

Natural Expression

Embodied Learning within Engaged Eco-Psychosomatics

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ABSTRACT

Engaged Eco-Psychosomatics joins breath awareness, somatic intelligence, and mindful attention with a creative agency further heightened through convening with nature. Within this convening is an interactive symbiosis intensified through heightened perception. The intimate cognizance, breath, and liberation available within the act of communing with nature can serve as an eco-psychosomatic therapeutic resource. This form of engaged therapy enhances holistic embodiment and regeneration. When we invite our creative instincts to flow through our bodies, our somatic intelligence animates in a way that can span our historical narrative and encourage transformation aligned with our core desires and inner wisdom. When we join our heart perception with breath and sensory awareness in nature, the confines of the linear brain dissolve. We begin to attune the bodymind to the depths of slow fascination, compassionate discernment, and synergistic consciousness. When there is an element of nature to assist in addressing the inner self, there is an external and textural feedback loop that grounds each stage of the healing cycle in a tangible reality. Engaged Eco-Psychosomatics joins consciousness and energy in a manner that can lead to a direct insight into our character structure, inner needs, and vital nature, as well as assist in the completion of the healing cycle toward homeostasis.

Keywords: somatic intelligence, engaged eco-psychosomatics, mindfulness, movement, expression, embodiment, the healing cycle, creative agency embodied consciousness

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*Every experience I've had in my life
is a resource in my body.*

Anna Halprin

When I was a young girl, my first energy mentor would bring me to the local Seminole Indian drum circles. She was Jamaican Chinese, but somehow, perhaps through her energetic resonance, she had bonded with the tribe who held their ceremonies in the forests close to our homes in Miami, Florida. I would dance with the women and children around the drummers, who sounded like they were playing the heartbeat of the Earth. I don't remember ever speaking in words with anyone at the ceremonies. Still, our collective movements spoke through my cells as one foot after another planted itself into the soft forest soil underneath me. Our focus was on the Earth, spirit, and energetic presence. It was as if roots grew through the soles of our feet, up through the core of our bodies to the sky and back. Our arms wove through the air like winged branches reaching out into the world and then back into our spines. This early foundation of communing with nature and community has threaded through my work as an artist and healer. In time, as I pursued further engagement with nature and body psychotherapy, ritual, and mindfulness practices, I came to realize the psychosomatic resources nature provides in the healing cycle.



A Cycle of Healing

“Like a bird in a cage, the heart speaks of life beyond its confines. A second pulse pumps cerebral spinal fluids, a deep, secret stream of life through the spine and brain. And more fully expressive as a rhythm is breathing, which feeds the cells with new life.”

J. P. Conger

Gerda Boyesen illustrated a healing cycle in what she termed the Vasomotoric Cycle of Healing. Through her study of energy and the nervous system, she identified phases we naturally endure or interrupt, from stimulus and charge to expression and equilibrium. When we interrupt or block energy from moving through its full expression, we prevent discharge. This prevention can lead to discomfort and destructive patterns. A completed healing cycle can lead to self-regulation, restoring balance with a new baseline and integrated learning. The cycle is a psychosomatic process of learning that weaves through physical, emotional, and spiritual reactions, along with responsive insights into our lives. A cycle can span experiences from the initial charge and response to a situation, to the winding down, recuperation, and integration of new learning. Within the winding down and relaxation, new competence can be absorbed.

The process can take moments, hours, days, or years. When the full cycle is accomplished, the accumulated diseased energy is discharged. Then, the experience can be digested physiologically. Past tensions can be expressed through the body, mind, and spirit in an experiential way. If someone stops the process at the charge, however, there is a possibility of getting stuck within the anxiety or other energetic conditions the charged experience embodied. Trapped energy can lead to a lack of feeling the soothing sensations at the end of the cycle. It is through the completion of the cycle that a new baseline of homeostasis forms, and gateways to pleasure open. The cycle

doesn't erase the experience or inferred images; however, it does release the charge, allowing the nervous system to let go of the disruption and re-integrate in a place of harmony. The involvement of conscious, semi-conscious, and unconscious proprioception influences the autonomic nervous system. It affects both sympathetic and parasympathetic activity, interlacing to usher a person through the journey to equilibrium. When there is an element of nature to assist in addressing the inner self, there is an external and textural feedback loop that grounds each stage of the healing cycle in a tangible reality.

