

Ignite! Passion, Purpose, Potential!

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By Anita Allen

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In a culture that worships science and idolizes the intellect, we have lost touch with one of the simplest tools to support ourselves in creating lives filled with meaning and passion, we have denied the power and potential carried in the body. We have begun to awaken to our spiritual needs and yet the triad remains incomplete until we consider the body as where the spiritual essence of us is housed. Many of us have been conditioned to believe that our bodies are somehow less sacred, a coarse representation of the spirit and something to be denied and overcome.

I believe that any process that re-establishes our sense of joy, passion and adventure must begin by embracing the body as the vehicle of our experience. It is where we live and how we experience and interact with our world. It is the storehouse of information acquired in our development and its unparalleled capacity to process information as it "thinks" via its dense network of neurological pathways offers us a gateway to move quickly beyond self-imposed limitations and into our full potential.

As I work with individuals and the individuals that come together as groups, I find myself repeatedly having a conversation about "how". "How do I reconnect to what I'm passionate about? How do I change the life that I have? How do I begin to get to know myself after years of paying attention to everyone and everything else?"

The answer, I believe, is to begin to occupy your body. What does that mean? Well, how many of us walk around with a body that is primarily a display unit for our heads? We have become a culture so engrossed with our intellectual capacity that we ignore most of what lies below our neck until it responds with pain, discomfort or dysfunction. My experience as a Physiotherapist has demonstrated over and over again how intimately the mind and body are connected and how few people actually occupy their bodies. We may obsess over our physical needs – cosmetic surgery, the feeding, clothing, training and general nurturing of our bodies, and so often what we lack is connection. Even elite athletes, in my experience, often fail to pay attention to their body and its messages. We become like an aloof parent, substituting material things for the richer connection that comes from simply being present and attentive. I believe that if we want to have a different experience of ourselves as vibrantly alive and actively engaged in creating lives with meaning then we must stop the treadmill of intellectual activity. Be present. Pay attention – to what goes on inside of us.

For those of us who have come to prize our intellect and our capacity to figure things out, here is some surprising news from Dr. Candace Pert, whose groundbreaking research has shown that it is difficult to determine where the brain ends and the body begins. Her discoveries about neuropeptides, the molecules that carry information between brain cells, have taken our understanding of how the body works a giant leap forward. In her book, [Molecules of Emotion](#), she shares that these peptides, originally believed to be the sole domain of the brain are actually present though out our bodies in high concentrations.

Ignite!

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The body “thinks” in the same way that the brain does. The distinction is that your body thinks with an incredible network of neurological pathways. If you were to work out the speed of thought in the body in computer terms, it would be something along the lines of > 4 billion bits per second. The intellect, where reasoning and logical thought occurs, weighs in around 3 bits per second.

I think that speaks volumes on our capacity to intellectually figure things out. If you are still not convinced about the capacity of your body to think, let's throw your intellect another bone. According to Louise LeBrun, in her book, Fully Alive from 9 to 5, of the approximately 65,000 thoughts we think each day, about 90% or more are the same thoughts we had yesterday. Talk about a habit! And we wonder why it seems to take us so long to figure out how to change.

It is well accepted in the therapy community that most of our beliefs about the world are in place by the time we are 5 years old – some would say even younger. Our beliefs about whether the world is a safe or dangerous place, our beliefs about power and authority as modeled to us by mom and dad, our beliefs about what it is to be a good girl, a good boy and the rules about how boys and girls behave...are all present by the age of 5. For many of those 5 years, you did not have the capacity for language that you do now. Your body, however, was fully engaged in the learning process.

Do you remember how visceral the world was when you were in primary school? How vibrant each sensation was from the feel in your stomach as you pumped yourself higher and higher on the swing, the sharp smell of fresh grass, the butterflies in your stomach when the boy or girl you had a crush on glanced your way? When did we stop feeling so acutely? At what point did our need to intellectualize the world outpace our direct experience of it?

For the first few years, as you were laying down all kinds of neurological associations that represented how to make sense of the world, you were still unable to speak. You may have understood language – verbal cues, non-verbal cues, but you were not yet able to articulate your thoughts with language. Nonetheless, you were receiving messages from your body, which is where the experiences were occurring. You did not enter into the internal conversations that we now have as adults, trying to “figure” something out.

The experiences you had when your body was hardwiring knowledge into your nervous system with the language of energy and sensation are the filters through which we continue to perceive information about the world. Packets of energy and information along with neurological pathways were created in the body for future reference. These packets and pathways are used by the nervous system to process and make sense of our experiences in the world. When a barrage of information flooding the system interrupts normal processing of this information, it is filed away in the body for future management. Other bits that are similar are clumped together in the same “pending” file and these half processed experiences continue to shape our behavior and experiences – all this happens out of our awareness.

Consider this example paraphrased from Gwen McCauley's book, The Alchemy of Energy. As a young toddler, you saw a shiny object that grabbed your attention. It is like finding a wonderful surprise, an unexpected prize! It just so happened that this object was in the middle of the street. Having no sense of the danger of oncoming cars, you begin to wander out to pick up this pretty, shiny thing and suddenly find yourself roughly jerked back by the adult accompanying you...and depending on the adult involved, you are reprimanded, punished, held closely and fussed over. All you know is that you are unable to get that shiny object and now your nervous system is flooded with all kinds of other information. It becomes another piece of your neurological puzzle available for future reference. Now, fast- forward 33 years and at 35, you find yourself repeatedly pulling back from the things you desire. They may be attractive, sought after

prizes but there is this sense of fear and unease around being able to claim them, so you feel this irrational (to the intellect) conflict about reaching out to grab the prize. Better yet, you seem to almost have it in reach and then it somehow slips away through some subtle form of self-sabotage.

