

Touching the Invisible:  
A Field Guide for  
Living

Jacqueline Westhead

“In this remarkably lucid, engaging and intelligent guidebook to awakened living, Jacqueline Westhead integrates ancient wisdom with modern neuroscience and years of devoted, arduous practice in a brilliant synthesis that is at once engaging and profoundly illuminating.

This work is written from a place of deep love, wisdom and passion. Westhead invites her readers to understand and experience the mysterious ways that invisible spirit interpenetrates our visible world, guiding us to discover the mystery and beauty that surrounds and abides within us in every moment.

This is a must-read work that belongs on the shelves with the great classics in self discovery and healing. In celebration and gratitude, I encourage all to open these pages and thereby learn to touch the invisible.”

*Jeffrey S. Lidke, Professor of Religion, Berry College*

“Jacqueline Westhead’s book is a game changer. Finally a tool box for artful living that cultivates awareness, engenders kindness and engages curiosity!

Jacqueline’s story of personal realization brings to life these tools. She has honed and developed each of them through years of study, personal growth, teaching and finds fresh ways to clear paths for their natural “bubbling up.”

As we make friends with our Inner Tribe, as we honor all our Parts with Awareness and Kindness, we enlist our greatest advocate, our humble selves. The super power of self love weaves all of these Parts together. These excellent tools need only be tapped; the unfolding will result. This *Field Guide for Living* brings the *invisible* to light!”

*Charlotte Frires, CNM, MSN*

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*“I could not, at any age, be content to take my place by the fireside and simply look on. Life was meant to be lived. Curiosity must be kept alive. One must never, for whatever reason, turn their back on life.”*

*Eleanor Roosevelt*

Each of us struggles, desires change, seeks growth, or finds we get stuck in different ways and at different times in our lives. There is not one single method or path for personal development. It is more like an evolving relationship over time of awareness, insights and tools that we choose to access. But accessing them is difficult if we don't realize they exist in the first place.

Or perhaps we know they exist, but we have gotten the message that they are not within our reach. But the truth is that our own biology and fundamental tools are here for us to engage. There is so much that lives in our own bodies and minds that we can tap into. Every person deserves access to this information of mind body biology and the general principles of these free tools. No one should feel their only source of support is something that exists outside of themselves. If you are curious or desire more personal empowerment for change, come along on this journey.

# The Invitation

*“And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now.”*

*Rilke*

*“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”*

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

## **Life is a Journey**

Living is an exciting and unpredictable adventure. Along the way, we all have highs, lows, places we get stuck, or obstacles we meet. It is a trip we each take in our own unique way, and we will need to develop the skills and tools available to us to best navigate the ever-changing landscape. Along the way, we will learn to better understand our map, gather information as we go, and calibrate our inner compass. On every journey, it is helpful to have a guide, and *Touching the Invisible* will be that guide as we explore the vast potential of our life, our body, and our mind.

There are many skills, tools, and reference points that are part of our map of mind body potential. They are all helpful for our journey, but one of the most significant is our ability for personal awareness. It allows us to navigate the edges of the inner landscapes and supports our rewriting of old maps when needed. We can think of this as a hero's journey to tap and reclaim our many personal resources.

We will build muscles, form a few callouses, shape the stories we tell—and somewhere along the way, we will inevitably uncover the treasure of self-love that is inherent in all of this. It is the superpower that dwells within each of us, and this journey will invigorate it simply as a byproduct of overcoming obstacles and reframing our inner terrain.

We are not always able to predict what we will encounter on our journey, but we will learn to grow from our travels. The skills we develop will serve our ability to better read the weather and elements of the landscape moving forward. There are so many tools to help us

on our way, and I will guide you through each of them. All it takes is a first step, and what we encounter becomes the *practice of the self*.

Have you ever wanted to:

**Heal old wounds**

**Shift unhelpful habits**

**Change how you react to situations**

**Feel more joy in your life**

**Experience more inner freedom**

**Change the inner chatter**

**Quiet the inner critics**

**Have greater confidence**

**Alleviate stress**

**Free yourself from limitations**

**Empower more choice**

**Open to new potential?**

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Developing your *practice of the self* can help do all this and more.

**Are you ready to learn more about the potential within you?**

## **A Field Guide**

I consider this book to be a field guide because it is interactive and asks to be engaged. It explains landmarks, qualities that grow, and things to look for. It is a guide with inspired, practical insights for navigating our day-to-day lives and what is happening behind the scenes of who we are by accessing powerful skills, tools, information, and science. There are many elements that affect the journey of how we feel, our behaviors, our health, the choices we make, and the thoughts we have every day. Many of these elements remain “invisible” to us if we don’t cultivate our awareness and invest in knowing more about ourselves. Switching from our old way of navigating to a potential new one might be awkward at first, but as we continue on this journey, we find our footing with each step we make.