Somatic Intelligence

*“I am not what happened to me.
I am what I choose to become.”*

Carl Jung

Tangible reality is just one aspect of our lived experience. We all have bodies with intricate systems that embody inner wisdom, multifaceted feelings, and sophisticated healing capacities. Somatic intelligence encompasses our innate potential to integrate awareness with renewal, intuitive action, and dynamic vitality. In her book *Awakening Somatic Intelligence: The Art and Practice of Embodied Mindfulness*, Dr. Risa Kaparo defines somatic intelligence: “Somatic Intelligence is your own inner guidance system. A compass to navigate the conditioned aspects of experience from a state of limitless awareness.” (2012) Further, breathing slowly, deeply, and mindfully in connection to the natural world, we attune to the untethered wildness in our hearts, the lush nature of our bodies, and the interconnected nexus that sustains life. When we invite our creative instincts to flow through our bodies and empower our somatic intelligence with breath and attention, we encourage neuroplasticity that has the potential to span historical narrative, and encourage transformation aligned with our core desires and inner wisdom.

Engaged Eco-Psychosomatics (EEP)

“There is that in us which has moved from the very beginning: it is that which can liberate us.”

Mary Whitehouse

For the last two decades, I have led students, clients, and myself through creative somatic processes of self-encounter and expression. The processes reach into cellular memory and engage a sensual embrace of the natural world. By tapping into the revealing essence of breath, movement, and nature, there is a grace that wholeheartedly supports and invites an embodiment of the complexities of life. I have found that convening and interacting with nature through intention and focus can both extend and support personal expression. A term that best encapsulates this process is Engaged Eco-Psychosomatics (EEP). By engaging with the tangible qualities of nature and visceral intelligence, we have both a container and a medium to express our deepest pains and most sensuous tenderness. Within this process, I have found an atmosphere where breath can slowly integrate our brain, heart, and gut through the potency of our senses and our innate ability to embody new learning. As Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen noted, *“This dialogue between present cellular and past nervous system experience is what I call ‘learning’.”* (2012, p. 161) This form of cellular and embodied learning can encourage reflexive creativity that is physical, cognitive, and behavioral. In an article published by the U.S. National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health entitled *Neuroscience of Exercise: Neuroplasticity and Its Behavioral*

Consequences, the adaptability of the brain is presented, as well as the body-mind connection in learning through changing dynamics. The article states:

Convergent evidence from both human and animal studies suggests that enhanced physical exercise facilitates neuroplasticity of certain brain structures and as a result cognitive functions as well as affective and behavioral responses. There is evidence linking increased physical exercise with an enhancement of neurogenesis, synaptogenesis, angiogenesis, and the release of neurotrophins as well as neuroendocrinological changes, which are associated with benefits in cognitive and affective as well as behavioral functioning (such as fine motor functioning). (Budde et al., 2016)

The exercises within an Engaged Eco-Psychosomatic process joins these scientific understandings with the awareness that being in nature is good for us on many different levels. As Dr. Qing Li writes, *“Being in nature can restore our mood, give us back our energy and vitality, refresh and rejuvenate us. We know this deep in our bones. It is like an intuition, or an instinct, a feeling that is sometimes hard to describe.”* (2018) EEP develops a bodily felt sense that is focused, intricate, and innovative. There is an invitation to be fully attentive to energy, stillness, movement, and expression. There is a call to cultivate presence through sensory exchanges with nature. In their paper *The Bodily ‘Felt Sense’ as a Ground for Body Psychotherapies*, Eugene T. Gendlin and Marion N. Hendricks-Gendlin refer to bodily felt sense as an implicit intricacy that is always functioning. They highlight its movement between “verbal-conceptual and bodily implicit understanding,” while tapping into intricate bodily knowledge waiting to emerge. The Gendlins explain:

