

# **Rediscovering the Lost Body-Connection Within Christian Spirituality**

*The Missing Link for Experiencing Yourself  
in the Body of the Whole Christ  
is a Changing Relationship to Your Own Body*

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■ **Practical Body-Learnings and Exercises** *that Transform  
Your Awareness of Who Christ is Today and Who You are in Christ  
by Developing a New Habit of Noticing and Nurturing  
Your Important Feelings*

*A First Body-Learning*



# Noticing

**Changing the Relationship  
To Your Own Body by Noticing  
Your Feelings and How You Treat Them**

## Chapter 1

# Why Pay Attention to Feelings?

**I**N OPENING THIS CHAPTER, Pete wants to share a little story for both children and adults—a story about learning how to become a teacher by listening to what your body knows. It describes an experience he had one bright, sunny morning, a long, long time ago.

### The Hawk Story

Our former home office in California overlooked a beautiful mountain meadow with a stream meandering through that emptied into a jewel-like little lake. During Spring and Summer ducks and geese made their homes here, and red-tailed hawks hunted for small prey along the grassy shoreline. I had been blessed to live there for many years, and imagined that I knew all there was to know about this precious little corner of my world. But I was wrong. For there was a surprise yet in store for me. A surprise that would teach me much about the meadow, but eventually even far more about myself as well.

That surprise came one fresh Summer morning as I looked up from my desk and noticed, far down the meadow, a red-tailed hawk high in the sky drifting slowly down toward our lake. As it veered in front of my office, turning toward its eventual hunting position along the far shore, I could see all the individual wing-tip feathers extended like outstretching fingers, delicately balancing the bird in flight.

As it sank slowly toward the water, for a moment I thought the bird's sharp eyes might be searching for unsuspecting fish warming themselves near the surface. But in a very determined and purposeful way it continued gliding toward the farther shore where I assumed it might seek out small rodents and other prey along the water's edge.

Then came the surprise. Just as it crossed the shoreline, without ever flapping its great wings, the bird was suddenly lifted straight up in the air. Banking sharply, while deliberately holding itself within a small tight circle, it spiraled gracefully skyward, never once flapping its wings.

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In that instant, I immediately understood. This point on the shoreline marked a powerful, invisible updraft. From past experience the hawk knew precisely where this convenient column of rising air originated. Deliberately aiming for the familiar spot along the shore and entering the steadily rising current, it knew instinctively how to remain within the updraft, banking in a tight upwardly spiraling circle to keep within the narrow column lifting it skyward.

I watched with awe at this skilled act of survival, filled with such grace and near effortless movement unfolding before my eyes. Deliberately, without ever flapping its wings, the great bird spiraled upward until reaching some chosen height where it finally drifted out of the column, coasting slowly away from me and back down the meadow from whence it had come.

My desk work lay forgotten as I returned indoors, sitting for a moment in a kind of reverie with my memory of the experience. I had known this small meadow valley for years, almost like the back of my own hand. Every rock, stone, and tree, I knew where they all stood, and the old fence posts rotting in the rich soil. I knew where cattle crossed the stream and deer fed in the evening. But I knew absolutely nothing about this particular column of air. From more careful observation I soon learned there were even more, spread out along the far edge of the lake like convenient elevators rising high in the Sierra sky. I had discovered an invisible, hidden world of moving air that I might never have noticed without a leaf being driven into it by some random breeze, or a hawk deliberately hitching a ride skyward in its sure and steady embrace.

I carried this experience inside for days. Even now, years later the memory comes back vivid, fresh, and compelling in the lessons it bore for me—because there is more to this story. A delightful postscript that helped shape my perspective and set my life in a new direction.

A week or so later, I was again at my desk, when from outside through the open door I heard a tremendous squawking and calling back and forth of birds. Looking up, I again saw the hawk beginning its slow, graceful descent toward the lake. This time, however, right behind the parent hawk flew a little baby hawk, furiously flapping its small wings, trying to keep up with mom or dad and, to my ears, complaining mightily about the entire enterprise.

