



A MEDITATION ON YOUR BODY

by Michael D. Warden

"May your body be blessed.

May you realize that your body is a faithful and beautiful friend of your soul.

And may you be peaceful and joyful and recognize that your senses are sacred thresholds.

May you realize that holiness is mindful, gazing, feeling, hearing, and touching.

May your senses gather you and bring you home.

May your senses always enable you to celebrate the universe and the mystery and possibilities in your presence here.

May the Eros of the Earth bless you."

– John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara*

In order to become the whole person you're meant to be, there are a few things you have to realize about your body. These are essential, nonnegotiable truths, and to the degree you accept them and work to live into them every day, you will experience an ever-deepening connection with your truest self, with God, with other people, and with the world around you. Here they are:

Your body is you.

Your body is a living threshold.

Your body is the key to this moment.

Your body never lies.

First: Your Body is You.

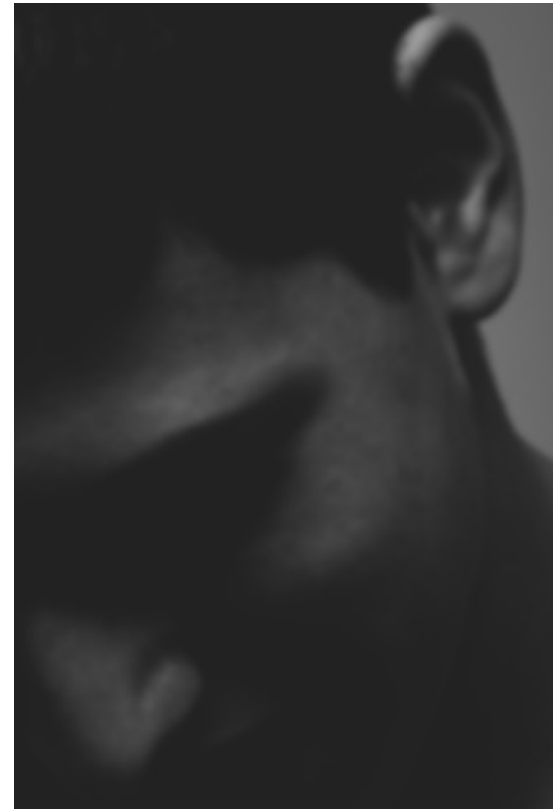
When you use the word “I” or “me,” to what are you referring? For many, we mean our minds, or what we might call our hearts—those parts of us we think of as non-physical and somehow more eternally viable. We tend to think of our bodies more as a vessel that holds us. We are a soul. We have a body.

But my faith tradition of Christianity does not teach this. Rather, we are told that our physical bodies will still be an essential part of us in the world beyond this life, when God makes all things new ([Phil. 3:20-21](#); [1 Cor. 15:12-58](#)). Your body is just as eternal as the rest of you. It is as much a part of who you really are as is your mind, or your feelings, or your will, or your spirit.

Part of becoming a whole and fully integrated human involves learning to love and accept your body as an essential expression of your true self. Your body doesn't just belong to you. It *is* you—just as your heart is you, and your mind is you, and your will is you. Learning to integrate your body in this essential way is key to any true spiritual practice. To do less than this is to live a fragmented life.

Here is a simple prayer of self-acceptance of the body. Try praying this daily for 10 days and notice how your body responds. Place your hands on your body as you pray:

*In the Name of Jesus, I bless my body,
and consecrate it as holy unto the Lord.
Body, I accept you fully as a beautiful and holy part of who I am.
I look on you with compassion and gratitude
for all the ways you have carried my burdens,
and borne the brunt of my shame and self-rejection.
I ask You, God, to reveal any judgments I have made against my body,
and to expose any beliefs I hold that limit my body from experiencing life in any way.
I recognize you, my body, as a core expression of who I am.
You are me. And I am you.
In the Name of Jesus, I receive you. I bless you. I accept you. I love you. Amen.*



Second: Your Body is a Living Threshold.

"I am the joy of God made manifest
in a body
here
now
Breathing Life
stretching out
to join the convocation
of the awareness of everything
a true brother
with every right in the world to be here"
– from my poem "Remember"

A few times a year, the Irish poet David Whyte takes a small troupe of people on walkabout across the magical landscapes of his homeland of Ireland. He describes the profoundly mystical and weighty presence of many of the places there as being the result of what he calls "genius loci"—the "spirit of a place" born out of the living echo of all the life and beauty that has intersected there across time, both of God and nature and historical events and human presence. All of it congeals together to create a kind of resonance that you feel in your bones whenever you stand in one of these magical places and really let it take you.

He says that very same sort of *genius loci* lives in your body, and, in fact, is your body. Your human body is the manifestation of the intersection of thousands of lives and events and moments of beauty and pain that stretches back across time in all directions, coming together for this brief brilliant moment to produce *you*. In this sense, your body is a living threshold, the transformative line between the present and the past, between the heavens and the earth, between the darkness and the light, between all the



places you know and all the places you don't, and between all the people you have been, the person you are today, and the stranger you will become tomorrow.