You have a bodily orienting sense. You know who you are, and how you come to be in this room. The knowing is physically sensed in your body and can be easily found. You can learn how to let a deeper bodily felt sense come in relation to any specific situation. Your body “knows” the whole of each of your situations, vastly more aspects of them than you can possibly just think. Here, you find an intricate bodily knowledge, and new steps that want to come, and will come if you can wait here and allow them to emerge. (2015)

Ecopsychology and Engaged Eco-Psychosomatics (EEP)

In the natural world, you can wait and empower emergence. The patterns of beauty, destruction, and growth can be observed in both intimacy and vastness. Along these lines, nature is a reflective tool for encountering personal, cultural, and social realities. Within Ecopsychology, the relationship between human beings and the natural world is viewed through ecological and psychological principles.



Photo: Anthea Scott Zollinger

There is recognition of the inherent links between human health and the state of the planet. Just like Ecopsychology, the transpersonal elements of identity and appreciation of transcendent experiences in nature are very much a part of an EEP practice. In this way, it could be considered a branch of Ecopsychology. However, EEP interacts with nature in a slightly different way. Within Engaged Eco-Psychosomatics is the catalyst of acutely breathing and feeling into the interaction with nature. There is also a deepening of mindful awareness that focuses on the fine details within nature as well as on our inner dialogue, yearnings, and sensations. This interplay between feelings, textures, and multifaceted details beckons an emergence of intimate hyperawareness.

The EEP experience is interactional and interpersonal in the most primal and intimate sense. Like a kitten purring as she paws the soft belly of her mother, the interconnectedness of self and nature ripples through an EEP experience cellularly. In this way, the mind, body, and spirit are



Photo: Alycia Scott Zollinger

infused experientially. It taps into the depths of personal history while stoking primitive synergy with the natural world simultaneously. Somatic intelligence becomes sensitized. Options and patterned responses are highlighted as we navigate dimensions of nature and feeling into the moment.

Within this EEP praxis, there is a heightened perception of consciousness via the direct experience of our embodied presence and a felt sense of our nervous system. In an EEP process, the mind-body-spirit connection is supported, enlivened, and grounded in the awareness of self. The multifaceted textures of nature assist in attuning attention. Connecting with nature in this physical and intentional way also enhances a greater sense of aliveness. In this practice, the bodymind is the perceptive interpreter and interlocutor. Nature is the web for holistic expression, and breath is the thread. In an article entitled *Why Ecopsychology Needs Natural History*, Laura Sewall and Thomas L. Fleischner write about the influence of convening with nature on our sensibilities and consciousness:

Natural history, as a practice of intentionally focused attention to specifics of the nonhuman world, offers a method for learning to see a richly animated world – and the patterns that connect us all. In the practice of doing natural history, signals originating from ecological realities alter sensory habits and perceptual expectations – and shape new ways of seeing. We become more perceptive, more ecologically informed, and more wholesome as our shifting sensibilities influence consciousness and actions. (2019)

The experience of seeing, feeling, and breathing with a natural element can invite both reclamation and expression of deeply embedded needs, emotions, and pleasure. It provides a tangible orientation, container, and conduit for shifting sensibilities and enlivening consciousness with new perspectives. This psychosomatic practice of interoception, breath awareness, and mindfulness can also facilitate nervous system regulation, self-encounter, and expression within an interconnected container of nature. It is a form of self-engagement that instantly shifts states of conscious awareness while simultaneously heightening receptive discernment. It invites messiness, grace, and play while engaging attention, imagination, and the connective interplay between bodymind and nature. This presencing enlivens one's interactive bodily felt sense. Breath can then further deepen, and new expressions can emerge.

