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YOGATM MAGAZINE

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ISSUE 231/ JULY 2022

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BODY WISDOM FOR RESILIENCE

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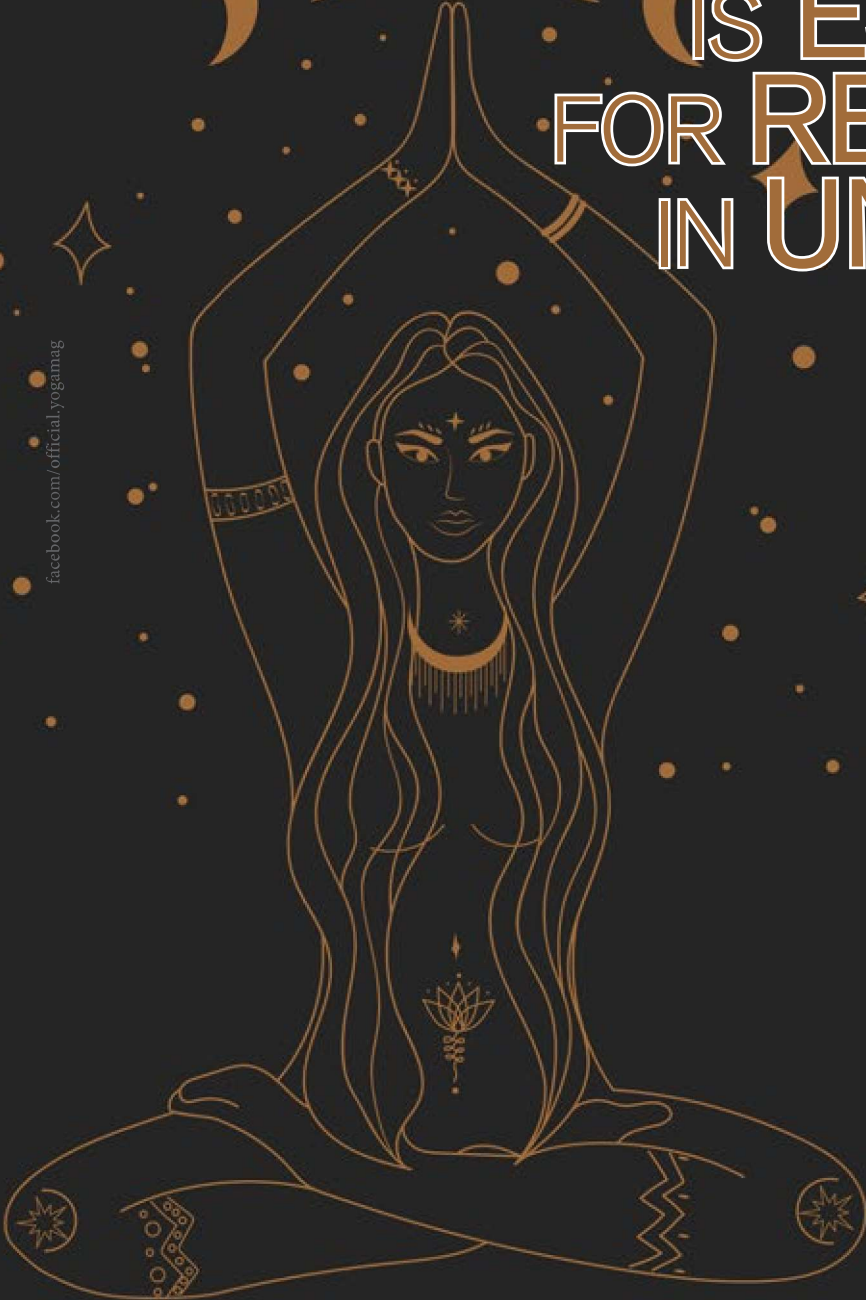
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BODY WISDOM IS ESSENTIAL FOR RESILIENCE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Words: Julia Paulette Hollenberg

The body is our personal home. It is where we live, where our life takes place. It is the location of our pain and our pleasure, our wisdom, and our joy. When we are in contact with our own sensate body, we are in touch with our physical reality and deep knowing. Despite the uncertainty, we know what to do!

So, why don't we usually use our body wisdom? Why do we need to learn about it? What can you do to access your own inner wisdom?



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STRESSED

When things are tough, we tend to want to escape from the pain. We jump out of our bodies and into our heads. We try to solve the problem with our thoughts and ideas. We try to keep ourselves safe.