We begin in *Part I: The Playing Field* which contains *Biology of Possibility* and *Unconscious Influence*. We learn more about what is happening behind the scenes in our biology, our unconscious, and how these two interconnect. This background information is helpful because it lays the groundwork for you to understand why certain skills, tools, or exercises will make a difference.

In *Part II: Framework for Change* we put a spotlight on the framework of the *Inner Tribe* and learn how this model can create a powerful shift in how we relate to ourselves and the world. It offers changes from the inside out based on the strength of our 3 key skills: *awareness*, *kindness* and *curiosity*. *Inner Tribe* work becomes an



exciting lens through which to meet our day-to-day life and can lead to tapping into our superpower: self love.

***Part III: Our Toolbox*** outlines 10 different tools we have access to right now. It offers insight and background into each of them and why they can work for us. These tools and the exercises in ***Part IV: Stepping into Practice*** will help you make the changes you seek and create more nourishing habits. You can mix and match tools or explore one in particular.

***Part IV: Stepping into Practice*** is all about putting it into practice. There is an abundance of exercises for you to choose from based on what you might need in any given moment or on any day. The range of choices is broad depending on your time, needs, and resources.

## **Something for Everyone**

This work is for everyone, whether you are a lifelong meditation student, someone already with a healing practice, an utter pragmatist, someone struggling with depression, or you are totally new to all of this and are looking for some insights. This book can offer support whether you struggle with chronic issues or occasional setbacks. Everyone is equal here, and no person better or worse off in developing their skills for this journey. Everyone is invited to cultivate more empowered choices, greater inner resource, or a personal sense of freedom in their life. No matter who you are and where you find yourself, your inner resource is able to be accessed in your own unique way. There is always space for new insight in our lives because we have infinite possibility for growth.

However, this does not mean we eliminate all our struggles. Rather, we develop the resources and skills we already have to create a new landscape, making a new experience possible. Sometimes, the struggles and things that challenge us will unwind completely in this new landscape, and other times we will be able to meet them with new

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navigational insights. Either way, it offers us greater possibility for making the changes we desire.

On this journey, we start from wherever we are. The unconscious is vast and our aim is to better understand and develop a relationship with it, and one way we do this is by engaging it through our conscious mind. This is how we can use our skills to gradually write new maps that are more nourishing.

***And truly, the best part about this practice is that it already belongs to you. Everything you need is already within you.***

Each of us is so amazingly resourced. We have spent much of our lives hearing things contrary to this, so I am going to shout this truth from the mountaintops of these pages because we *deserve* to hear it repeated. No matter our unique blessings and challenges in this life, we all have incredible resources within. The trick is figuring out how to access and touch upon them.

The wisdom and brilliance that every person has within them is something I feel in my bones. This deep knowing informs how I see, feel, and experience just about everything.

I hope to convey the science and biology involved in this knowing in just the right amounts, so if you ever feel lost in the information or the details, pause. Step back and take a breath. My excitement for sharing all of this will be here when you come back. The information is important but we don't want it to short circuit how joyful this *practice of the self* can be. We are in this together to discover a new way of living that touches every aspect of life.

## **What Does “Touching the Invisible” Even Mean?**

I use the word “invisible” because so much of what we think, feel, and do is shaped by our habits, chemistry, conditioning, and functions of

our unconscious. Our unconscious can be running the show without our awareness because it is designed to do this efficiently and without questioning. There are aspects of this that are helpful and necessary, but others that might be holding us back. All of this is not completely visible to us, but we can use our skills to help us touch parts of the invisible places within ourselves and directly address the unconscious patterns. Developing our awareness to make new choices and discern habits is an important skill we will get to know in our work with the unconscious.

Our conditioning and habits are also a part of this concept of the invisible because they can be so seamlessly woven into the fabric of who we are and stored in the unconscious. But in developing our skill of awareness, we begin to recognize patterns and clues. We begin to glimpse the space between our hopes, instincts, and happiness in contrast to our current habits or challenges. We can use our skills of *awareness*, *kindness*, and *curiosity* to change our patterns of conditioning into a new, more nourishing relationship.

## **Mind Body Brilliance**

We are more than what we seem, and we are greater than any singular idea of physiology or consciousness. What we currently understand about the mind and body is that they are amazing instruments that we still have so much to learn about. And yet, we understand they are exquisite in their capacity to adapt to their environment, heal, change, seek wellness, and experience thriving. The brain, including the central nervous system, and body are in constant dialogue, affecting each other all the time through our thoughts, emotions, sensations, and more.

As I will share in detail in the *Mind Body* section, we now have research confirming beyond doubt that our mind body relationship is fundamental to our health and wellness, as well as an interactive map. Tapping into the intelligence of our minds and bodies is compelling

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because it is something available to each of us. Some of this intelligence can be understood through the objectivity of science, but the rest is known through our own subjective exploration. And even with all the research available, the best way any of us can come to trust, access, and learn to navigate our mind body potential is through personal experimentation and practice. As the field of mind body expands and more research becomes available, I am profoundly inspired to see that we are moving towards increased understanding of how empowered we truly are.