Breath: The Direct Link and Self-Encounter

“There is a way of breathing that’s a shame and a suffocation and there’s another way of expiring, a love breath, that lets you open infinitely.”

Rumi

Breath's direct link to the nervous system facilitates a more rapid transition into multiple levels of human experience and memory. It is life in an energetic form. Breath is impacted by the effects of emotions and can affect our physiological state. It can carry and move through emotional charges embedded within us. *“While normal unconscious breathing is controlled by the autonomic nervous system, the breath is readily accessible to conscious control and can, therefore, provide a link between our conscious mind and our anatomy, physiology, deeper emotional states, and our deepest spiritual potential.”* (Kraftsow, 1999) A practice of Engaged Eco-Psychosomatics combines awareness of conscious breathing and focused attention for insight into our existence and the intricate systems that sustain, heal, and vitalize our human experience.

Breathing illuminates our energy, brings new life to cells, and carries the vitality of our life force. Breath can weave through our nervous system in ways that elucidate the way we structure our character, armor our being, and ei-

ther contract or expand from our daily experiences. Utilizing intentional breath while engaging with an element or aspect of nature further assists in highlighting our natural rhythms of expression, holding, and physical armoring. EEP focuses attention on our inner needs and sensory nature. As Laura Sewall wrote:

Within psychology, the most common definition of attention is ‘the enhancement of selected sensory information.’ Focused attention, we know, translates into a richness of color, a depth of sensory experience, and the difference between seeing and not seeing... Initiated by our intention, attention offers a kind of coming together with the world. Over time, our gratitude rises up like a wave surfacing from still water, meeting the world in a purely present moment. There is grace in the offering of our attention. (Sewall, 1999)

The union of breath and ecological awareness orients self-expression with our bodily felt sense, allowing us to find a balance between our assertive and receptive movements creatively. This self-awareness can facilitate self-regulation and integration of the past into present intention. It is a form of self-encounter that mindfully tunes us into breathing while enduring a more rapid penetration of our defenses and withheld energy. Dr. John Pierrakos once wrote, “*And the very act of self-encounter is the first step toward reintegration not only of the person within but of this, our being, with outer reality.*” (Pierrakos, 2005) When we give ourselves permission to intentionally connect with our breathing, time dissolves, and gravity holds space for us to delve into a deeper level of contact with the most vulnerable aspects of our being. We experience the solid and fluid nature of how we hold ourselves, our energy, love, rage, and thoughts. This mindfulness of our internal imprints and patterns taps into the intricate networks and undercurrents of our nervous system.

Breath is both voluntary and involuntary. It is a meeting place for our inner and outer worlds. It can be a stream of consciousness where we can intimately encounter our

unconscious self. When we fully attune to our breath and attention, we more deeply immerse in our living essence, where we can enable transformation. In the image seen, my client is using her breath in connection with sand as an outlet to deepen her self-awareness. The sand is providing a container to press into, throw, roll, and move within, while her breath enhances her connection to her internal processes. These processes could be intellectual, physical, or spiritual. There could be a continual deep focus on the sensual nature of her body in relation to the sand. Alternatively, the thought of how messy it could be to roll in the sand would take her out of the sensuous capacity of the experience. Through either thought, she can intentionally choose to bring her attention back to her breath and the sand to reconnect to a more innate psychosomatic encounter. When she spread her body over a fallen tree trunk and opened her heart to the sky, surrender and empowerment met. In her feedback from this session, she spoke about how she felt so held by the container of natural interrelatedness. New experiential-based messages began to thread through her thinking and behavioral patterns, inviting more openness to expression, pleasure, and being fully in time and space. Passersby or past earlier experiences that may have otherwise distracted her dissolved in the force field of her dedicated intention to be fully present.

