CHAPTER ONE - Feel-Feel-At-Flesh Inside

Every human culture communicates its own story of reality and our proper relationship to it. Each story communicates what it means to be human.

The Story isn’t written in words – it’s written in the background, in the myriad of particulars found in the culture’s architecture, language, hierarchies, customs, values, markets, child-rearing practices, modes of transportation, prisons – everything.

The Story of Western culture asserts through these particulars a range of messages: that humans stand independent of nature as our skyscrapers do; that the head should be in charge of the body, just as a CEO heads a corporation; that we can own trees, land and animals; that self-mastery is the means to success; that what we feel as the ‘self’ lies within the boundary of the skin; that the pursuit of happiness is the primary goal of our lives; and that money can buy security.

Here’s the rub: Organizing our lives in accord with the Story ‘feels right’ to us, even when it makes us feel bad. Joseph Campbell referred to such a state as ‘organized inadequacy’.

The instructions of the Story aren’t reasonable or accountable, are largely hidden, and have nothing to do with the truth of the world.

Because the Story is largely invisible, its instructions rule us without our being aware of it.

The deepest impulses of our lives – our curiosity, our body’s sense of truth, our love of the edges of life – tend to clash with the patterns into which we have been molded.
Our lives can feel at stake. Not our literal existence, but the matter of our aliveness. We often watch the adults in our world seem utterly entranced by the fantasylands they live in; none of them seem free or fully awake.

- **What really matters in our lives? When do we ever dare to put this question fully on the line?**

  “What people think of as a moment of discovery is really the discovery of a question.”
  - Jonas Salk

- **The most difficult thing in the world is to question an assumption you’ve never consciously made.**

Shepherd’s Primary Focus:
1. To understand the nature of the Story of our culture.
2. To discern how it shows up in the body.
3. To acquire freedom of choice in the matter.

The Sense of Balance

Our culture interprets all aspects of our reality.

We all learn what to value. Without necessarily being aware of it, we learn the value system that says ‘up’ is good, and ‘down’ is bad.

It becomes difficult to see that this is merely a part of the Story of what it means to be human in our culture.

We’ve been taught that we have five senses – touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight. This is also a cultural construct, as different cultures recognize different senses.

- **Senses are what activate our intelligence. If we had no senses, our intelligence would literally remain asleep.**

The Anlo-Ewe culture of West Africa has an understanding and experience of the senses that differs radically from ours. They place an emphasis on balance as a sense. For the Anlo-Ewe, balance is an essential component of what is means to be human.

- **“Culture does not only affect the mind. It changes the body.”**
  - Kathryn Linn Geurts
The senses we legitimize in the Western world all conform to the same model: a stimulus from the outside world crosses the boundary of the self and arrives at a receptor.

What each of our sense supports is an aspect of the Story that is foundational to its message about what it means to be human: the self is contained within a boundary.

But balance does not work like that. It doesn’t impute a personal boundary. It relies on the felt relationship between your center of gravity and that of the earth. The earth itself is massive, but its center is precisely located.

Deliver Nothing, Experience Everything

In the Anlo-Ewe culture, speech is considered to be a sense.

Speaking is an experience that is felt in the mouth and the body; and they feel spoken words as something that could be directed “with the intention of hitting a mark”, as your senses might direct an arrow.

Our view that someone speaks in order to communicate what she knows is a reinforcement of our cultural belief that the self is contained within a boundary: our thoughts exist inside us, and speech is what we use to deliver them across a boundary to someone else.

In reality, speech is not a delivery system – it is a means of discovery. It enables a speaker to give spontaneous, tangible form to her thoughts and feelings.

Speaking is analogous to the sense of touch: It enables you to feel your way forward through the metaphoric dark towards a beckoning idea, just as your hands might enable your way forward in a dark room.

So speech can be thought of as a sense that facilitates discovery. When we understand speech in that way, the whole of your being is invited to be present to your act of speaking.