The intention of this guide is to offer a clear foundation of information so you can connect your own dots between the tools, exercises and yourself. Understanding the nature of why any of this works, like an overview of the terrain, allows you to improvise when you need to. All too often, if we only rely on the external GPS system and do not collect a little travel information in advance, we can get lost or meet a dead end. The information in this guide will help you know what direction you need to go when the software or satellite reception is just not helping you.

Remember, I am here with you as we journey through this landscape. Whether it is science, biology, exercises, or first-hand experiences, I will strive to make it as accessible and clear as I can. If you are interested in researching more of the science on your own, the internet or local library is a great place to start. In the meantime, your own *curiosity* will be your greatest resource in this *practice of the self*.

## **Accessibility for All**

I believe in accessibility and that the potential of our mind body is as powerful as the internet. And just as some cities want to provide Wi-Fi accessibility for all, because we realize information empowers people, I believe everyone should have access to the information for tapping the power within themselves. We can all learn to work with the unique qualities of who we are right now, without question. There is no right

or wrong, greater than or less than. We are all learning how to navigate our personal terrain and develop our superpower no matter our personal circumstance. Little by little, with practice, each of us can touch more deeply into this.

*“The whole universe is change and life itself is but what you deem it.”*

*Marcus Aurelius*

## **How Can You Make Lasting Changes?**

If we want lasting change, we need to go into the maps of who we are that hang out below the surface of our everyday conscious mind. We need to develop our *awareness* and create more of a relationship between all the different parts of ourselves that are both conscious and unconscious. We learn to develop emotional and mental hygiene in much the same ways we have for brushing our teeth or bathing. We make space, ask questions, and practice. We cultivate the space of our *awareness* so that we are able to engage, moderate, and interact with the unconscious, allowing for the changes we want and need. The relationship between the conscious and unconscious is a constant dance of give and take. First, *you have to realize there is a dance floor*. Then you get yourself on it and learn how to practice some moves.

Any sustainable change involves examining the structure on which things are built and making choices. To be more specific, I am suggesting that you will need to look at the basic beliefs you have about yourself and the world around you, the language you use to communicate, and habitual responses for even the most mundane aspects of life. This might sound radical or overwhelming, but it can quickly become liberating and joyful. Think of it like a house inspection where you get to see the condition of your foundation and whether anything needs attention.

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This doesn't mean you get rid of everything you have known about yourself. It simply means you invest in a practice to take things apart, ask questions, and make choices as far as what you need to move forward and feel nourished.

As much as we can understand the basic mechanisms of how humans function, each of us is still completely unique. Read any of the latest research and you will find that the development of each of our biologies is like that of a snowflake: no two are alike. Each of us will need to invest energy to discover this incredible and mutable map that has been written over time. There is no direct path for this work, so we will need to pioneer our way developing the skills and tools we have available to us.

And no matter who you are, where you live or what your unique struggles may be, the information of this guide can be of support on your journey to develop specifically what you need.

In all my travels working with an incredible diversity of people, I am always struck by how much we all have in common no matter our exposure to therapeutic or spiritual techniques, tools, our age, biology, socio-economic, or cultural backgrounds. We all have struggles and a desire for more choice, sense of joy and internal freedom. This guide offers a common thread of information and ways to engage it that are meant for anyone to access. There is no single answer or tool in this life to help us on our path, but there is so much we can learn about our mind body potential that grows our internal resource for truly supporting how we feel and live in the world. My intention is to offer guidance in exploring this potential so that we might be less dependent on an external GPS system and instead know that we have skills, tools, and maps to reach for inside of us.

Any method or technique can help only in so far as it inspires us to look more deeply and persist in our practice. Truly, we want to develop our own inner compass so we are able choose which direction to go next, as opposed to just staying on the same path because we didn't

feel we could choose a different one.

Even this guide is not a book of answers, but simply insights and tools that *you* bring to life. Your investment is what breathes energy and dimension into the words on these pages. Keep this in mind, because it is essential to the journey. Nothing here will be passive or static in nature. Everything is participatory, and how you choose to meet the invitation in this guide is purely up to you. Your continual commitment to this as a practice is what will lead you to your own growing insights. Ultimately, this is a ***practice of the self***, and I am here to offer support to you on your journey.

## **Our Essence Is Change**

I know change can be unsettling for many people, but *life by definition is about change* and evolution. Just by living and breathing, we grow and change every moment. We are not meant to be stuck (static), and becoming unstuck is not always a comfortable process, but it is a key ingredient for a nourishing life. Your practice helps you discover all the invisible elements that influence your thoughts and actions and helps you meet them with *kindness* and *curiosity*.