Quickly, I got up and walked outside, already anticipating what might come next. The parent hawk flew directly toward the invisible column of air, coasting gracefully into it and immediately rose upward. The little one, too, plunged forward, flapping furiously and was caught by the column, likewise rising skyward. Struggling to follow the tight spiraling turn of its parent above, the little one managed to make the first, and even the second sharp turn. But at that point, it lost control and fell out of the column, drifting back down toward the lake. The larger hawk, viewing all this from above, quickly abandoned the column of rising air, diving downward to position itself once more in front of the little one, leading it again back into the rising column. The lesson was repeated several times. In the end they both rose skyward together, eventually drifting out of the updraft and away back down the valley, hunting along the way.

I carried this experience inside for a long time, gradually coming to recognize that hidden, invisible currents were very active in my own life as well. Grace-filled surprise and opportunity, new directions, and fresh meanings were continually emerging from inside my own bodily knowing. Hunches, intuitions, vague yearnings and often surprising, unexpected inspiration—much more than purely cognitive, reasoned thinking.

Each of us has been blessed with our very own inner world, much like the small valley I have just described. Yet, an entire universe of unexamined possibility lies hidden there. I often imagine my private inner world to be filled with upward spiraling columns of gift and surprise. Such a resource lies waiting to be discovered within every person's body. The challenge, of course, is learning how to notice, nurture and in turn be nurtured by such hidden possibilities.

To this day, I remain impressed with the parent hawk. The older bird had no way to sit the little one down in their nest and give it a lecture on rising thermal currents. The parent simply had to lead the younger bird directly into the rising air so it could get a feel in it's own smaller body for the invisible power and supporting presence that lay hidden at the edge of our lake. A critical skill for survival could then pass from body to body, and generation to generation. Once we develop the body-feel for grace, then we too can pass this on to the next generation, helping each other as adults to rediscover it. That is why we share this workbook with you.

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Hidden deep within our bones lies an unrecognized capacity just waiting to be found. We each exist as an integral part of something greater than ourselves. Our bodies already know this even before our minds can think it. And within just such knowing lies the key, finally, to experiencing what it really means to be human. Can we make time to begin this sacred, inward journey, discovering hidden possibilities inside ourselves just waiting to surprise us?

### **Six Fundamentals about Body-Knowing and Learning**

Your first step toward developing a new body-habit around feelings helps you notice when you have them. Most people don't even recognize when their feelings rise up because they're generally too preoccupied with instant reacting to them—especially when their experience surfaces difficult, scary or lonely feelings.

This first chapter offers a simple step toward noticing your feelings by summarizing a few basics that may have *motivational value* for committing yourself to the more challenging task of actually becoming aware of your feelings as they unfold—noticing their appearance right away instead of spontaneously hanging back or running away from them.

In the next chapter, you will have an opportunity to go through a useful exercise that helps you recall and work with some remembering from your childhood which we have found can give you a body-sense for how you carry feelings within your own physical organism. For right now, however, here are some basics you can start with.

1. We all know we have feelings. What most of us don't realize is that more than 50% of human knowledge is learned from our body's ability to know, rather than through our mind's capacity to think. This is another way of saying that most of us use only a self-restricting amount of our knowing potential throughout life. As a species, we have barely begun to recognize the depth and hidden potential in what our bodies will teach us—if we can only learn how to listen to them.
2. Every good coach knows that students learn swimming or any sport, typing, singing, dance, or carpentry from *the body-feel* of doing it correctly. They need more than outside information. They must enter directly into the process of learning from *inside* their own bodies.

Acquiring this *how-in-the-bones* enables each generation to pass special ways of body-knowing on to the next, but in a manner quite different from communicating information through concepts and ideas that our intellects can grasp.