Engaging Eco-Psychosomatics: A Guided Experience

“The brain is a far more open system than we ever imagined, and nature has gone very far to help us perceive and take in the world around us.

It has given us a brain that survives in a changing world by changing itself.”

Norman Doigde

Nestle yourself comfortably in a place where there is a natural element. Take a moment to turn your awareness to your breath. How are you breathing? Where is your breath going in your body? Is it stopping or gathering in certain places? Is it flowing like currents through your whole body? What happens when you become more intentional about your breath and begin to breathe slowly? As you inhale, fill your belly with air, and lightly lift your heart. As you exhale, bring your navel gently towards your spine as you lightly bring your chin toward your throat and notice the sides of your neck and body lengthen. Continue to breathe as you also take note of the parts of you in connection to the surface below. Connect to the natural rhythm of your breath. Be fully present in the ebb and flow of your breath for a few minutes. If you





feel a yawn or sigh arise, let it move through you with full expression.

Next, turn your attention to a natural element, plant, tree, or flower. Continue to breathe as you take in the intricate details of your focus. If your mind wanders, bring your attention back to your chosen focus. Shift your sensing out of the brain and into your heart. You can do this by feeling your heart's elevation as you breathe in as well as its sensory buoyancy within each exhale. Tune into an awareness of the heart as a perceptual organ with a 360-degree sensing capacity and its own nervous system that interconnects with the autonomic nervous system. The brain can rest in its coherence with your heart's intelligence if you permit it to trust in your innate intuition. Breathe.

Feel grounding through your feet and sitting bones (if you are seated). You can do this by lifting the flesh out from under your sitting bones, if seated. If standing, imagine roots, big and small, growing from the full sole of each foot down toward the core of the Earth.

As you continue to breathe into the intricate details of your point of focus in nature, see what happens when you invite a response within you, whether it be a small gesture, sensation, or movement. Can you tune into your felt sense in connection with the natural point of focus you have selected?

From here, you can take this moment in many directions. You can remain seated, standing, or begin to allow movement to undulate through your body in response to the inner and outer nature you are connecting with in real time. It can be a five-minute meditation or hours long, as you deepen your openness and awareness in connection with a plant or element. The foundational intention is open-heartedness and breath in association with mindful attention. You can remain in connection with the fine details of your focus, or also attune to the consciousness of feelings, thoughts, and sense of being. It can be extended

through a deep dive into the depths of sensation, and following the threads to find the deep needs, memories, and withheld expressions awaiting tending and continuance through the bodymind. In this process, inner patterns of thought and action can be seen and then updated in present-day awareness, intention, and integration – akin to the session I mentioned above.

Most importantly, this is a precious time to be with yourself, your breath, and the interdimensional capacity of connecting deeply with inner and outer nature. Breathe and Be.

Somatic Learning and Visceral Compassion

From the perspective of somatic learning, as you begin to utilize feeling and sensation as feedback, you become an open, learning-oriented system. You become more self-sensing and self-organizing, transforming your structure and functioning in a way that eases the pressure and allows the organism to follow its own natural course toward healing and self-renewal... (Kaparo, p. 18, 2012)

The practice of breathing into personal interactions with nature expands the reaches of our senses from the inside out, from cells and neural tissue to sensory nerves and hollow organs. In *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation*, Dr. Daniel Siegel explains how the brain in the body develops through the dispersion and clustering of cells to the extensive networks of nerves from the heart and other organs that convey information to the brain.