This is a human nervous system response. It happens when things are too much and too fast. When we feel overwhelmed. It can happen in response to traumatic big events and can happen on a smaller scale when ordinary everyday life feels just too stressful and pressured.

We jump out of ourselves also in times of uncertainty, pandemic, war, or personal change, like a divorce, bereavement, illness, or redundancy. And happy new events, like starting a new relationship, moving home, having a baby, or an exciting new job or project, can also feel overwhelmingly unfamiliar and uncertain (we don't always know how to do this new thing we need to do now!)



SENSITIVE

The body is very sensitive. The body can hurt – physically and emotionally. Your body can sometimes feel like it is not comfortable and is not a safe place to be. Easier sometimes to ignore it.

Being in ideas, thoughts and concepts can make you feel more confident. It can be a successful temporary answer to anxiety. But it is only a thin layer of confidence...

When times are uncertain, we want answers, solutions, and action plans. We want to know what to do! It seems to make sense to rely on our reliably clever and knowledgeable brains, for the best next step...



MAP OF LIFE

In normal times, when things seem routine, we rely on our old mental maps. These developed based on the experiences we had in the past when we were children or teenagers. Depending on them, as a model of the way life is, we usually operate by assumptions, conclusions, and strategies - mentally predicting how other people might behave, $A + B = C$.

But, even in normal times, these fixed mental maps are already out of

date and inaccurate anyway! The maps are not real, and are not the same as a spontaneous response to an immediate situation.

In a new unfamiliar landscape, you need to cultivate a new way of being. The only thing that's certain now is the uncertainty. You cannot think your way through, because you don't know what to expect...

You need to start making use of a different kind of intelligence, your innate whole-body wisdom.



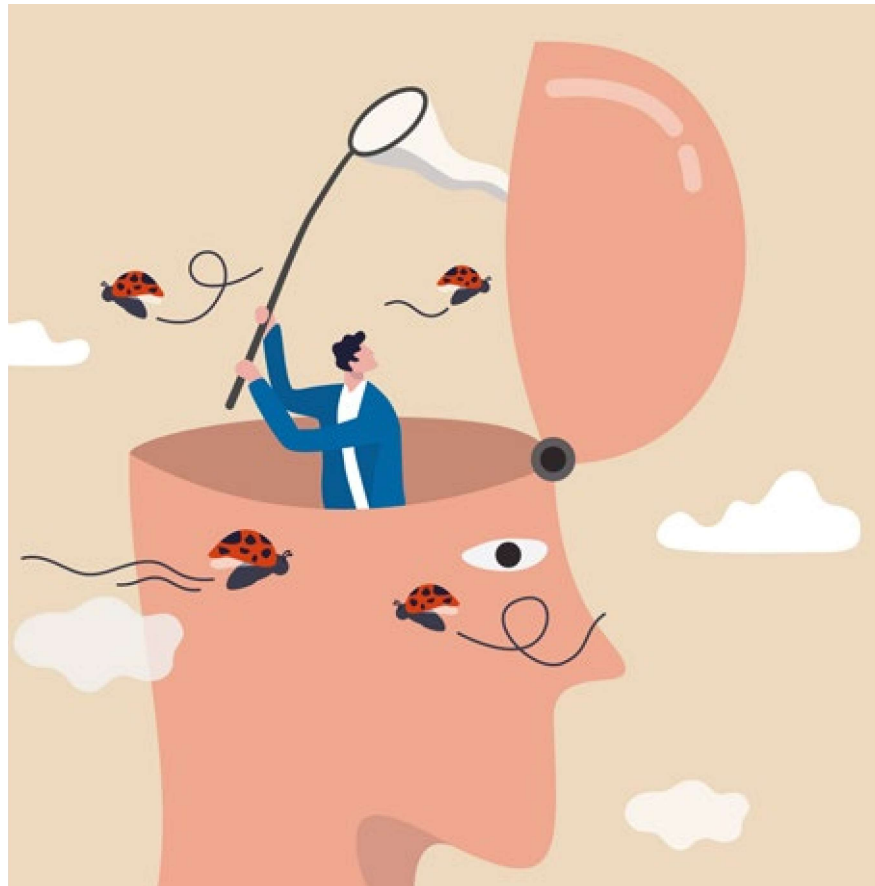
DISEMBODIED

Most of us, most of the time, are disembodied. Our modern, over-stimulating society encourages that. We are pulled out of ourselves, out of contact with our own body, by all the many things to be done by the deadline, the never-ending digital updates, and the disturbances of pings, beeps, and flashing lights.