By contrast, if you believe that speech is a means of delivering your ideas, your concern will be on the task of presentation.

The primary concern of presentation mode is to elicit a certain response in the listener. So your underlying desire is to manipulate a certain reaction in the other. Presentation mode is the default option in our culture.

An extreme version of presentation mode is public speaking. It’s the nightmare of being burdened with trying to control the uncontrollable.
• Every time you speak you face a choice: to be in presentation mode or you can be present.

We quickly learn that if we are present to our truth, the listener – if they wish – will be able to feel this truth and resonate to it as well.

• One can learn to experience the present moment as a tangible, borderless, intimate intelligence.

Seselelame

When we think about promoting our personal well-being, we might think about taking the right supplements, eating organic food, exercising regularly, sleeping well, etc. But this is based on a limiting assumption that personal health will be achieved by doing the right things to the body.

The Story of our culture is to focus on the self as an isolated entity, as though it were a machine requiring upkeep.

In the Anlo-Ewe culture, they experience the self as porous rather than enclosed. Well-being is understood to be dependent on transactions between the self and others – including the flow of energy, matter, substances and information throughout many aspects of the individual world.

In short, well-being is sustained by dynamic relationship.

Neuroscience organizes human senses into three categories: exteroception, proprioception, and interoception.

• Exteroception includes all the senses that inform us about the world outside the body, such as touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight.

• Proprioception tells us where the body is in space.

• Interoception monitors all that is going on within the body – the heart, the breath, muscle tension, hunger and thirst, our gut.

The Anlo-Ewe culture places the realm of internal sense front and center, as a kind of meta-sense of “feel-feel-at-flesh-inside”.
They call this seselelame, *all that is perceived through the sensations of the body*, using exteroception, proprioception, and interoception.

The Anlo-Ewe don’t just hear sounds, they feel them resonate through the body. They don’t just see sights, they feel them in the body. **Seselelame** is an inner realm in which all the world is experienced and felt.

### What The Body Knows

Because the senses activate our intelligence and orient us to the world, a selected set of senses will privilege a certain way of attending to it. We also learn what *not* to sense.

The pre-conscious mind has an ability to process clues from the environment that are undetectable by the conscious mind – and what the pre-conscious mind knows shows up in the body.

What the senses can tell us – especially the interoceptors – is more reliable than our conscious reasoning.

In Western culture, we habitually subjugate the senses to serve the head’s desire to gain objective knowledge about the world around us. Objective knowledge is disembodied knowledge. We need to recover what the body knows.

**Seselelame** is an umbrella or ‘uber’ sense that freely feels reality reverberate through ‘the cavern’ of the body. It is a holistic, synthesized, non-categorical, subjective wakefulness to the world as it is perceived through the body.

The body and the brain act as a single functioning unit that collects signals inaccessible to the conscious mind. The whole of your intelligence is more astute than any partitioned portion of it could be.

When the body ‘knows’ the world, it is not relying on the abstractions of language: its knowing is nonverbal, unmediated and direct. Its thinking is sensational. Flesh is experienced as a medium that resonates to our thinking as well as to the world around it.

### Our Primary Wound

We tend to downplay or pre-organize what we are feeling.
Living our days in the abstract knowledge of things rather than in the intimate companionship of the world promotes a sense of disconnection and anxiety, and is consistent with an underlying schism in our culture: the separation of our thinking from our being.

A nurturing of seselelame is nowhere to be seen in our formal education of children.

Divorcing our thinking from our being has separated us from the core understanding of all that the body knows: the understanding that it belongs to the world, expresses the world, is held by the world and shares in all that happens in the world.

This causes us to think we are superior to the world, distinct from it, and independent from life on earth. This delusion is capable of both deadening and dooming us.

The Boundary & The Borderless Present

‘Being’ doesn’t occupy much of our attention. Yet we long to open ourselves to life and feel it, rather than hold ourselves in check until we figure out how to respond to it.