This coming together to produce your living body is the most profound of miracles. You have never happened before in the history of the universe. And once you pass beyond the veil, you will never happen again in this material world.



Your body is a glorious *genius loci*, a living threshold, a "thin place" through which heaven may break through at any given moment. There's a great deal more going on in you than we commonly see, but it is there to see for anyone who stops to really look.

For this reason, we ought to regard our bodies with only the utmost of respect and a holy gentleness. And not only ours, but the bodies of every other human *genius loci* we have the privilege to intersect.



Third: Your Body is the Key to This Moment.

"This is the bright home
in which I live,
this is where
I ask
my friends
to come,
this is where I want
to love all the things
it has taken me so long
to learn to love.

This is the temple
of my adult aloneness
and I belong
to that aloneness
as I belong to my life.

There is no house
like the house of belonging."
– excerpted from "The House of Belonging" by David Whyte

In coaching we say there are only two things required for true fulfillment in life. The first is the pursuit of a noble cause that is greater than yourself; and the second is the capacity to be fully present to your life as it is in this moment.

Most of us in the West understand the first requirement, at least a little. We know intuitively that we need a meaningful purpose

in life to feel complete. But very few of us understand much at all about the second. Few of us practice being truly present to our lives in the moment, or have the faintest idea how to achieve it.

But our bodies know. Our bodies know, because our bodies always live in the present moment. Our minds may race to the future in planning and worry or anticipation. Our emotions may linger in the past in regret and longing or nostalgia. But our bodies are always inexorably anchored to the flow of this present moment in time – they are always right here, right now.

For this reason, your body is the key to the second requirement of true fulfillment. Your body is the threshold to this present moment of your life. It is the open door to experiencing all that is true about your life right here and now – all the beauty and the sorrow, all the wonder and the loss, all the love and the pain. All of it is happening right now in this moment, and all of it is available to you in all of its richness. Your body is the gateway to the full experience of it all.

How? Begin by paying attention to your senses – what you see, what you hear, what you feel on your skin, what you feel inside your body. Let go of your thoughts about the future or the past or some other place, and pay attention to what your body is noticing right here and right now. Then, from that place of awareness, listen for the voice of your own essence in the midst of all you are sensing, and the voice of God enveloping the fullness of your awareness.

This is what the saints are talking about when they say things like this:



"God is a God of the present. God is always in the moment, be that moment hard or easy, joyful and painful." – Henri Nouwen

"Where, except in the present, can the Eternal be met?" – C.S. Lewis

"Settle yourself in solitude, and you will come upon Him in yourself." – St. Theresa

"Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace." – Frederick Buechner

St. Paul wrote that “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17), and the Spirit is *always* in the present moment. The grace of God lives in this moment of your life – never in the future or the past. You will begin to experience the Kingdom of Heaven within you when you realize that the present moment is the only moment in which we really live.

Your body is the key to accessing this gift.

Fourth: Your Body Never Lies.

I once knew a pastor who suffered with these horrible migraine headaches that would come upon him like a storm, most often right before he went on stage to preach. To soldier through the pain, he would swallow up to a dozen aspirin in one shot, then present his talk as if nothing was wrong, and minister to his flock afterward until he could finally go home, where he would lock himself in his room and lie in bed for hours with the lights off and the curtains drawn.

This remained his standard M.O. until one Sunday when right before going out to speak, he lost all feeling in his left arm. Panicked he might be having a heart attack, he gathered his leadership team around him and they prayed together. They tried to convince him to go to the hospital, but he refused. He took another handful of aspirin and delivered the message as usual, hiding his numbness so well that no one in the audience was any the wiser. Afterward, his team rushed him to the hospital, where they quickly diagnosed him with severe anxiety. He resisted the diagnosis at first. He’d been preaching for years, and wasn’t aware of feeling anxious at all about going on stage.

But the body never lies.

Some believe that the more spiritual you get, the less important your body ought to be; but actually, the opposite is true. Real spirituality is about becoming a whole,



fully integrated human being, and that necessarily includes recognizing that your body is not only a key aspect of your actual self, but also carries within it critical wisdom and insight you need in order to become who you were meant to be.

For example, when your heart or mind experience trauma and wounding that you don't know how to process, where does all that pain go for safekeeping until you are ready to handle it? It goes into your body. (You can explore books like [this](#) and [this](#) for more on this reality.) Whether you realize it or not, your body has been your great protector from the beginning. It carries the wounds you don't know how to bear. It holds them for you. And if you'll listen with compassion, it will never lie to you about the pain it is carrying on your behalf.

To become all we're meant to be, we must learn to listen respectfully to our bodies. They are faithful parts of our true self, stoically suffering under the weight of our forced detachment, but nevertheless faithful to our cause, patiently waiting for us to invite them back into our hearts, and hear the truth they have to say, which is often the truth we need to hear most.