3. The human body has a unique way of felt-knowing quite different from any thinking, analyzing, or reasoning. Your body spontaneously senses the relational whole of a situation or experience, embracing the entire interacting web of complex linking and connecting which goes along with each and every part. Your body knows in a great gulp, while your mind must systematically chew its way through every individual piece. Our human species has been blessed with two entirely different but complementary ways of knowing. Our challenge lies in developing the habit of using the two together in a balanced and interacting practice. Discovering and implementing a simple, effective way to teach our children and youth how to connect with and learn from the important stories in their own feelings represents our next forward step in what it means to be human.
4. The ancient Greeks recognized at least five different kinds of knowledge: scientific knowing, wisdom, opinion, faith, and an esoteric experience called *gnosis*. Among the five, however, only *scientific knowing* referred to informational knowledge in the mind. The other four pointed to special ways of knowing in your body. This is the world of hunch, intuition, creativity, inspiration, revelation and, most of all, the wisdom that comes from experience in living your life.

Wisdom always expresses far more than information. It gives voice to your felt body-connections. The wisdom of Solomon shown in 1 Kings 3:16–28 is a case in point. Two new mothers who live together approach the King, one carrying a dead infant and the other a live baby boy. Both claim the living newborn. After some deliberation, the king calls for his sword and declares that the only fair solution is to cut the baby in half, giving a portion to each woman. The true mother, wanting to keep her son alive, cries out in anguish to the king to give her newborn to the other woman. Solomon, immediately recognizing the true mother, gives the baby back to her. He drew upon a deeper knowing felt within the heart of a mother, something beyond logic and law, analysis, reason and hard thinking. The king constructed a situation wherein

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something within the body would cry out and reveal the true situation. Your body speaks the truth when your mind cannot even begin thinking about what to do or say.

5. Everyday feelings, emotions, and physical sensations represent an important first step into the world of felt body connections—your felt-senses. Such body-links bring their own special meaning into your life, a meaning you feel rather than think. *All feelings*, whether positive or negative, express an important part of your body's intelligence because they introduce you to deeper felt meanings at work in your life. In this workbook, noticing and nurturing important feelings so they can tell you their stories describes an habitual process you can grow into within your own body as it is felt from inside.
6. *Most people don't realize how values, basic human goodness, and a positive sense of self are all learned in and acquired through our body and our body's knowing.* Such valuing does not mature in us because we follow some external list of do's and don'ts. Nor do we discover this through various religious or ethical interpretations. Rather, it arrives through our body's ability to become aware of its innumerable connections as well as an even more compelling invitation that lies within such linking. Since the body knows through felt relationships, it also knows that each of us is part of some Greater Body or Larger Whole.

Most children absorb their parents' values through ordinary, everyday experiences of interacting with them. The old adage, "Examples speak louder than words," reveals how valuing is primarily a body awareness and habit—not a piece of analytic information arrived at logically in the mind. Effective parenting instructs, models and leads through body knowing as well as through lecture and commands. The parent hawk offers a striking metaphor for guiding us into this more integral manner of educating. The baby hawk learned by experiencing a body-sense for what the parent was teaching.

### **Some Basics about Developing the Habit of Noticing and Nurturing Your Important Feelings**

The dictionary defines *habit* as "...an acquired pattern of behavior that has become almost involuntary as a result of frequent repetition."



Parents and child caregivers need to know that most habits are accompanied by an *acquired neural patterning in the brain* as well, a patterning that both stimulates and reenforces habitual behavior.

The first six years of human life are most important for the development of our brains. During this period, neural patterns are laid down. In other words, the switchboard is being designed and soldered into place that will determine much of our behavior in later years. This is true, especially, of our neural patterns and habits of *openness* to learn from new experience, or our tendency to *resist* such experience when we perceive it as somehow threatening. This tendency includes attitudes toward feelings as well as for other experiences in the child's world.