The neural networks throughout the interior of the body, including those surrounding the hollow organs, such as the intestines and the heart, send complex sensory input to the skull-based brain. This data forms the foundation of visceral maps that helps us have a "gut feeling" or a "heartfelt sense." Such input from the body forms a vital

source of nutrition and powerfully influences our reasoning and the way we create meaning in our lives. (Siegel, p. 43, 2009)

The practices within an EEP process provide space for our bodymind to interact with sensory input and create new meaning. In its broadening of our senses and expressions, the experience can be regenerative, cleansing, grounding, and informative. It encourages play, as well as safety in intimacy and connection. Engaging the ecology of our sensations and impulses connects us to our innate wisdom. It empowers a sense of tenderness and curiosity in discovering and growing the edge of our limitations. These experiences can mobilize our holistic intelligence through relational perspectives that engage within the resiliency of nature and the awareness of breath through the whole of our being. As scholar and deep ecologist Paul Shepard wrote, “*The epidermis of the skin is ecologically like a pond surface or a forest soil, not a shell so much as a delicate interpenetration. It reveals the self-enobled and extended... because the beauty and complexity of nature are continuous with ourselves.*” (Shepard, 2006) In the continuity of our sensuous intelligence, breath and ecology can bring the brain into coherence with the ingenuity of the heart. Nature becomes both a tangible anchor and holistic guide into proprioception and then integration. After traversing different levels of intensity, the breath can slow down with a continuous focus and connection to nature, sealing the nervous system back in to present time and space with the cumulative somatic knowledge and sensory perception gleaned.

Sensory perception is the natural and right blending of inner and outer. The linear mind is what creates the boundary line between us and the world. Location of consciousness in the brain closes the door to Nature. But the door is unlocked. Perceiving through the senses opens the door. The more sensitivity we cultivate to sensory flows, the more directly we perceive with our senses, and the wider the door opens. (Buhner, p. 140, 2004)

Heart Perception and Threads of Compassion

Marcel Proust once wrote, “*We do not receive wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves after a journey through the wilderness, which no one else can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world.*” When we shift out of the brain and into our heart, perception, breath, and sensory perception in nature, we enter the wilderness of our senses unbound. The confines of the linear brain dissolve, and the bodymind becomes attuned to new and greater depths. This shift also fosters compassionate discernment and alignment with inner wisdom. Our brain can then sync to the new sensory discoveries intuited through intentional attention and movement in

heart coherence. “*When the heart moves into coherence, it acts as an amplifier, sending coherent information through its afferent nervous pathways straight to the thalamus, which synchronizes the neocortex and the brain’s survival centers.*” (Dispenza, 2019) Experiences of deep connections with nature become resources for both the present moment and the future. New foundations, rooted in experiential learning, cultivate healing and compassion that can serve as rejuvenators, regulators, and innovators in times of stress and in response to physiological urgencies. In an essay entitled *Our Deepest Affinity*, conservation biologist Thomas Lowe Fleischner writes about our connection with nature concerning our capacity to honor beauty and express compassion openheartedly. Fleischner refers to this connection as “Natural History.” He wrote, “*Compassion – literally, feeling with – occurs when we encounter others with open hearts... When we connect with individual, specific lives – this flower blooming in this parched mudflat, these muskrat eyes looking back at me from the desert pool – we can transcend nebulous notions like ‘Nature’ and replace them with texture, depth, and a realm of specificities. Natural history, then, is a path of compassion*” (Fleischner, 2017) Once compassion is embodied, somatic learning and renewal can be absorbed through our cells and an extensive network of nerves. Embodied compassion also often generates a conscious awareness of self that sparks creativity and engenders meaningful agency.

Creative Agency and Knowing Our Senses

In my work, I continue to experiment with addressing situations in my life through a creative agency. I find this to be an effective approach to uproot cognitive and behavioral patterns that need transformation. As neuroscientist David Eagleman stated:

Our brains naturally default to the neural pathways that represent what we’ve done before. Creativity emerges when we get off of the path of least resistance. All of the good ideas are in there, but you have to dig deeper into your neural networks. The first way to get more creative is to dig deeper, to get off the path of least resistance and try something new. Creativity belongs to all of us. It is the most potent, transformative tool we have at our disposal. It can change people’s lives. It can transform the world. (The Creative Brain, Video, Beamish & Trackman, Directors, 2019)