Learning to not merely survive, but find inner resource for greater nourishment, is our birthright. As we develop our skills, rewrite maps, and take this journey, we find more possibility for how we experience our life. *The essence of how you live becomes about interacting and making choices*. You are able to find more freedom in life when you participate in the activities of the mind. Because in whatever way we direct the mind, we direct our experiences *and* our life.

## **So, Here's a Radical Question...**

***Why would you consciously choose to maintain any form of negative inner chatter, depleting habits, or pattern that doesn't nourish you?***

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I understand all too well the obstacles for making changes. And to be honest, for the early part of my life, it never crossed my mind that I could change the underlying structure. More accurately, it didn't even occur to me to ask the question. I accepted everything as fixed landscape, jumping the hurdles and meeting the challenges of emotions and perceptions. I would repeatedly trip on the same rocks or bump into the same walls because I was unconsciously attached to a way of thinking or a belief. I would get stuck in reactive loops that never helped me see how I could rewrite these maps for solutions. It wasn't until I was drowning that I discovered a different option. I had never known I could have conscious relationships with all my parts and allow them to transform as opposed to trying to shut them out all the time. I gradually realized that being vulnerable was a strength, and I realized that I was worthy simply for each breath that I took. I stopped looking for validation in superficial places and eventually found how to build a strong *Inner Tribe*, how to ask the questions, and how to redesign the map of myself.

Perhaps you can relate to some of what I have shared. This is the human condition as we have passed it on from one generation to the next, but we have the choice to shift what gets paid forward. Not just a few of us, but anyone who desires to rewrite their map, cultivating a totally new relationship with themselves. And it is with great joy and passion that I say to you: I know you can do it, because I did it.

This work is a leap of faith in that it is a process, not an end goal. You commit to the practice and allow yourself to open into the unknown with *kindness* and *curiosity*. It involves a willingness to walk side-by-side and hand-in-hand with fear, discomfort, uncertainty, and frustration. I know that these might feel like insurmountable or unlikeable obstacles, but they are just parts of the whole story of who we are. We need to build our relationships with these *parts* because every aspect of who we are becomes an ally in this work. We are complex beings, and we need to reclaim and reframe our relationship to our different *parts*, emotions, and experiences. These challenging feelings can often be the indicators that we are moving towards



growth. We have this inner compass to seek change, an intuition guiding us towards touching what seems invisible.

***Never doubt that your ability to access your inner resources, cultivate awareness, and make new choices is the seed potential within you.***

***You are front and center in this practice.***

## **Yes, It Takes Courage**

This journey takes some courage because it involves letting go of what feels familiar in exchange for something new and unknown. We open ourselves to transformation when we step outside of any box or choose to rewrite maps without fully knowing where they lead. Transformation is about creating *fundamental shifts*, as opposed to just symptomatic relief to get by.

On this journey, our challenges can become our opportunities and our teachers. This may sound cliché, but trusting and connecting to this can help so much. Even when situations and challenges feel uncomfortable, there is so much more resource available to you when you work *with* them, not against them. This practice is about moving out of any habits and patterns that limit you by transforming your relationship with all *parts* of yourself.

Perhaps your struggles are pretty obvious to you or maybe you are in the process of discovering them. Either way, you are the only one who can engage this practice. This means learning to follow your own intuition and meeting your life in a new way. I know for myself there are infinite more possibilities than I can see in any given moment. I trust that there is always more beyond the visual limitations of the horizon line. Possibilities exist even when I cannot directly see them, and I leap into the journey without always knowing “what” or “how.” For me, it is the courage to trust that I can find the path even in the

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dark. And if I don't find it right away, I improvise with the information and tools I have.

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Your *practice of the self* moves with you to develop your inner skills so that you can be empowered to choose and continually transform what you meet on your journey and what you desire for living. You become your own expert and resource for growth.

Every moment and experience of your life will contribute in some way on this journey. Your emotions can become a source of energy to be tapped. Your thoughts and perceptions can be expanded so that you become more flexible to life's situations. You learn to connect to the vast resource that dwells within you.

If you feel inspired so far, then take this leap, peel back the layers of the self, question, love, and evolve with *kindness* and *curiosity*. Wherever you are on this path is where you begin. Whether you are very familiar with the language of this book or it is like reading a foreign text, we are all navigating forward from this moment. This is not a practice for a special few, but a life practice for all who choose to take the journey. It might feel awkward or uncomfortable at first—and yes, it would be easier to simply stay with your existing maps!—but the discomfort quickly shifts because our minds and bodies are wired for making these changes. This journey guides us in uncovering the superpower we have had since birth, teaching us not only how to access it, but to enjoy it.

Of course, we each have our own unique blind spots and challenges, but through tools and experimentation, you will discover what works best for you and continue to grow with it for the rest of your life. Because we never stop learning, and life is about growing.

Each of us is unique, and it is through our own exploration that we come to understand what particular tools work best for moving us forward. Quite often, I hear people express disbelief or joke “not in

this lifetime” when I talk about falling in love with themselves or even feeling content. Why has this possibility been seemingly allocated to a small group of special people? Why would we ever believe we are not good enough?