Many of us exercise, eat, and have sex, while being very distracted, our thoughts and attention elsewhere.

Perhaps you sometimes do yoga while thinking about the music, your appearance, who you're attracted to in class, who you need to message, etc, etc, etc.

The separation between body and mind, between physicality and awareness, is incredibly normal. It is the ordinary way of being in our world. Yet it means that we are missing out on the feast of enjoyable and wise sensual information, that is available for us all, here and now, in our own sensitive bodies.



GET RESOURCED

How do you cope when things are uncertain or tough? Having sufficient resources helps you to cope better. This could be enough money, therapy, yoga classes, good books, friends, lovely food, a beautiful home, etc. Support helps you to balance out the demands and challenges.

Your body is your primary resource. It is the place where 'you'

live. The body is not just about health and wellness, flexibility and circulation, energy and flow. It is the ground of your own personal experience - your foundation - being in touch literally, with the earth, the planet, and the elements.

While your emotions and thoughts may be spinning with the unexpected, uncertain, or chaotic, the physical body is always in reality. A physical entity in the physical world.

Being in sensitive and curious contact with the sensate landscape of your body is a powerful grounding resource for yourself. Just feeling your feet on the ground or your bottom on a chair is really grounding. Noticing breath as it moves through your body and face. Stretching out muscle tension in your yoga practice. Being interested in the immediate sensations of your own body now.



SPONTANEOUS WISDOM

The more you can be in contact with the sensual somatic information of your body, the more grounding it will be for you. All information from the body is useful. Perhaps you feel hot or cold, itchy or awkward, stiff or loose, tired or energised, uncomfortable or in pain? All this sensate data is telling you something important about your state of wellbeing. The stronger it is the more urgent it is.

Instinctual intelligence arises from the whole of the body, in a fast response to an immediate circumstance. It is your gut instinct, your intuition, your inner wisdom. It arises quickly, spontaneously, through the nerves of the spinal segments, not necessarily through the slower rational brain. It might feel like an impulse, urge or need to act.



I call this capacity 'knowing without knowing.' We can suddenly know something with unshakeable confidence. It is not thought as such, it's a knowing, deep inside.

Your body wisdom is a sensitive, intelligent and benevolent capacity. It can help you and others. It can arise to protect you from imminent danger or to let you know of a good opportunity right now, perhaps you are about to

find a new home or meet an intimate soul partner. I've experienced all these!

History has examples of army generals 'knowing' not to cross a bridge and so saving their troops.

Do you have examples of times when you 'knew' to cross to the other side of the street, or to do or not do something that surprised you, but you just knew was the right thing for you to do? All of us have...

SENSING

But because of the pressures of busyness, most of us tend to ignore or override the physical signals of our bodies. Most of us are trained out of the habit of respectfully listening to our bodies...

How tuned-in to your own physical body are you? For example, do you usually eat, drink water, and rest just when you feel that you need to do so, or do you tend to delay these things to get your work done or complete a task like cooking, cleaning, or creating?

How responsive to your own bodily signals are you? The more you can be kind to yourself and your body, the more you will be able to heed the subtle signals, and the better you will take care of yourself.

Movement is a helpful practice for you to attune to your own body. Yoga is fantastic, and so are walking, dancing, martial arts, badminton, tennis, golf, etc. Your capacity for accessing your whole-body wisdom is improved, not just by the movement itself, but by your willingness to align your mind and body together - to sense your body as you move. You can also sense your body during small movements, as your hand simply reaches out for a cup of tea.

Training yourself through a sensing practice, will not only increase your sensitisation - and therefore your access to more physical pleasure - it will also increase your access to your own bodily wisdom.



RESILIENCE

In a time of uncertainty, many of the old navigation points we thought were constant, will have changed or are changing. Perhaps your personal life will take an unexpected turn. Perhaps there will be global pandemics, wars, or local breakdown in the supply of food, water, energy, or internet.

In a new unfamiliar landscape, your old beliefs, habits, and behaviours will not work. You cannot rely on your old mental map of the way things used to be... You need a new way of being...

To be resilient, you need to be able to access your body wisdom, effective in an unfamiliar setting. To be physically awake and subtly responsive to this moment, this person, in this unknown situation. And to then take action.

If you act on guiding sensations, impulses, and images, from your own sensitive body, you will thrive.

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Julia Paulette Hollenbery is an expert in the power of happiness, joy and relationships. She is the author of *'The Healing Power of Pleasure: Seven Medicines for Rediscovering the Innate Joy of Being'* (Published by Findhorn Press)