If a child feels humiliation or pain from attempting something new, and then failing or being ridiculed, there is a natural pulling in for protection and security—a cutting back on risk. A *habit* of withdrawing begins to grow. Neural patterning in the brain becomes established and reenforced. On the other hand, if a child experiences encouragement and support for discovering *the personal meaning* in an experience, even in the face of set-back, fear, and pain, an entirely different *habit* and neural brain patterning can emerge.

Feelings are like the phone ringing. A message is trying to get through. We don't have phones in our offices or homes just to make noise. They ring to alert us that some information is waiting. The problem for many, however, is that when the phone of their feelings rings, trying to get a message through, a habit of blocking the message kicks in. People respond to the ring of their feeling by turning on the TV, music or pouring themselves a drink. They go to the refrigerator or their computer, they pick up a magazine, daydream, go shopping, text their friends etc. They escape, they numb, they avoid, or substitute something they enjoy in place of what they perceive as fearful or a hurting attack and threat. The neural response in their brain stimulates and reinforces their particular habit of avoidance. We will have more to say about how to change these patterns in a chapter further on about *process-skipping*.

It helps for parents and teachers to learn and recognize the major differences between a child *owning and processing* their feelings, versus *acting them out* in a destructive way that demands intervention.

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Learning the habit of noticing and nurturing important feelings as a first step toward processing potentially destructive feelings diminishes the child's need to act them out in a destructive way.

The growth issue, both for adults and children, does not lie in whether we interpret a feeling as being socially, spiritually or culturally *good* or *bad*. Rather, it depends upon whether a person can own and process his or her feelings in a way that allows the inner felt meanings within them to unfold and be heard. Morally speaking, feelings are neither *good* nor *bad* in themselves. They simply happen. Acting them out in a destructive way that harms self or others is where moral and social accountability come into play. Children need support and mentoring in order not to be afraid of their feelings. They learn this by watching the ways in which their parents, teachers and the important people in their lives model the processing of their own difficult feelings.

### Inviting Children to Listen to All Their Important Feelings

Children should learn from a very early age that every important feeling offers an opportunity for new adventures, or finding a hidden treasure. By taking time to help them notice such feelings and learn how to care for them, they are invited to embark upon a discovery trip inside themselves. Feelings can express themselves like the stories in a book. Further pages always wait to be turned and new discoveries lie hidden around every corner. Children, as well as most adults, value and look forward to what's next in a story, on a walk, or when they are exploring. So, in order to reach and get closer to children, adults need to set *noticing* and *nurturing* an important feeling as though it were an important adventure you take together with a child. The adventure motivates learning, and results in the development of a lifelong habit of listening to what their body tells them as part of their own unfolding personal story.

Adults, too, can discover a more positive way of relating to their own feelings which may be quite different from what they learned as children. We can develop a patient, listening and caring attitude toward how our bodies carry feelings, especially where we still live with unfinished business inside ourselves. As feelings are heard and change in how we carry them, so too can outworn, growth-blocking neural patterns in the brain change. This builds body-links of hope for

development and transformation. It frees us from the prison of old, stuck patterns that obstruct continuing growth in wholeness no matter what happens to us or how we feel about it. Child caregivers often play a special role in helping to create more positive patterning in a young person's life.

All of us, especially children, must be encouraged to listen to *our bodies as teachers* and not as enemies. Our bodies speak through important feelings and the deeper felt meanings within them. Experiencing this inner resource generates courage, self-confidence, and a creative human spirit.

When adults learn to help children listen into the stories, the personal meaning and life direction hidden within their feelings, it gives the child's spirit a chance to blossom. Kids end up feeling good about who they are, no matter what their feelings may be or what is happening in their lives. They recognize that feelings are only *the tip of the iceberg*, and that a deeper story lies waiting beneath every feeling they learn to access.

Children learn self-esteem and caring for their feelings when adults respond to such feelings with respect, teaching them to notice, nurture, and learn from them. This book can be a guide for parents, grandparents, teachers, counselors, and caregivers, helping them learn how to do this. The foundation for a healthy spirituality grows from just this kind of body-learning and knowing. ■