

Your body will tell you

Our bodies know before our minds when something in our lives is wearing us down.

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The other day I visited a retreat center. I had a loose idea of what I would do while I was there, but for the most part felt content to just let the time happen and enjoy being in a place set aside for reflection and rest.

After a while I visited the chapel, which has a simple modern aesthetic including an altar, podium, and cushioned wood chairs lined in rows.

I sat in a chair to allow myself time to settle into the space. I observed my surroundings, I listened, I took deep breaths. Eventually, I closed my eyes.

And then I had a strong urge to lie down on the floor.

I can best describe this urge in terms of how imagining lying on the floor caused me to feel. It seemed like it would be so relaxing, much more so than sitting would be. If I could just sink down onto my back ... well, that would be the best thing I could do.

So I did. The above picture was my view, at least when my eyes were open. And sure enough, my physical urge turned out to be the correct one. It felt natural to be in that position, much more so than if I'd forced myself to remain in the chair. I'd needed to take a position of rest, and my body sent me strong signals to get me to pay attention.

In her book [*Finding Your Own North Star*](#), Martha Beck talks extensively about how our bodies send us clues about what we really want and need to be healthy and whole. We have received so many messages to 1) ignore our feelings in favor of our rational abilities and 2) to do what would get us the greatest positive social feedback.

So when we have any inklings to the contrary, we tend to downplay them as much as possible. This includes physical reactions or impulses.

Think of when you've been in uncomfortable situations and you start to feel unease in your stomach. Or times when you enter the building to go to your job you don't like and you feel a tightness in your shoulders. Or a particular person you don't get along with starts talking to you and your muscles tense up.

Perhaps our first reaction is to not listen. After all, we've been socialized to not react in ways that would embarrass ourselves, or to keep powering through hard times at work, or to be polite no matter how repulsive we find someone to be.

These are all times when our body is telling us something; pointing us in a different direction, telling us that the path we're on or the situation as it currently stands is not healthy for us.

Sometimes it's as simple as an impulse to lie down on the floor.

If there had been other people in the chapel that day, I might not have listened to what my body wanted. I would have remained in my seat to seem socially proper and not risk upsetting anyone else in the room. But I would have been ignoring what I really needed.

Our bodies know when something in our lives isn't working, or is dangerous, or is wearing us down. They know before our minds and felt social obligations will allow us to understand or act. They will let us know when something needs to change, whether it's our immediate surroundings or some larger part of our lives that is keeping us from living into our true core identity.

When we need certain things, our bodies will tell us. What difference would it make if we let ourselves listen? What new path could we discover?

Originally posted at [Nelson's blog](#)