What if this thing called “enlightenment” is everyone’s birthright? What if most of what you need to shift habits is all within you? What if your empowerment came from developing skills and tools based on your own strengths *and* challenges? How does that make you feel?

### ***What Do You Believe?***

*“No safety without risk and what you risk reveals what you value.”*

*unknown*



# Part I: The Playing Field

*“Wisdom Begins in Wonder.”*

*Socrates*

*“To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all.”*

*Oscar Wilde*

We are about to step into our playing field of information and potential. With a little knowledge about our own design, we can understand more about how things are interconnected. *Part I: The Playing Field* is divided into 2 elements. We will start by looking at the nature of our biology in ***Biology of Possibility***, then move on to the layers of our unconscious in ***Unconscious Influence***.

There are some fundamental puzzle pieces and key players in these areas that we hear about more often these days, and it is important to know what they are, how they fit together, and in what ways they feed our mind body potential. Learning some structure and insights about these will help fuel our practice with developing our *awareness*, working the framework of our ***Inner Tribe***, and exploring our tools.

Learning more about the playing field of our biology and our unconscious can open doors to understanding the *how*, *what*, and *why* any of this might support you making the changes you desire.

If you're ready, let's jump in!

# Biology of Possibility

*“We do not receive wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one else can make for us, which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world.”*

*Marcel Proust*

As human beings, we have many design elements that are interconnected, influencing all aspects of who we are. Many of these can be misunderstood or perhaps not really known about at all. Having a general overview is important in developing and tweaking your own personal practice for empowered change in your life.

The focus of *Part I* is to keep the information concise and direct so that you get a sense of the blueprint that is the personal vehicle of YOU. Getting an idea of the big picture allows you to tinker, engage, and improvise in meaningful ways on this journey. We never know what we will encounter in our life, but knowing what is under the hood—so to speak—can keep us from getting stuck in the mud or repeating the same trip over and over. A little bit of information—combined with a little bit of *curiosity*—can be the difference between basic knowledge and effective wisdom for navigating our inner and outer worlds.

*Biology of Possibility* offers the overview and information to best access the potential within our own biology. We will first read more about what we mean when we talk about “mind body,” then go on to look at the many elements that are involved. Understanding these different layers helps guide us towards a deeper clarity of what is happening and how to harness the power of our biology.

# Mind Body

*"The natural healing force within each one of us is the greatest force in getting well."*

*Hippocrates*

*When I think back on my life journey, I can see that connecting the dots of mind body was a slow inevitability. One puzzle piece effortlessly led to the next, which then encouraged my curiosity and fed more exploration. As a child, emotional life events directed me towards a feeling of how powerful emotions could be. Dance taught me how physical expression could be therapeutic. Drumming and voice helped me understand physics and how everything was connected. My life became my laboratory, and my teaching was a vehicle to continuously go deeper. And all of this during a time when mind body practices and research was not as common as it is now. Research and study in this arena was more challenging, and you needed to have a lot of perseverance. This worked out well because determination is something I have always had in abundance.*

## **Oh, the Times Have Changed**

It is an exciting time in mind body medicine, neuroscience, and being human. We have broken through the limitations to find ourselves fully immersed in undeniable research, studies, and wide acceptance of the practical potential within each of us.

The phrase “mind body” can often elicit less than scientific images due to a long history of lacking support by the mainstream. But with the advance of technology and our ability to see further into the brain and our cells, there is abundant evidence to support the fact that our brain



and bodies are intimately connected. We understand beyond a doubt that emotional, cognitive, and social factors directly impact our health and experience of self and life.

We start setting in place patterns and habits as soon as we are born—and perhaps even in utero. It can be challenging to discern these patterns because they have been woven into how we experience ourselves from such an early age. We continue throughout our lives to respond to life and create habits that both nourish and deplete us. Evidence is telling us that environment, stress, and perception can actually “reprogram” our genes. We are influencing our genetic material all the time, whether we know it or not.

The mind and body are in constant dialogue and affecting each other all the time through our thoughts, emotions, and sensations. Believe it or not, every organ—including your gut—is listening to what the mind is communicating about your subjective experience of your external environment, as well as internal thought habits. Every thought can actually have a corresponding manifestation on a physical level. The body will believe what the mind thinks. It doesn't discern one habit or memory from any other; it simply follows the chain of beliefs and responds accordingly. Mind body science shows us that our thoughts and perceptions impact our biology. But we can use this knowledge to work towards our ultimate wellbeing by learning to shift any depleting perceptions or thought patterns. Mind body practices make us simultaneously stronger and more flexible, calmer, and more adaptable. Not a bad deal for something that is available and totally free to us.

