

Book Review

What a Body Knows: Finding Wisdom and Desire

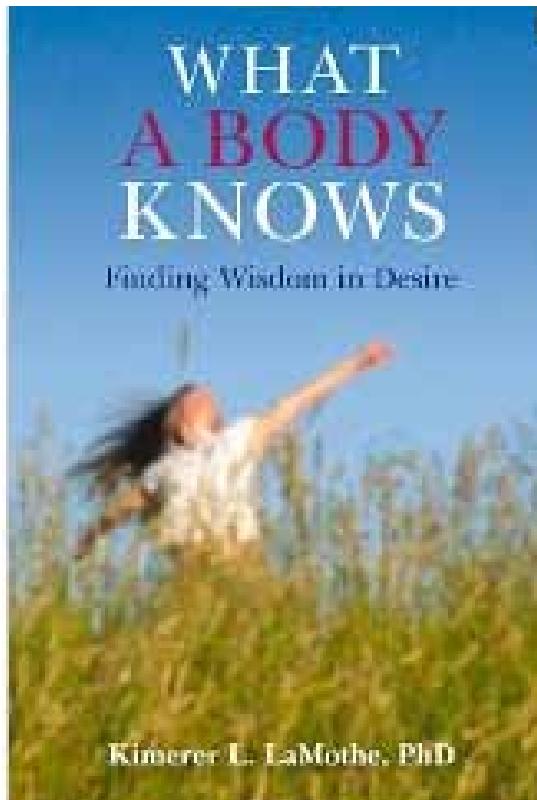
By Kimerer LaMothe, PhD

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I love it when people send me books that they have written. Not only do I get a free book, but I enjoy the connection that unfolds because of that gift. Kimerer LaMothe writes a blog for the Psychology Today magazine web site (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/what-body-knows>) using the same title as the one for her book. She has an impressive background, which you can find on the home page for her blog, along with interesting links and facts about herself. I also write a blog on the same web site called Body Sense (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/body-sense>). I wish I could say that I discovered Kimerer's work by searching the Psychology Today website for fellow bloggers with a similar interest, but the fact is that she found me first. I'll share with you the email that she sent to me.

Dear Alan,

Hello! I have just come across some of your PT blogs and thought I'd get in touch.

I am a fellow PT blogger, a dancer, philosopher, and scholar of religion, who is concerned with many of the same issues you are. My overall aim is to communicate

why movement matters. For me it has to do with the kind of sensory awareness that movement practices allow us to cultivate of our bodily selves as themselves in movement.

I have a PhD from Harvard (Theology in the Modern West), where I also taught and worked for seven years. Then five years ago my family and I followed a dream to move out to the country and create a place for making art and ideas in closer relationship to the natural world. After moving, I wrote my third book, and the first for a general audience, *What a Body Knows: Finding Wisdom in Desire* (2009). It provides the basis for my PT blog. The book introduces a

philosophy of bodily becoming that privileges movement as the source and telos of human life. It does so while staying close to the ground of our bodily experience--focusing on our desires for food, sex, and spirit--and illustrating the benefits of shifting away from a mind over body sense of ourselves.

Thanks so much for taking the time to read this message!

Kimerer

Kimerer offered to send me a copy of her book, which I gratefully accepted. In addition to my Rosen practice and teaching, I have been an academic scholar and scientist for 40 years. Working at a University was a major part of my career identity and I am only now, at age 66, ready to let that go and move into my own dreams of being with and moving in nature and finding fulfillment in the power of body awareness via Rosen Method and other embodied practices.

So, I was intrigued that someone who was younger than I would give up the promise of an academic career in order to cultivate her embodied relationship to nature, family, and self. Some quotes from the book illustrate Kimerer's perspective on the world.

"We can cultivate a *sensory awareness of our bodies as the movement that is making us*. When we do, we learn to pay attention to what we are sensing – whether boundless hunger, chronic cravings, or sinking depression – and welcome what we are sensing as vital information about how to move in ways that will not recreate those same feelings of discomfort" (pp. 3-4).

"When we forget to breathe, we forget to feel . . . When we breathe we sense. When we sense we know" (p. 5).

"If we are touched with care and tenderness, empathy and tact, we may be more likely, as we grow, to remain open to what we feel. We may be more inclined to cultivate our sensory awareness as a guide to our health and well being" (p. 146).

"A life enabling touch brings our senses to life. It awakens us to a sense of our bodily selves in time and space, with a wonder at who we are and how we are becoming" (p. 147).

The idea of *movement that is making us* is central to the wisdom of this book. We come alive when we move in the world with embodied self-awareness; we come alive by awakening our desires and letting them be felt and expressed in ways that are resonant with ourselves, our health, with nature, and with people and all living beings. Kimerer devotes major sections of the book to the everyday practices -- eating, sexuality, and spirituality -- showing that we can find enlightenment and fulfillment in the ordinary by coming into the present moment with our total sensory-emotional self, the good parts and the bad parts.

Early in the book, before getting into these main topics, Kimerer talks about going for a walk in nature and how it can create a profound shift in how we experience ourselves. Of what does this shift consist?

"For one, it involves opening our *sensory awareness*. The walk did not just give me an idea *about myself*, it enabled a *lived experience of myself*, of my bodily immersion in this particular

time and place. It was not an awareness that I have a body or that I live inside a body, but that I am a body, actively alive in my senses, ever engaged in the world" (pp. 14-15).

I like this book because it brings the kinds of things we cultivate in Rosen Method, both the Rosen Bodywork and in Rosen Movement, into everyday life. It is not just about being aware of our bodies from the inside, but also about moving our bodies from the inside out.

If a client in my bodywork practice is coming into a newfound awareness of the way in which they lose their body awareness during their encounters with the human and nonhuman world, I may sometimes suggest ways for them to cultivate their attention to themselves. If, to take one example, their breath stops when talking about communicating with a spouse around a particular issue, I might suggest something like: "Next time you two talk about this, notice when you are holding your breath. Notice when this happens and what you are feeling." I don't think of this as a form of giving advice. I'm not telling the person what to say or do in relation to their spouse, but rather reminding them to pay attention to their body. As Marion reminded us, the body tells the truth and I trust that the client's awareness will bring about the "right" response for them in that moment.

I feel that part of my role as a Rosen practitioner is to teach people about their experiential anatomy and about ways of staying in touch with their bodies. For most people, Rosen practitioners and movement teachers can just be the midwives of the big and little birthings of embodied self-awareness that occur under our hands and in movement classes: nothing more needs to be done.

In my experience, however, some clients seem to need more guidance than others, particularly when new, unfamiliar, and even scary sensations of their own living body come into their awareness. They may need this kind of simple reminder (pay attention to this particular part of yourself) to regulate and stabilize their embodied self-awareness during encounters outside the safety of the Rosen session. *What a Body Knows* is a perfect book to recommend to certain clients. It contains gentle and easily understood wisdom about how to live and move more fully as the body that we are, that we have become, and that we will become as we continue the process of learning to pay attention to ourselves.