



## A REVOLUTION IN HEALING

**H**uman beings are losing their feelings. I know at first hand that people today cannot tell where in their bodies they experience the core emotions of human existence. The body awareness of feeling—the feeling of emotion—is missing. And in the absence of this skill a host of ills comes into being.

For over twenty years Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks have been helping human beings to feel, and to feel better. They are so gifted at this process that they are widely known as the therapists' therapists. Now they have written a wonderful book—an essential book—about their approach to healing. I consider *At the Speed of Life* a turning point in the profession: It lays the foundation for where I believe psychotherapy needs to go in the twenty-first century. It represents the first leap forward in therapy in many, many years.

There is no question that such a leap forward is deeply needed. As a neurologist specializing in headache and pain, I am witness to the suffering that occurs when people lose their feelings. Week in and week out, patients come to me with bewildering and frightening sensations in their bodies. To discover how to help them, I must ask them not only about the pain but

about the other sensations that precede and surround the pain. People find this process very difficult. Many have so lost touch with their bodies that pain is the only sensation they recognize.

My patients are afraid they have a tumor or multiple sclerosis. They are frustrated with how little their medications have helped, or with side effects or risks of addiction. They are saddened by the loss of life's satisfaction. But they speak of these emotions vaguely, with suspicion and outright distaste. They suspect that I will tell them that these emotions are only in their minds. They have become so alienated from themselves that they do not consider their feelings real or valid.

Fortunately, feelings can be rediscovered. When they are, human beings get healthier, both mentally and physically. The great value of Gay and Kathlyn's book is that they show us exactly how to do this. With boundless care and encouragement, they walk us step by step through the process of becoming reacquainted with our bodies. They have invented a new term, *presencing*, to make the old but forgotten act of feeling new for us again.

### WHY HAVE WE LOST TOUCH WITH OUR BODIES?

To understand the importance of this book requires an understanding of the importance of feelings in the history of healing. In modern times many forces—social, cultural, even scientific—have shifted our attention away from the feelings that live in our bodies. Science has typically examined only those things that are objective, publicly observable, measurable, and quantifiable. Thoughts, feelings, and sensations have been relegated to the backseat because they are subjective and hard to measure. In fact, many scientists today would say that feelings do not exist.

In psychology, feelings have been particularly ignored. While one would think that psychology would be the study of thoughts and feelings, the field abandoned these subjects in the late nineteenth century. For more than half a century only behavior—that which could be observed and measured—was the major focus of psychology. In the latter part of the twentieth century, cognitive theories and therapies reappeared and are attempting to restore thinking to its rightful place in psychology.

Even psychologists who study emotions have ignored the feeling component—how human beings experience those emotions in their bodies. A major split occurred in the mid-1920s when the famous Harvard physiologist Walter Cannon rejected the James-Lange theory of emotions, described in all basic psychology texts. The James-Lange theory held that sensations from our muscles and our viscera (internal organs) are the source of our emotions. Cannon rejected this view and sought to confirm his view with a famous experiment. He injected adrenaline into the veins of a number of Harvard undergraduates and asked them if they felt anything. The students described various sensations but did not mention any specific emotions like fear or anger. According to Cannon, this proved that body sensations are not the source of emotions. He invented the famous phrase *fight or flight* to mean that the body experiences only a general arousal that is the same whether we are fighting or fleeing. Modern theorists have largely sided with Cannon, ignoring the feeling component of emotion in favor of a focus on behavior and cognitions.

There are exceptions, of course. In the 1960s the humanistic psychology revolution of Carl Rogers, Fritz Perls, Abraham Maslow, and others popularized the notions of getting in touch with and expressing feelings. The purpose of therapy, they thought, was to free people from their social taboos so that authentic underlying feelings could emerge. These theorists also clarified a key distinction between feeling and thinking. They would point out that saying "I feel that . . ." is often equivalent to saying "I think that . . ." An important therapeutic maneuver became to shift the client's focus from beliefs to feelings. If people said that their bosses were unfair, for example, the therapist would ask clients to focus on how that unfairness made them feel. These therapists were inclined in the right direction but were guilty of a major oversight. They thought that their clients knew how they felt but were simply too socially conditioned to acknowledge those feelings. They assumed that their clients needed only support and encouragement to express their feelings. This assumes too much: You cannot express a feeling if you do not know you are having it.

We physicians have contributed to the problem in a myriad of ways. Our general tendency is to look for a disease to explain every dysfunction. We look for infection, tumor, or inherited chemical abnormality. If we cannot

find one of these, we all too often dismiss it as a nervous condition or blame it on that current catch-all, stress. To the extent that feelings are acknowledged at all, they are often considered *symptoms* of a disease. Thus, feeling depressed becomes a symptom of a disease caused by inherited abnormalities of brain chemistry. When patients come in with symptoms of tachycardia, sweating and tremor, we order extensive tests looking for hormone or metabolic disease. We run EKGs and treadmill tests looking for heart disease. If all these tests are negative, we raise the possibility that the person is suffering from the anxiety disease. The physician is most unlikely to consider that the patient's symptom is actually a feeling. It usually does not occur to us to inquire about the circumstances—such as giving a speech—that trigger the feelings.

While psychology and medicine have been ignoring feelings, society has done so as well. Feelings represent our animal side, to be opposed and resisted by reason. As a result, we do not teach our children much of value about feelings. In fact, the only feelings that are formally taught are bladder pressure and urge to defecate. Every child is carefully taught to recognize the sensation of a full bladder and what to do about it. We call it toilet training, but this is a misnomer: No child has difficulty knowing where the toilet is or what it is for. The problem is teaching them when to use it. The key to successful toilet training is teaching the child to recognize an internal sensation. Unfortunately we do not teach our children how to feel and deal with any of the other crucial human feelings. In fact, we often teach them the opposite.

### HOW DO WE GET OUR FEELINGS BACK?

Until recently there have been no systematic methods of therapy that specifically train us to regain our feelings, to learn again how to pay attention to visceral sensations. At our clinic in La Jolla we have worked with more than five thousand headache and pain patients over the past ten years. The backbone of our treatment procedures is to teach these patients how to feel again. As they learn to discriminate feelings such as anger and fear, they are able to reawaken to lives without drugs and without pain. Our

staff, along with graduate students at University of California at San Diego, is also engaged in a line of research that is mapping out scientifically the unfamiliar world of feelings. Our intention is to place feelings squarely in the center of mainstream medicine.

Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks are pioneers in this new territory. At their institute in Colorado Springs they are quietly doing some of the most innovative work in the field of psychology. Their two central interests are the realms of close relationships and body-centered psychotherapy. They have gained the reputation of being on the leading edge of both fields. Now they have trained enough professionals that their work is entering the mainstream. This news could not be better for all of us. *At the Speed of Life* is the first book to describe in detail how to employ the body and its feelings as a path of healing and a means of psychospiritual growth. Gay and Kathlyn make it fun, too. That is their special gift.

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