## **What's the Story?**

Perhaps you are wondering why it has taken so long to tap into all of this, especially considering we have been studying the mind, body and brain for so long. The truth is, we have already known and well understood the connection between mind and body. In fact, this

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understanding of interconnectivity can be dated as far back as the second-century CE physician Galen of Pergamon and medieval physician/philosopher Moses Maimonides. Are you wondering how we could have possibly gotten so far off track?

It didn't happen all at once in a flash, but events early in history can be attributed to this separation of mind and body. The most notable shift came with René Descartes in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. As the story goes, Descartes made a deal with the Pope to get cadavers he needed for research. In exchange, the Pope asked Descartes to keep his studies directed towards matters of the physical realm only and not have anything to do with the mind, soul, or emotions. These latter areas were considered the exclusive jurisdiction of the Church at that time.

This event had a great impact on the overall tone of Western science moving forward. It established a model of separation that became the norm and, over time, a disservice to our research into the mind and body. Ideas that the mind and body were interconnected were viewed with suspicion, seen as perhaps mystical and certainly unscientific. This became the accepted philosophy. The vast resources and essential knowledge of our interwoven biological matrix became denied and often completely buried. When you consider that our mind body relationship covers every aspect of our daily-lived experience, I am encouraged to see that we are navigating back towards our inherent design.

Modern medicine has largely kept them separate until the past 30 years, when advanced technologies have begun moving mind body techniques and wisdom into the mainstream. A more integrated approach to mind body is being accepted by increasing numbers of scientists and research institutions as newer technology makes our interconnectedness impossible to ignore. A new wave of neuroscience is excited about these discoveries, leading the way towards letting go of our previous limiting views. This acceptance is allowing us to vastly expand our understanding of the remarkable and essential interplay between mind and body. Science can often move slowly, at times with resistance to change, but here we have seen this exciting shift begin

and move us into a new world of possibility and empowerment.

“According to the mind–body or biopsychosocial paradigm, which supercedes the older biomedical model, there is no real division between mind and body because of networks of communication that exist between the brain and neurological, endocrine and immune systems.”<sup>1</sup>

*Oakley Ray, Professor Emeritus of Psychology, Psychiatry and Pharmacology at Vanderbilt University*

## **Moving Forward**

With studies confirming things such as stress, hostile environments, negative interactions, psychological stressors, socio-economic factors, perceived lack of empowerment, and more being linked to an increased rate of disease, it’s no wonder we are getting back on track with this innate intelligence of mind body.

There have been many modern pioneers that have asked the questions and performed the studies to reconnect us. To demonstrate the leaps and bounds mind body medicine has made, we can look at the story of Dr. Dean Ornish. A professor of medicine at the University of California – San Francisco, Dr. Ornish had claimed in the early 80s that heart disease could be prevented with “lifestyle changes” such as diet, stress reduction, yoga, meditation and social support. He was not at all well received by mainstream medicine, and it wasn’t until about 10 years later that studies would begin to confirm his findings. Today, his programs have been adopted in many mainstream clinics in the U.S.

Another study <sup>2</sup>that contributed to making a landmark shift was done in the late 1980s at Stanford University. It looked at using stress reduction and social support as a therapeutic intervention for women

with breast cancer. The supportive findings were unexpected at the time, and they triggered a large body of research into mind body techniques for use in the medical field. These individuals were committed to using these tools because they were seeing first hand that they could not only help patients heal, but also prevent disease from advancing. The research and science to confirm their experience opened the possibility for people to have more access to these fundamental methods for health and wellness. Today, there is an increasing number of medical schools and centers—such as Harvard University, Columbia University, and UCLA—with departments dedicated to mind body research and treatment. The field is growing, and it often incorporates behavior, beliefs, thoughts, biochemistry, physiology, moods, immune health, and mindset.

It is not just the doctors and scientists driving this growth in mind body, but patients and individuals are finding a growing interest in self-care and treatments beyond and in conjunction with allopathic, or mainstream, medicine.

The consumer demand for mind body medicine even motivated the government to get involved. In 1992, Congress mandated the National Institutes of Health to open an office of “alternative medicine”—what is now known as the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Medicine. At that time, more than one-third of Americans said they used techniques such as guided imagery, relaxation, biofeedback, and hypnosis techniques. The interest, usage, and funding for mind body therapies since 1992 has done nothing but grow.

“[A] growing number of medical schools are including mind–body medicine in their curricula, and a lot of progress has been made... but we’ve still got a long way to go.”<sup>3</sup>

*James Gordon, Clinical Professor at Georgetown University and founder and Director of the Center for Mind–Body Medicine*

## **We've Come a Long Way**

There are many that can easily recall when the acceptance of mind body research in medicine was not widespread. The medical institution had a certain amount of uncertainty because it didn't want mind body to take money and focus away from other areas such as psychology and pharmacology. Many scientists have reflected that their interest in the field of mind body connectivity was met with great skepticism and almost ridicule from the mainstream. It was a common acknowledgement that pursuit of such studies was taboo and could ruin your career. Even if you were interested, you couldn't really talk about it or run the risk of being considered a "quack." But attitudes have changed slowly over time. We saw movement in the mid-1990s and continuing into the 21st century where training for doctors in complementary medicine techniques became more common.

