

The following material comes from the introduction to my second book, **200 Ways to Love the Body You Have**

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### ≈ Introduction ≈

Since 1979 I have been leading a workshop for women who dislike, disown, reject, or obsess over their bodies. The workshop is called **Transforming Body Image**. Through this workshop, and the book that grew out of it--**Transforming Body Image: Learning To Love The Body You Have**-- I have had the rewarding experience of being able to help many people develop a more wholesome, comfortable, and self-accepting relationship with their bodies-- regardless of size, shape, age, color, level of health or fitness, or degree of beauty. **Transforming Body Image** is a very in-depth process of making peace with, and making a home in the body by using dynamic, guided imagery to explore all the stories and issues embedded in that troublesome relationship. It's an intense and powerful process that demands commitment over time.

Throughout the years many women I have worked with have asked me to make it possible for them to break down the process into small bites that they could take into daily living. By doing this, they could make that commitment of learning to love their bodies something that permeated each day. This book is my response to their requests. And it will be of value to you as well.

The average person in the West is disembodied! Of course, I don't mean that we are bodiless, but that very few of us who are products of Western Civilization actually live in our bodies. The relationship to our bodies is the first relationship we have. It's the very foundation of self. It's maybe the most important relationship we could ever have. Yet it is an uneasy relationship for most people in Western society.

Men are "permitted" by our culture to have bodies that they use instrumentally in work or athletic activity. But to be involved in "relationship" with their bodies-- to pay attention to bodily cues, or concerns, or to spend time caring for their bodies-- is culturally viewed as "feminine" activity. Many men therefore have a blunted body awareness. They tend to ignore their bodies-- to have a non-relationship with them. Since thoughts register in our minds, whereas emotions live in our bodies, by turning our awareness away from body experience, they also frequently miss out on an inner richness of emotional experience.

Women, on the other hand, are considered unwomanly unless they are engaged in nothing less than an obsessive relationship with their bodies. Most women in this society are actively doing battle with their bodies to conform to an elusive

cultural ideal of appearance. To them, the body is a hated antagonist they disown, or an albatross they lug around. It is normal in our society for women to feel that they should be thinner, prettier, firmer, younger, and in all ways better. They readily deprive their bodies of food and drag them to the gym to whip them into shape. They dedicate time, energy, and obsessive attention to trying to “fix” them and make them “right.” They do everything but live in them.

Whether people acrimoniously disown their bodies, ignore them, or narcissistically sculpt and worship them, the body is treated as if it were an object separate from the person who inhabits it. In both cases, there is an intense involvement with the body. But neither is an example of embodiment.

To be embodied is to live in a state where self inhabits a body-mind. Where you are in touch with--not just intellectually aware of-- the dance of interplay between these two aspects of your being. To be embodied is to experience your body as the center of your existence, not as its focus. As the frame of reference for being in the world. To be embodied is to feel alive, to perceive bodily states as they change from pleasure to pain, energy to fatigue, from vitality and excitement to calm and tranquility. In other words, it is to have access to and to value a body of knowledge that reveals itself only in fully embodied living.

Throughout your waking life, your living body-- your lived-in body-- is a screen for your mind. It is present with you in all your thoughts and deeds. You cannot escape from it. So it behooves you to reclaim its power, embrace its richness, and connect with its wisdom. To be fully alive, each and every one of us must have a first person-- not a third person, objectified-- experience of our embodied selves. How many people do you know who are living truly embodied lives? Are you?

This book is for you if you have a negative body image; if you have disordered eating or an eating disorder; if you struggle with other forms of substance abuse; if you are a survivor of abuse; if you come from a dysfunctional family that devalued the body; if you live in a non-conforming body; if you are disappointed in your body for growing old; for being disabled; for being sick; if you are involved in healing a physical illness; if you are in a 12-step recovery group. It is also for you if you wish to create a stronger connection with your body or to develop greater body awareness for health or enlightenment.

In this book, you will find 200 “tools” to help you learn to live a more embodied life. I have gathered these tools from over twenty years of being a student of the relationship between body, mind, and soul. I offer them to you to enrich your experience of being alive, to rekindle in you a sense of awe for the miracle that is your one and only body.

## How to Use This Book

The tools in this book are arranged at random. I do not intend you to it in a linear fashion. Rather, you should close your eyes and point. Trust in the universe or the laws of chance, that your finger will land on the process you need most to learn from at a given moment.

Make a commitment to yourself to make this book a constant companion. The best approach is to make a point of choosing one tool each morning. Then you have time to make whatever preparations the tool calls for. Commit to working with one tool each day. But, it is my hope that you will make many of these tools a regular part of your life, not just an activity on the day that you point to it. These tools do not lose their effectiveness after being done once. They benefit you over and over, the more you use them. Each tool is self-explanatory. Occasionally you might choose a tool that has a prerequisite. In such a case, you will be referred to the material that you need to make sense of it.