Last summer, I addressed certain fears concerning a situation in my life by stepping into the sands of the Utah desert to intentionally get to the seed of what was causing the disruption. I saw a reflection of past experiences in aspects of the current-day problem. I figured there was a pattern in my system stemming from an earlier developmental period of my life. I had no idea what the seed was when



Photo: Holli Zollinger

I began. Still, I knew I needed to lean into the disease and tap into my physiology to understand the psychosomatic complexity as simply as possible. A branch awaited me as I stepped into the sand and ventured into the unknown of my experience. Sounds emerged in a way that felt like both a cry and a lullaby.

The withheld emotions dating back to my experiences as a child through to the current day surfaced. I collapsed. I felt empowered. I sang out and I cried in despair of the harshness. The heat of the desert both exhausted and warmed me. I continued down to the water. The water was cold. Instead of stepping away, I stepped in. I felt that I needed to step in despite my usual distaste for cold water. I allowed myself to express the agony of the inner emotional tenderness that felt called forth in the piercing sensations of the cold water. As I stayed with the needed expression, it moved through my body. I could have chosen to be scared of what it might look like or feel like, but I directed my mindfulness to the commitment to fully express somatically, no holds barred. When I felt a sense of fear or judgment, I redirected my attention to my breath and the connection of my senses to the natural world I was immersed in. As my expressions processed through me, I dedicated myself to breathe and be within the connection with myself, the water, sand, and rock below me. In what felt like a short time (that also encompassed decades), my breath brought me into an embodied peacefulness. The serenity translated into a somatic buoyancy of beautiful pleasure. Suddenly, I was floating on a branch in cold water, completely ecstatic in awe and gratitude.

From this experience, I understood more of the bedrock from my personal history that was influencing patterns of thinking and responding in current day life. I was able to make more conscious choices from the learning gleaned. Since the comprehension happened creatively and psychosomatically, my nervous system began to embed and rewire past patterns through my broader somatic intelligence. The interconnected spirit within convening with

nature held, provoked, and inspired me through each step of my Engaged Eco-Psychosomatic process. After each one of these processes I have endured over the last two decades, I am forever changed and grateful. I can utilize experiential learning in my daily life by recalling the sensations psychosomatically. For example, in a moment of stress, I can recall the somatic buoyancy I experienced in the desert waters. Immediately my face softens with a sweet grin as my body calms and feels held. My heart elevates, initiating deep breaths, and often a yawn followed by a deep calming sigh of ahhhh.

By weaving the integration of mindful breath awareness within the therapeutic potentials of Engaged Eco-Psychosomatics, the consciousness of self is heightened. The way our breath ebbs, flows, is blocked or held in our body further instigates and integrates somatic expression. The connective expression develops an in-depth orientation with our body regarding how we feel and act. In writing about cultivating interoception, Dr. Bessel Van der Kolk wrote, *“One of the clearest lessons from neuroscience is that our sense of ourselves is anchored in a vital connection with our bodies. We do not truly know ourselves unless we can feel and interpret our physical sensations; we need to register and act on these sensations to navigate safely through life.”* (Van der Kolk, p. 272, 2015) Inviting someone to move in space can trigger sympathetic responses. If the movement is preceded and initiated by breath, however, a feeling of embodiment and parasympathetic regulation can meet and support expression. This expression can further release primal screams, cries, elated pleasure, and other previously withheld energy, now in motion. As Sondra Fraleigh once wrote, *“Somatic experiences have the potential to extend consciousness and transform lives.”* (Fraleigh, 2015) Within psychosomatic awareness of the states of our inner and outer natures, we can voluntarily continue to breathe into our unconscious depths, release past limiting patterns and deepen our connection to our core desires and truths. This process can also catalyze new curiosity and embodied empowerment to say yes to



pleasure. Learning to wholeheartedly embrace the sensations of ecstasy, bliss, and connection as a personal birthright soothes and transforms the pain, anxiety, and broken-heartedness within personal and societal ills. The intimate cognizance, shapeshifting breath, and liberation available within the act of communing with self and nature heightens somatic intelligence and enhances holistic embodiment.