“The average doctor does not prescribe meditation, breathing exercises or yoga, and this needs to change”

*Herbert Benson, founder of the Mind/Body Medical Institute at Harvard University*

Contributing to the support of mind body acceptance is improved technologies to visualize communications between the central nervous system, immune system, and endocrine system. However, despite all of the growing evidence, medicine is still lacking in necessary changes and integration. This is likely a throwback to the negative stigma around ideas of “alternative medicine,” even though mind body is empirically based and not “alternative.” The institutional shifts might move slowly, but it doesn't change the findings of so many individuals who are receiving help, improving their lives, and getting preventative support using mind body techniques with medical issues such as coronary artery disease, headaches, insomnia, cancer symptoms,

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chronic pain, depression, diabetes, obesity, auto immune disorders, and even skin ailments.

Suffice it to say, we have found significant health links between stress, depression, outlook, mindset, beliefs, empowerment, social support, touch, happiness, purpose, and more. The body of evidence is beyond questioning, and it simply compels us to go deeper into understanding how potent our relationship of mind body truly is. What we find is that there is no division between mind and body because networks of communication that exist between the brain and neurological, endocrine, and immune systems. It is that simple, but Descartes couldn't have known this, having not taken the time to study mind body as interconnected. Instead, Descartes focused on the body at the behest of the Church, and a separation was created that contributed to disconnecting us from our inherent resource. Today, things are changing and restoring and we can thank the latest technology and research in neuroscience for this shift. We are reclaiming the potential of this interconnectivity and the power of choice that we have.

It's never too late to intervene with *awareness* and choice to shift and create new, nourishing patterns. Our brains have infinite potential to change. The key is discovering the exercises and tools that work for you to change your conditioned habits. All this said, it is not a straightforward path. I suggest approaching with *curiosity*, a willingness to experiment, and being open to finding answers that are really more like new possibilities to explore. Remember, everything is interconnected. There is no question of this anymore.

### **Truly, It Takes a Village**

As much as I discuss things individually and break things down, it will always be an elaborate network. Everything is interconnected and communicating at lightning speeds. No part of us works in isolation.

The major players of the mind body complex I will explore are the

brain, the unconscious, neural networks, the mind, nervous system, endocrine system, and the cells of our body. Mind body is interconnected on many levels and each of these have some of the greatest influence on our behavior, health, and perception of life. They all work in tandem to coordinate and respond to the continuous information being received both externally and internally. Establishing the understanding of this interconnection is what will support you as you engage this practice and continue to grow with it.

***DID YOU KNOW?***

Everything we are, do, perceive, or experience in life is coordinated by how the mind body is functioning.

***E-V-E-R-Y-T-H-I-N-G***

Your thoughts? Yes.

Your moods and emotions? Absolutely.

Your daydreams, dreams, or imagination? Correct.

Your perception of any situation? Things that “turn you on”? Foods that you like? People you trust? Sense of joy?

How about facial expressions, eye movements, and body posture?  
(This is not a trick question.)

So...

Did I mention *EVERYTHING*?

Because *YES*, everything is connected, and everything is part of mind body.

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This can be difficult to imagine, but ultimately, we are neurological and chemical beings constantly being influenced by our habits, thoughts, and experiences. This means there is a symphony of interaction happening within us without us needing to be aware of it—unless we perhaps recognize outcomes, symptoms, or patterns. This can often be our challenge, but it is also our power because we can *engage, interact, and make changes* through our conscious *awareness*. We are learning more and more how profoundly we can intervene with basic tools to affect change. We may never know the full extent of how powerful our mind body is, but we have ample evidence to compel us. What we are seeing reflected in the research of major medical institutions, neuroscience, and independent studies is astounding.

Much of my beliefs are rooted in developing our *awareness* so that we can make conscious choices that influence and create change.

I know there has been great debate about how much choice we can possibly have, considering the vast sway our unconscious has upon us. And I know many psychologists and social scientists question whether “free will” in humans exists at all. They suggest the idea of choice is an illusion because our brain’s wiring and physiology are ultimately calling the shots. But I believe there is a middle ground in the relationship of choice and the unconscious.

I think that our previous idea of *free will* is not what we thought, because I do believe we are a product of neurons, cellular intelligence, and chemicals. But I equally believe that our consciousness, our *awareness*, is our power to interact and intervene. It is the way in which we enable choice on some level. As much as the unconscious can be directing us continuously, we do have moment to moment access via our conscious mind to affect choice and change. The more *awareness* we have, the more we can glimpse the habits of the unconscious and choose actions or thoughts to influence our habits or patterns. I don’t think “choice” is all or nothing. I believe it is a constant dance, and our way to even step onto the dance floor is through our *awareness*.