When our energy does not flow, we cannot be informed by it.

Bodily tension diminishes our sensitivity.

Our sense of self is actually held in its reality by the world to which it belongs. But when our surface tensions disrupt our sensitivity to that embrace, we create our own container through thinking, and we lock the reality of self into that story.

- The experience of being is affiliated with feeling.

Our bodies hum to the Present Moment, and as we become aware of that humming, we feel the Present living within us. When we are embodied in this way, all sense of separation fades, and the embodied present moment is the lived divine experience.

Known Relationship, Felt Relationship

The body feels the currents of reality in all their yielding, rich and changeable aliveness; by attuning to these currents, the body attunes to the relationships that guide the unfolding of the Present.
• *The intelligence of the head is its ability to think abstractly.*

Abstraction is properly understood as the act of removing something from its associations and its living context, and considering it independently of all that, on its own.

Here is a truth our culture has yet to accommodate: the essence of something is not a quality that sits within it, sealed off from the world. *Its essence is found in its relationships with the whole.*

Those relationships are infinite and cannot be comprehensively analyzed and wholeness itself has emergent properties that are not material and do not exist in its parts, even though every part participates in them.

• *There is no such thing as independence, period.*

Quantum mechanics ran into this fact head on: the very concept of independence is a fantasy. Everything affects and depends on everything else. Everything leans on everything. As soon as you imagine otherwise, you contract your ability to be informed by the reality to which you belong.

Things & Processes

There is certainly some truth in saying that things have boundaries. *Where we go astray, though, is in believing that a boundary can contain the whole of what something is.*

For example - a tree, far from being a static thing, is actually a process, like a whirlpool, which implicates and reveals the entire cosmos.

“What we are learning from the molecular processes that actually keep our bodies running is that we're far more fluid that we realize, and the world passes through us.”

• *Steven Cole*

Consider breathing, for instance. We are breathing in the exhalations of forests. Oxygen is born of the touch of sunlight on leaves.

Bringing our attention to our breath puts us in touch with not just our life, but with the life coursing through the moment. Our experience of our breath is foundational not just to our life, but to our experience of life.

We can choose to experience our breath carrying the world through us, or we can choose to inhibit our experience of it. Our experience of reality is upheld by the experience of our breath passing through us.
Our experience of reality is our experience of the world’s energy passing through us – diminish one and you diminish the other.

The nature of every one of our senses – and not just the ‘chosen five’ – is also an experience of reality passing through us. And there is no experience of reality without the senses.

Don’t Fence Me In

We cannot experience reality without becoming sensitive to our very real porous-ness to it.

Our being includes all that we discover when we are fully present.

When we understand these two intertwined aspects of our very being, we facilitate a shift in allegiance from the abstractions of ‘known relationship’ towards the presence of ‘felt relationship’.

When we cut ourselves off from felt relationship, we divert our thinking from ‘What Is’ to the endlessly complicated subject of ‘What Might Be’.

We are born into two forms of thinking: one is allied with wholeness and the other with parts. Each is necessary. One is abstract knowing and the other is embodied knowing.

The Inescapable Mystery of the Whole

If reality cannot be objectively known, we should appreciate that it can be felt. It can be experienced. It lives through us.

Wholeness is the primary, inescapable nature of reality.

Wholeness lies utterly beyond the scope of any perspective. The whole lives through each of its parts, yet its parts cannot be known with any finality.

To be desensitized to wholeness is to be desensitized to reality.

Wholeness is not something we can achieve. It doesn’t need achieving. It already, irreducibly, exists.
The idea of achieving wholeness is meaningless, though we might recognize that we can surrender to wholeness. Undertaking that surrender – what Joseph Campbell called the “self-achieved submission” of the mythic hero – carries us into a softening of the divisions that partition us from ourselves.