The voluntary sector of our perceptions and decision-making faculties generally correlates with what is considered our conscious mind: our self-awareness and self-direction. The involuntary sector comprises the unconscious processes: our innate impetuses and our unconscious energy formations, plus the buried experience of our unremembered past. Integration and creativity require freedom of movement from the innermost reaches of the unconscious to the outermost perimeters of consciousness. (Pierrakos, p. 89, 2005)

Balancing our inner sensations in connection with nature aligns our greater psychosomatic intelligence, where neural pathways fuse with spirit and mindful consciousness. A positive inner-outer merging and discernment develop. This both sharpens and expands perceptions of reality and what is possible. Options emerge that can then be utilized in daily life. Communication opens up within inner dialogue and in relation to others. Vibratory resonance can be restored, and grounding can emerge. Grounding returns calm, grace, and compassionate discernment into a state of being fully present.

In Conclusion

Whether it be in a deep meditation on the dimensionality within a leaf's appearance, or submerging and responding to the tidal flow and temperature of the ocean's currents, nature provides an interactive medium that animates reciprocity and the restorative capacity within genuine ex-

pression. Within this conscious awareness, a compassionate agency emerges that can direct us toward new paths of healing. As John Pierrakos wrote:

Agency starts with what scientists call interoception, our awareness of our subtle sensory, body-based feelings: the greater that awareness, the greater our potential to control our lives. Knowing what we feel is the first step to knowing why we feel that way. If we are aware of the constant change in our inner and outer environment, we can mobilize to manage them. (Pierrakos, p. 89, 2005)

Engaged Eco-Psychosomatics joins breath awareness, somatic intelligence, and mindful attention with a creative agency further heightened and supported through convening with nature. As we intimately encounter our unconscious and sensory perceptions, our breath and nature can compassionately nourish our sense of being. Breath and movement provide a fluid platform to interface with the ways our embedded attitudes and forces of personality either interpret or attune to body-based feelings. Through breath and creative agency, we confront the realities within our storied inner landscapes non-judgmentally. As our mindful attention somatically develops, we can begin to course through our feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and emotions like a lantern with audiovisual rays. When we tune in acutely, we see our boundaries and find where our life force is flowing or blocked. In this act of compassionate self-encounter, sensorial attention and creative agency are united, provoked, and regulated. In the process, discernment is refined, and embodiment is vivified. As Bessel Van der Kolk wrote:

Direct sensuous reality, in all its more than human mastery remains the sole solid touchstone for an experiential world now inundated with electronically-generated vistas and engineered pleasures; only in regular contact with the tangible ground and sky can we learn how to orient and to navigate in the multiple dimensions that now claim us. (Van der Kolk, p. 96, 2015)

When I was a young girl, I didn't know each connection of my soles with the Earth, and the wave of movement through my spine, was grounding and awakening my somatic intelligence. I am forever thankful for the Seminole Indians and other peoples who share the rituals that remind us of our interconnection. The practice of Engaged Eco-Psychosomatics reorients us in this interconnectedness. It supports, enlivens, and recuperates the mind-body-spirit connection in an embodiment grounded in conscious awareness of self within the multifaceted depths of nature. It invites reconnection with the brilliance of nature's intricacies, our innate somatic intelligence, and

our inherent creative agency. It calls forth the expression of our sensuous bodies and gut feelings in direct contact with the natural world and our heart's coherence. As Toni Morrison once wrote, "If you surrender to the air, you could ride it." If we surrender to the sensations rendered within

us in connection to our depths and the natural world, we empower our somatic intelligence and our full potential: engaged, expressed, and embodied.

"There is a voice that doesn't use words. Listen".

Rumi



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