***We can take what we do know and create more choice, working within this space of possibility.***

**We know:**

*Our brains have the ability to change*

*Our biology, bodies and brains are interconnected*

*Our life influences our mind body*

*Our mind-body creates how we experience our life*

*Our choices have direct influence on our mind and our body*

*Our unconscious is constantly at work influencing our mind and body*

*Our thoughts, emotions and physiology mutually direct one another*

*Any restriction or dysfunction in one area of the mind or body can produce repercussions in disparate other areas*

***We are far more powerful than we have previously imagined.***

***Nothing is isolated or happens in a vacuum.***

The tools and practice in this book work with current neuroscience, decades of exploration, and real-life feedback. For many of us, it requires a reframing of how we approach and view our bodies, minds, and choices. The cool thing about this is there is no downside to trying. There are no negative side effects, and our mind body communication is happening either way—we might as well get involved consciously!

There is however the possibility for immeasurable benefits. You get to decide how much you want to explore. There is no way to do this wrong because it is *your* practice.

*“Science is guiding us to understand that the very nature of our biology is based in change. It is not only possible, it is inevitable.”*

*Unknown*

## **Plasticity**

Not too long ago, the widely accepted view of the brain was that once we reached maturity, our brains were pretty much static. We were stuck with whatever we had and how it had developed. The discovery of brain plasticity in the past 20 years has changed all of that.

Plasticity refers to our ability to make changes in neural pathways and synapses due to changes in behavior, environment, social factors, neural processes, thinking, injury, and emotions. Neuroplasticity explores how the brain can and does change over a lifetime. This change can happen by conscious choice or unconscious exposure. Anything you practice can illicit change because the body follows where the mind goes. When we engage habits, conditioning, and unconscious influences through conscious choice, we can change the aspects that limit or deplete us. We are empowered to change the habits of the mind and functions of the brain in so many ways. We can direct the power of neuroplasticity.

Plasticity shows us that environmental events, experiences, and the actions you take can lead to changes in your brain. The brain is never a “fixed” entity; it is always a work in progress. Our facial expressions, eye movements, gestures, posture—every little aspect of how we live and breathe is wired to share information and influence us on an

emotional or physical level. There is nothing that is a throw away. It is extraordinary and always adapting and changing based on the world around you as well as your inner world. Neuroplasticity indicates that we can be active participants in how we think, feel, and experience our life. It is why and how many exercises within these pages have the potential to make sustainable changes. In many ways, plasticity tells us that human beings have the capacity and the choice to change our own biology and transform our lives.

***What new response or experience would you like to create? How do you want to learn and create your world through your neural connections moving forward?***

### ***Things to remember about Mind Body:***

- Mind body is not some new science or technique, but rather our inherent biological technology that is accessible to us all.
- Hospitals, universities, research organizations, and more are utilizing and turning to mind body potential.
- Mind body is interconnected on many levels, and each of these have some of the greatest influence on our behavior, health, and perception of life.
- Neuroplasticity is major player in mind body potential, and it has revealed that our neural pathways are not fixed but able to be changed and influenced.
- Our minds, brains and bodies are designed to process information, and it is up to us how we want to engage in that which makes us who we are.

### **Try this:**

#### ***Making Choices***

The act itself of choosing can help when you are feeling stressed or anxious. Setting an intention and making a plan for action can interrupt

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the feedback loop of these emotional states because, as with labeling, it engages the prefrontal cortex (PFC) of the brain. Activating the PFC can reduce stress related emotions, help guide us towards being able to see more possibility for solutions and gives a sense of control in the moment. All of these are calming to emotional reactions and the connected stress response in the body.

Learning to choose anything, no matter how simple, can help make these shifts. It can be something such as deciding to take a particular direction while walking, choosing an activity to engage or deciding to go do something in the moment. See yourself as in control and guiding the ship of *you*. You can try this when you are feeling triggered or practice it when you are feeling more resourced. Studies have found that if you make exercising a choice instead of feeling you “should” or “have to,” you can increase the benefits and pleasure of the exercise. Choosing anything, even typically enjoyable activities, can boost how you feel.

What *choice* can you make right now?

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See **Part IV- Stepping into Practice** for more exercises.

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For more reading about *plasticity* or the *brain* see **Part I, Biology of Possibility - Neurons and Networks**.

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***There is more to explore with plasticity but first let's learn about the brain so we can understand the space in which plasticity is taking place.***

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1456909/>

<sup>2</sup> The potential of stress reduction and social support as a therapeutic intervention became evident in the late 1980s during a study of women with breast cancer. David Spiegel, Director of the Psychosocial Research Laboratory at Stanford University (CA, USA), wanted to determine whether women with metastatic

breast cancer who participated in supportive–expressive group therapy had better quality of life and symptom control than those who received only medical treatment. To his and others' surprise, not only did the women have better quality of life and less pain, but they also lived significantly longer ([Spiegel \*et al.\*, 1989](#)).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1456909/>