



Hiding In: Embodied Spirituality Embedded in the Body

By Rick Miller

The pursuit of happiness: fortunately gay men can learn to find happiness by looking within rather than outside . . . with a little work.

There is a special place inside the body—a deep and peaceful place—that is accessible through any one of a number of modalities, including relaxation, mindfulness or hypnosis. Years ago I immersed myself in experiential techniques incorporating mindfulness, mind-body work, and meditation. I wanted to add a layer to my psychotherapy practice in order to reach my clients in new ways. It seemed to me that experience, more than talk, could be key to actually shifting self-deprecating perspectives and negative life patterns. I was amazed to see how bringing these techniques into therapy transformed the experience for many of my clients rather quickly: they moved from anxiety and depression into a space of calm and confidence. Happiness and comfort now came easily and readily to clients who could not previously access them. The experience inside the body and mind became unified, giving rise to a new, fresh sense of aliveness.

This is especially relevant to the gay community, as it is common for gay men to seek external validation both through materialism and outside judgment. The initial

rush of gaining such validation is a fleeting experience, and older, disquieting or hollow feelings will likely return faster than wanted. And, of course, the despair caused by not receiving external validation is painful as well.

Gay men have often made a habit— for the sake of survival—of becoming masters at distancing from pleasure and also from further pain. Growing up we did not feel masculine. In our families, schools, neighborhoods and religious circles, we were taught how to be a guy, not a gay guy, but a “real” guy. Most of us felt as though we didn’t pass for real guys.

For gay boys, it is perfectly normal to feel different from other kids. After all, we often are drawn to “different” activities from other boys. We may be interested in aesthetic pursuits rather than typically “masculine” ones and enjoy the company of female friends rather than “hanging with guys.” Many gay boys and teens were made fun of and bullied as a regular part of their upbringing. The word “faggot” carries a painful sting as tensions between the internal and external

world were hard to bear. Shame is usually our biggest secret, even into adulthood.

What are the implications of this inside our bodies? We split off parts of ourselves in an attempt to fit in. Unlike others, we are a minority in our own families and communities thereby emphasizing the mask of secrecy. Concealing parts of who we are from the world, even from ourselves sometimes, is what I call “hiding in,” the opposite of hiding out, taking shelter inside a fortified secret place. We develop a protective shield that becomes impenetrable, and most of us continue to carry this shell long after childhood. The trauma of being gay in an uncomprehending world is something we don’t get over and decades later we are still protecting and guarding ourselves. Frequently it isn’t even in our awareness as adults. We simply feel stuck or oppressed or anxious.

My hypothesis regarding resolution of these tensions comes from having had a deep experience of inner alignment while experiencing hypnosis, including sensory experiences based on a developing awareness that the body can be a friend. This is a completely new awareness for many gay men: the body that once betrayed and endangered the individual becomes a sphere of serenity and enjoyment.

Through sensory work, we can begin to experience a rejuvenation and delight where two things happen simultaneously: *undoing* the old, internalized way of being, and more important, *redoing*, where on a deeper level, an internal sense of aliveness is now felt. As

this happens, space opens up for the real self to emerge — whole, authentic, and confident. Rather than to meld into a socially expected role with central parts hidden, this whole self can be experienced as open and without fear.

These new experiences constitute a movement I refer to as “unwrapped,” a movement through which we come to rely on our entire self. The reflex of automatic compartmentalization falls away as a greater ease with self and others takes root. The expansion of internal resources allows for a

sense of centeredness that is no longer dependent on the reflection of external perspectives. We may now cross the bridge to being our true selves. An entirely fresh landscape lies ahead along with a new feeling of aliveness inside.

This experience, which is embedded in the body, is indeed spiritual. It shifts us from isolation and feeling stifled to deep connection

and feeling free. You choose the modality that works best for you, whether mindfulness, yoga, relaxation, or any kind of hypnotic experience, including physical exercise, so that an exhilarating experience of new possibility can take root.

As a psychotherapist who utilizes hypnosis with gay men, I observe how their receptiveness to sensory modalities provides an internal connection that is empowering and creates contentment. It is always exciting to witness as the client’s body relaxes and tension releases. It’s as though the client is returning home, where he can sit back and allow himself to feel and to be seen, landed in the present. This sense of deep relief is animated in different ways: the client smiles

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or tears roll gently down his cheek, he laughs or simply breathes uninterrupted breaths through his whole body. Frequently they verbalize how they have never experienced anything quite as powerful, confirming again and again the significance of this approach. Clients are surprised by their enjoyment of the process and by the ways in which it affects their feelings outside the therapy room. I too was surprised at first, but I have gotten used to miracles!

Take Tim as an example: he had frequently felt depressed and unable to trust his own inner resources. With his permission, I began the session with a relaxation exercise. He became increasingly aware of his breathing, the sounds in the room, and the ways in which his body was able to enjoy comfort. The goal was for him to be able to reconnect to his inner strength.

I reminded him that he already possessed exactly what he needed to make a practice of self-care and access positive resources. Tears streamed down his face as he took in this new feeling.

I asked Tim to recall a time when he felt a sense of happiness inside and the scene that came to his mind was driving in his car on a beautiful day, as Beyoncé played on the radio. He described this memory vividly and was surprised by the feeling of lightness that came over him—a sensation he had not felt in weeks. He was grinning from ear-to-ear, a noticeable departure from the sad wilted expression he usually had.

When he came back from this sensory memory and opened his eyes, he looked right at me and joyously commented: “You handed the baton back to me for self-care and I took it. It feels great, I have arrived!”

Imagination is a powerful tool. With this simple introduction to guided relaxation and calling forth his own rich imagistic vocabulary, Tim had already begun to reclaim his ability to transform sadness into comfort.

Mindfulness and other somatic approaches are powerful tools for interrupting habitual feelings of disappointment. Aligning the body-mind as a place of comfort that is evoked, nurtured and welcomed is the first step. With practice, such sensory awareness can further offer an evolving sense of home that is embedded within.

Interested in reading more? Be sure to visit Rick’s blog: [Unwrapped Mind Body Wisdom and the Modern Gay Man](#)

You are also invited to check him out on [Facebook](#)

Rick Miller is a clinical social worker in private practice in Boston and on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, USA. (www.rickmiller.biz). He has served on national and international faculty for The International Society of Hypnosis, The Milton Erickson Foundation of South Africa, The Brief Therapy Conference, The Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, The American Society of Clinical Hypnosis, and The American Group Psychotherapy Association. He has been a guest lecturer at The University of Johannesburg Department of Psychology, Johannesburg, South Africa. The curriculum Rick developed (hypnotherapy with gay men including customized scripts) is used at The Milton Erickson Institute of Mexico City, Mexico, and National Autonomous University of Mexico, also in Mexico City. He is the author of *Unwrapped: Integrative Therapy With Gay Men . . . the Gift of Presence* (Zeig, Tucker & Theisen, Publishers, 2014). He is also a contributing author to *For Couples: Ten Commandments For Every Aspect Of Your Relationship Journey* (Zeig, Tucker & Theisen publishers, 2012).

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