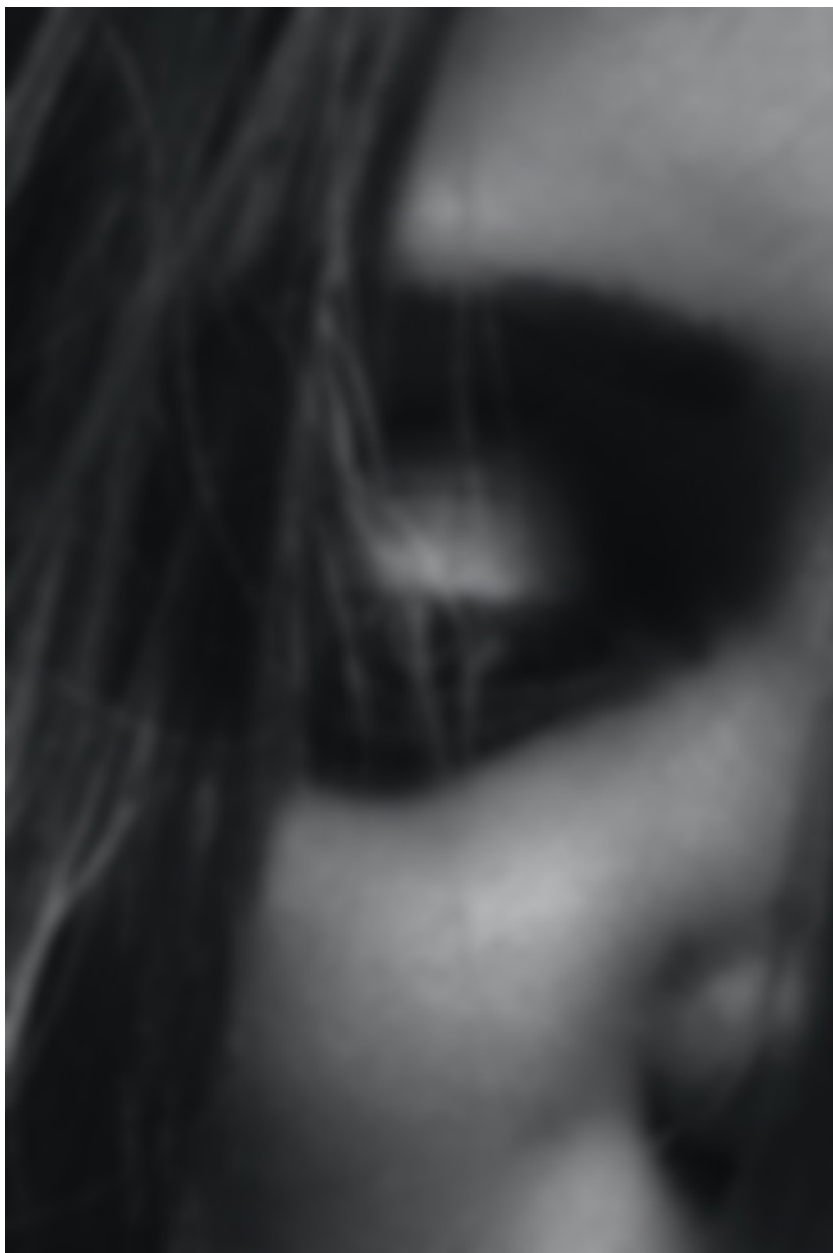


MY BODY

Sometimes I would run from you
if I could
take you to a crowded plaza
and lose you there
leave you to find
some other soul
to cage
while I simply fly away

But then the very thought
of being apart from you
brings me to tears

Am I trapped, or held?
How is it I still don't know
after all these years together?



I know you've carried my pain
I know you've tried to talk to me
for years
but I couldn't listen
I know you're not my enemy
But still sometimes
it feels
just like you are

Let's be honest
You have failed me
You will fail me again
We both know this
But I have failed you too
and for all this
I cannot help but love you
I cannot help but recoil at the thought
of leaving you behind
to rot in the earth
even for a while
while I move on

What is this
reluctant intimacy
between us?
This deep knowing?
This love?
Seems every day
I try to escape it
but then remember
I don't want to

Maybe we're not so alien
you and me
Maybe it's time to admit
those aren't even the right words
to describe us

Come
Let's just breathe
together a while
Maybe we can find the grace
to ease into the miracle
that's been living gently
here
all this time



Photo credits (in order of appearance): Akira Hojo, M.T. Elgassier, Sam Burriss, Jairo Alzate, How-soon Ngu, Alexander Krivitskiy,
Melanie Wasser, Ali Yahya, Alexander Krivitskiy, and Milada Vigerova

Copyright © Michael D. Warden. All rights reserved.

No part of this essay may be copied, distributed, or resold without permission.