We can practice softening ourselves into the borderless Present to which we ultimately belong.

The Template We Live By

Wholeness attunes to wholeness. There can be no renewal of our relationship with wholeness, then, without a broad appreciation of the divisions that live within us and how they are reinforced by the Story.

We tend to notice our bodies primarily when they are not cooperating with what we need from them. Or when they ache, or complain.

It’s clear that culture changes the body. Once we can recognize that we have established a divided, controlling, isolated, top-down relationship with the body, we can see how that shapes all the relationships of our culture:

- We relate to the body as though it contains our wholeness within its boundary.

- Living in our heads, we feel separate from the body. And so we similarly feel separate from the body of the world.

- When we live in our heads, we experience them as the center of our intelligence.

- When we segregate the intelligence of the head and privilege it, it deems the body to be without intelligence.

- When we live in our heads, we feel the body as something that is not quite us – it’s something we ‘have’.

- Because we prefer the privacy of the head to the porosity of being, we seek the familiarity of that experience in the worlds we create.

- To value what the head knows and demean what the body knows is implicitly to turn against not just human nature, but nature itself.
• Living up in the head, we feel superior to the body. Eventually that superior position comes to feel safe and familiar.

• Our cultural relationship with the body is a top-down relationship. We sit up in our heads and supervise the body from there.

• Deaf to the intelligence of the body, and viewing it primarily as our means for getting things done, we generally judge the body – the source of our deepest knowing – as either useful to us or as a problem.

Our culture has cast such a shadow over the body’s intelligence that we require help from other cultures to shed a little light on this matter.

Hara defines a realm of consciousness as much as a region of our anatomy.

• It is considered to be the place in the body where you come home to yourself.
• It is where you rest within yourself.
• It is where you come in contact with your deepest understandings.
• It is where you feel your most resonant truths.
• It is where you most keenly feel yourself cradled in the Present.
• It is where you feel most attuned to your life.

CHAPTER TWO – Our Disabled Sense

Renewing the Story

We have to allow the thinking of the head to get over its sense of superiority and need for control and discover the rich wonder that comes with offering its gifts to the living intelligence of the body.

When you think with the whole of your being rather than with a segregated part of the self, you recognize every sensation in the body as a form of intelligence, and you recognize the state of your body’s energy as the state of your mind. There is an identity between them.

Reclaiming your ability to think with the whole of your being is largely a process of undoing.
Embodiment isn’t about quieting the thoughts in our head and noticing the sensations in our body from there – it is about bringing the abstract intelligence in our head into relationship with our body’s intelligence.

We must go beyond the mind’s directive to “notice the breath” and “listen to the body” to foster embodiment, as this actually reinforces the very divide that it’s seeking to overcome.

- **Embodiment is a state in which our entire intelligence is experienced as a coherent unity attuned with the world.**

Embodiment is about feeling the world through our breath, and listening to the world through our body. When we are embodied, any distinction between ‘mind’ and ‘the body’s energy’ becomes meaningless.

The intelligence offers the huge advantage of being able to think about what isn’t present.

But the more time we spend thinking about our thoughts about the world, rather than feeling the reality of the Present Moment, the more we inhabit our private world of abstraction, rather than a realm of being.

‘Independence’ is the very basis of abstraction: separating particular things out from their related context.

When we don’t put our ideas in charge, or no longer need to be directed by them, we can come back to our body and its attunement to What Is. Without abandoning our facility for abstraction, we can learn once again to feel the world with sensitivities that fall far beyond the realm of our five basic senses.

There is a limitles capacity for attunement within the body.

**The Body Is a Resonator**

Proprioception is a sense that tells you where your body is in space.

- **Spatioception tells you where space is in your body.**

We all know the difference we feel when we are able to harbor a wide-open, easy flow of spaciousness inside our bodies, available to the world. This sense of spaciousness allows us to know our bodies with a new awareness.

