

## You Are Not a Body

This month, Gloria has been struggling with a *very* painful heel, whilst at one point I had a pretty painful thumb. So my thoughts have turned to how to rise above the temptation to drown in fearful 'Poor Me!' or scary 'What if?' thoughts whenever we experience any kind of physical pain, weakness, accident, or illness. It is crazy that the media constantly scares us about our physical health, but never tells us how to rise above all our health worries.

Our society is obsessed with finding ways to keep our bodies going for longer. For example, the Web is awash with endless articles about how bad certain types of food are for our long term physical health. We are told that anything fatty is really bad for us and then eating anything with sugar or salt is also damaging to our health. And it is not just food that is going to kill us! Getting too much sun is really dangerous, but getting too little is also very bad for us. Too little sleep or too much sleep are both supposed to increase the risk of dementia. Need I go on?

This emphasis on all the dangers our bodies face on a daily basis certainly does not make us any healthier, but it definitely makes us more afraid about our physical health, even if we are currently perfectly healthy. Then, as we age, most of us have to face some aches and pains in our body, as well as new weaknesses, more and more wrinkles, grey hairs and other cosmetic horrors. Years ago, I could jump out of a car without even thinking about it, but now I find myself limbering out of my seat like an old lady!

I don't think that any of us like what happens to our bodies when we age or when we get sick. But I now believe that facing ageing or illness of any kind can be a wonderful way to learn a fundamental life lesson or spiritual truth: we are not our bodies!!

We certainly have a body, but we can also see pretty easily that we are not just a body. For example, someone can lose both arms and both legs and still be basically the same person they were with two arms and two legs. Someone can even lose virtually all of their brain function and yet they still know 'This is me!' even though they may no longer recognise their nearest and dearest. Then, what about all those documented cases of patients who have been declared dead, only to come back from this near death experience

to describe to astonished doctors and nurses everything that they said and did whilst the brain dead patient was apparently dead and gone?

Of course, it is not just our physical body that changes dramatically over time. Our personalities also change so much as we age and mature. For example, when I look back on myself as a 20 year old I hardly recognise her as the same person I am today, and yet on another level, I am the same 'me'.

The way I now see all of this is as follows. We all check into this world as tiny helpless babies and then at some point we all have to check out again when our body dies. This is just as well, because think how unbearably crowded our little planet would become if no one ever left it.

Whilst we stay in Hotel Planet Earth, we all have to have a physical body so that we can enjoy the facilities. Or if you think of Planet Earth as a training ground for souls, we all have bodies here to help us learn some essential lessons about love, compassion, forgiveness and so on. But this body is not our true-self at all, but just a temporary home that we adopt so that we can dream an earthly dream for a while.

Now it is definitely important to care for our temporary home. No one is going to enjoy living in a home that is leaky, smelly or full of holes, and so we wisely patch ourselves up when we bleed, wash our bodies regularly and go to the dentist to fill holes in our teeth. But if we become too obsessive about looking after our body, we will experience more fear rather than less, and ironically, fearful energy is itself weakening and debilitating.

So I now do my very best not to react to the latest scare stories about dangerous foods or other 'dangerous' habits. If I do feel at all worried about my physical health I like to recite the title of lesson 199 of *A Course in Miracles* **I am not a body. I am free.** Yes, I am temporarily stuck in a physical body that is very prone to sickness and decay, but my true-self is not physical at all. My true-self is an eternal being dreaming a short, pretty crazy dream as a personality-self in a body.

When I was younger, I believed that when my body died that was the end of me and I found this belief to be frightening and depressing. But since I have begun to awake, I have had many vivid spiritual experiences that have proved to me - more or less beyond all doubt - that my existence did not start when I was born this lifetime and that I will continue to

exist in some form or other after this body of mine turns back to dust. Don't get me wrong. I am still pretty attached to my body and still feel fearful when it is sick or in pain. But I am definitely less fearful about dying than I used to be because I am now convinced that I will still exist after my body turns back to dust.

I love what Ram Dass once wrote about death: when the body dies, it is just like taking off a rather tight shoe. I also like the idea of being happy to discard our physical body when it becomes too old and decrepit – just as we are happy to throw out an old coat that is too worn or shabby for comfort.

Please do not think that I am being flippant here about death and dying. I know that the process of dying can be extremely painful and fearful for many of us. But I also now know that if we can begin to detach ourselves from the powerful belief, 'I am this body.', the process of letting go of our body at the end of this short life can be a lot less terrifying.

I am also convinced that we really need to get used to the idea 'I am not a body.' Before we are too weak or unconscious to rise above the fearful belief that when our body is no more, we are kaput, we need to keep reminding ourselves that we are far more than just physical beings. We need to keep reminding ourselves that this planet is not our ultimate home and that our true, non-physical home is always waiting for us to return, and always ready to welcome us home with a heavenly feast with absolutely zero calories in it. Amen to that!

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