship with others.

Embodiment Project: Introduction

Each class will draw upon examples of each practice to help us awaken their insights in our own body awareness. But more importantly, in bringing those practice examples into everyday life we will give them a chance to awaken the unique responses of our body to this moment, nurturing the connection to self as we move more fully to meeting the world.