As we practice undoing the habitual tensions and holding patterns that constrict a sense of spaciousness, our sensitivity to the Present Moment can grow until there is room in our bodies for the world to live.
• **Experientially, the body is like a bell.**

A bell will resonate to the sounds around it – and what makes that humming attunement possible is the spaciousness within it. Its intelligence hums as the energies of the whole, to which it belongs, hums to it.

Once the body’s spaciousness is compromised, it loses its resonance.

• **Spatioception** dissolves the boundary between the self and world, allowing what is outside to live within, allowing the Present Moment to be embodied.

Spatioception has no identifiable sense organ – no mechanism to receive a stimulus and transmit it for interpretation to the head.

**Our Primary Sense**

• **‘Holosapience’ refers to the inner sense that allows us to feel the whole. It is our primary sense because it attunes us to reality.**

When we feel the world only as an arrangement of individual things, and miss the mindful sensitivity holding it all together, we are divided from the world’s reality.

When do we actually think with the whole of our being, or speak from the whole of our being, or feel a question with the whole of our being?

Every living thing is in the midst of a dance of accommodation, integrating the stresses and enjoyments of the environment as it seeks to fulfill the encoded promise of its inheritance.

Every wild part of nature is actively helping the whole to harmonize, weaving the wholeness of the world into newness.

When we can feel our belonging to the wholeness of the world, we are better able to serve it by continually responding to it.

• **Our deepest nature yearns to reach beyond the fragmentation we feel in our lives, and seeks to surrender into the borderless reality of wholeness.**

The journey towards wholeness is counter-cultural, though, and will necessitate some concerted effort to swim against the tide.

The nature of wholeness is that it excludes nothing – and the purpose of a boundary is to explicitly exclude.
Ensemble – Exchange - Emerge

Our sense of wholeness is inseparable from our relationships with friends, family and community. It depends on all the transactions in which we participate, consciously and otherwise.

Radical Wholeness

Our personal wholeness is indivisible from all our felt relationships with the world around us. There can be no sense of wholeness without the Present Moment, which is the limitless cradle of being in which wholeness itself rests.

- If we take the counter-cultural journey of disclaiming the fantasy of independence, and growing into a remembrance of your deeper reality, the bearing of our entire life with re-orient itself.

Wholeness is not something that we can achieve. We can’t determine what it looks like, or where it might take us.

Wholeness is not a destination or a goal – it is a beginning that can only be initiated with a surrender to the Present Moment, and a sensitivity to what is asking of us in the here and now.

A surrender into wholeness is a letting go into the ceaseless creativity of the Present Moment. It invariably takes you someplace new.

A surrender into wholeness is an invitation into the rich paradox of reality – fully active and fully at rest; fully yourself and beyond yourself; experience of grace without possessing it; grounded in security while feeling somewhat at risk. We will feel the world with a striking intimacy that is at the same time non-personal.

What we most deeply crave are qualities that can never belong to us and yet are always found in the Present Moment – spaciousness, the joy of being, connectedness.

Radical Attunement

- Our sense of personal wholeness is found in our ability to attune to the Present Moment.

- The essential purpose of inner work is to discover and remove the obstructions that desensitize us to the wholeness around and within us.
Our personal wholeness is felt by feeling the wholeness of the Present Moment. This view of wholeness is radical – rooted in and alive to the world around us. Living with an inability to feel wholeness leaves us fundamentally ill equipped to know reality.

Silent friend of many distances, feel how your breath enlarges all of space. Let your presence ring out like a bell into the night. What feeds upon your face grows mighty from the nourishment thus offered. Move through transformation, out and in. What is the deepest loss that you have suffered? If drinking is bitter, change yourself to wine.

In this immeasurable darkness, be the power that rounds your senses in their magic ring, the sense of their mysterious encounter.

And if the earthly no longer knows your name, whisper to the silent earth: I'm flowing. To the flashing water say: I am.

- Rilke