You can at this point invest a lot of time and energy trying to figure out why this pattern repeats in your life and you may or may not stumble onto the memory of a specific event. With time, energy and effort, you can move past this pattern. Alternatively, if you are attuned to the physical sensations that begin to arise, you can choose to simply relax and notice the flood of sensory information that begins to surface as you reach for the prize. If, in that moment, you are able to simply relax into your body, take a breath and pay attention to what is flowing, allow it to reach completion and then, when your body feels stabilized, make a choice as to how to proceed, you will likely find yourself pleasantly surprised to discover that the pattern has been altered. So what has happened? By simply allowing your body to process that packet of energy and information that was stored so long ago without language to accompany it, you have opened up an opportunity to make a mindful choice.

I believe the key is "mindful". How much of our lives are run based on habit. We have habits of behavior and habits of thought. These habits are like the ghost in the machine. They run the show when we are otherwise occupied. How often have you ever set off to drive somewhere and then arrived at your destination with very little recollection of how you got there? Obviously you managed to obey traffic signals and make other decisions in order to arrive safely at your destination, but where were YOU? While this can occasionally be a useful capacity, it can also perform as a default in our behaviors and thoughts. If we simply allow those parts of our lives that we are dissatisfied with to happen mindlessly, we miss the underlying intelligence that lives as sensory information and energy in the body. As soon as we are willing to engage with that information with mindfulness, we have created the possibility for a different experience.

I believe fear is likely one of the most widely ignored body experiences that we carry. As soon as we begin to feel its sensory cues rev up in our systems, we move very quickly to shut it down. We may move away from the experience that provoked the sensation of fear, we may distract ourselves with food or other things, we may get very busy in a conversation or some other form of busy-making, all with the intention of shutting down the experience of fear in our body. If we get honest with ourselves, how many of these fears are justified? How about the sensations attached to shame? - ... to anger? - ... to rage? The list goes on. What might have been useful at age 3 no longer serves us at age 33. Have we noticed? How many of our thoughts and behaviors are habits that we allow to divert us from creating the life that we truly desire?

Once again, we can invest lots of time and energy in retrieving information, talking about it, trying to understand it intellectually and beginning to develop strategies and affirmations that enable us to have a different experience. I believe and it is my personal experience that our body, with its incredible capacity to both store and process information, can "think" this through in a fraction of the time that our intellectual approach requires. Remember the processing speeds we talked about earlier? Intellect 3 bps, body >4 billion bps? I'm not sure about you, but when presented with a Porsche vs. a skateboard as a means of travel, I would prefer the Porsche! Actually, body-processing speed is more like a rocket ship in this analogy!

How does this brilliant instrument work? With breath!! Yes, it is that simple. Using your breath to begin to relax and open the body, you can allow your body to begin to move and process vast amounts of energy and information. Just like the processes of digestion or respiration, your body is perfectly capable of managing and metabolizing these packets of information without your intellectual direction. In fact, imagine how long it would take for you to coordinate the process of digesting the sandwich that you had for lunch through the power of just your intellect! Often

energy and information move with such speed that there is no language associated, it is simply flows like a wave of sensations or images that flash through your awareness. The intellect can then take the completed analysis and feed it back to us, often with surprising results.

What is required in this process is that you remain awake. You must be willing to pay attention to what goes on inside you. Your willingness to stay awake and pay attention to what is happening inside you requires that you become very honest with yourself about where your internal experiences are out of alignment with your external experiences. Living life with passion, purpose and that expresses your potential requires that you live in alignment with your inner compass.

If we have not felt connected to ourselves and our own internal guidance system, the easiest place to begin to re-establish contact with ourselves is to pay attention to the conversations that we have inside our heads and then notice what comes out of our mouths. How closely do they align? When someone asks you for a favor and you find yourself grumbling inside because you already have too many things to do and then open your mouth and say, "Sure!" that is a clue that you are running on autopilot! A habit, a belief about being nice or likeable, has over-ridden your authentic response in that moment. That doesn't mean that you need to be offensive in your response, you can simply share the truth, which is, "No, I can't help you out this time as my schedule is full already." Telling the truth about what you are experiencing internally is not always met with open arms by others... - but then again, what they think about you is none of your business!

You must be willing to see what you see, hear what you hear and know what you know. Trusting your internal compass to guide you rather than deferring to the default of mindless, habituated thoughts and behaviors. In other words, trust your gut - or whatever part of your body that is sending you some information. Aligning yourself with your internal experiences, embracing the processing power and potential contained in your body are the keys to igniting your passion for living, feeling a sense of purposefulness in your life and moving deeply into expressing your potential in the world. What are you waiting for? –IGNITE! – one breath at a time.

*Acting on her commitment to live a life that is a full expression of her intention **Anita** created **WELsprings**; an institute that reflects her firm belief in the depth of potential each person carries.*

In addition to Personal and Professional Coaching, Anita is the creator of several workshops and seminars including Exponential Potential™, a program experience that offers a WEL-Systems® Perspective as a platform to assist participants to tap into profound personal potential in a way that fosters life affirming change.

As a Physiotherapist, Anita embraces the notions of self-regeneration and "Autopoiesis" by incorporating the CODE Model™ in her work with clients and other healthcare practitioners.

An avid writer, Anita continues to contribute to books, websites and e-zines while she explores all that life has to offer as she follows her inner compass. She is a contributing author featured in [Sekhmet Rising: The Restlessness of Women's Genius](#), available June 12, 2006.

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