

Coming to Our Senses: The Wonder of Embodiment ©

by Francis Weller

Following is an excerpt from Francis' upcoming book, Unforgotten Wisdom: Reclaiming Our Indigenous Soul.

What is the experience of embodiment? What awareness is necessary to know our incarnation? Sensing, feeling, responding, interacting with the world as participant, seamless intimacy. We are not apart from the world, prisoners in an internal landscape; we are members in good standing with this breathing, animate earth. What the indigenous soul knows, and so eloquently recognizes, is our kinship with clouds and wind, sunlight filtered through oak and Douglas Fir, birdsong drifting over the day, ants moving along railings and stone, comfrey blooming and self-heal offering its blue stalk to our eyes while Barber's *Adagio for Strings* plays in the background. *How can we feel so empty when the world is so full?* Our emptiness is our failure to be in the world. Every piece of conditioning—religious, social, economic, political, educational—that places us outside this abundance, empties us. We are bereft of the fullness in great part because what we know as alive, has been turned cold, objectified for study, researched as resource, but where soul was to be found, where love was to be felt, we only encountered abstraction.

Embodiment: what is it? How does one become embodied? Body, body, body, wet, moist, blood-filled, impulse ridden, organic, moving, pulsing, feeling, skin, bone, organs, tissue, want, desire, longing, touching, needing, seeing, laughing, crying, loving; all in the body. Dark mysteries, fathomless, it is a great unknown. We can dissect it; know all its parts, but the miracle of incarnation will remain a mystery. Maybe it should not feel so rare, so special. Maybe it is our birthright – to incarnate, to literally be *in flesh* is the most basic, ordinary of experiences. When touch comes to our skin, we feel the other, their presence on our body, shaping our moment. In that instant we are with another, surfaces joining psyches.

To be embodied. How simple it should be for us to be at home within our skin, to be familiar with how we move, feeling the grace of running, dancing, stretching, touching the face of the world with assurance. Yet this *is* rare! More often than not we are estranged from this body, treat it like a stranger or a ship carrying cargo, our minds, our consciousness. We often hate the body, displeased with its shape, appearance, size, too much, too little. To hate one's body is such a great loss; to feel estranged from one's homeland. Imagine, continuous exile and one you cannot escape from as long as the two are apart. So much of our spiritual literature separates us from body, waging war with the body, as Augustine says. We are taught to rise above, that we are not our bodies; our bodies are corruptible, sins of the flesh, body as illusion. Only consciousness—only pure consciousness will do, mind you—transcends this corporeal dimension.

Why have we stripped the body of the sacred? Why has it come to be antithetical to spiritual life? Ah, the fall, the slipping from grace, but that state of indwelling of spirit, when we were in the world. What is this shit, in the world, but not of it? I don't know about you, but this body, whose hand is holding this pen, moving across the page, back slightly aching, stomach a bit empty – no breakfast yet, feet a bit chilled, nose picking up the scent of Egyptian Licorice tea, head resting on hand, eyes tracking the movement of the other hand, breath moving in and out with its own sacred rhythm, this body is IN the world; fully, completely, down to the matter of subatomic spheres. I belong here, I was meant to live here. I am here and this is a huge piece of incarnation, of embodiment, to fully live where we are, kindly, within the experience of this body. Our language is too flat to fully ascribe the majesty of this gift. Body – “bodig,” Old English, meaning *cask*. NO, body equals earth, as the word is in many indigenous cultures. We are not troubled guests on the dark earth, but intimate members designed

magnificently for experiencing that closeness. But to get there, to recognize that truth, that is the challenge. To become embodied, yes to live within the movements of body/soul: that is it.

Senses, common senses, consensus, shared sensual experiences, coming to our senses; phrases, phrases in embodiment. Senses – taste, touch, sight, hearing, smelling, feeling, these senses as Blake suggests, are the “chief inlets of soul in our age.” How to know soul? – Through the senses, the felt interface with the world. Bringing the world in requires that the senses be lit, alive, open for reception. Living close to our senses brings an interaction, a shared skin immediately present. Our aloneness vaporizes when the senses thrive. Everything is waiting for you, the poet suggests. This is true! Every surface, every sound, every movement invites relationship; the world is so full and we remain so empty. Let the warm water in your morning shower be a blessing, where water’s beauty is a caress, not just to wash you, but also to make love with your skin. It bathes body and soul. If we could meet the world embodied, senses alive and open, our experience of the world would radically change. As Diane Ackerman says, “How sense-luscious the world is.” We must come out of our preoccupation with internal wanderings, continually searching for our defects, flaws, failures. Our obsession should be the world with its startling beauty, its invocations of delight continuously showering our body sense with enough for the day. Rilke reminds us, exhorts us in his poetry to not lose the world.

*Ah, not to be cut off,
not through the slightest partition
shut out from the law of the stars.
The inner – what is it?
if not intensified sky,
hurled through with birds and deep
with the winds of homecoming.*

When we slipped off the surface of the world and crashed into the private underworld of self-observation, the break was terrible; our loss immeasurable. We lost a world that makes a home for us, a surround of everything that holds us and calls us forward. We live now in the dimly lit cave of self-reflection, or more accurately, self-accusation. Something was severed, ripped, torn, as we were parted from the earth, from one another. Loneliness is the epidemic of our times. Emptiness, the gnawing reality that fashions a never-ending sea of addictions, cravings, hungers that can only be tempered, never satisfied. Embodiment; coming into the full nesting of our sensate lives. To live here unselfconsciously, perhaps that is our highest state, ordinary, open to the splendor of the world. It’s possible our spiritual life is simply this: to see the world in a grain of sand, the majesty of the Creator in a wildflower. Come back home: to body, to senses, to muscle and bone, to mystery and the wonder of this life.