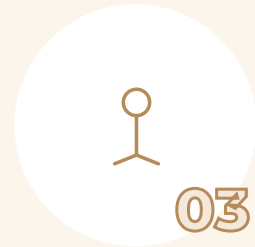


◆ Theory library • Framework 03 / 06

The Art of Coming Back to Ourselves

Somatics, Embodiment, and the Forgotten Wisdom of the Body

12 min read



We have become experts at thinking about our lives.

We analyse our emotions, reflect on our relationships, consume endless information about personal growth, and search for ways to become healthier, happier, and more fulfilled. We want to understand ourselves, make better decisions, and find meaning in what we do.

And yet, despite all this knowledge, something often feels missing.

We can understand why we are stressed without knowing how to slow down. We can recognise our emotional patterns and still find ourselves repeating them. We can spend years trying to figure out what we need while remaining disconnected from the very experience that might help us recognise it.

Perhaps the problem is not that we lack understanding. Perhaps we have become so accustomed to approaching life through our minds that we have forgotten another way of knowing: through the body.

This is where two increasingly popular concepts enter the conversation: somatics and embodiment. Beyond their presence in wellness, psychology, and personal development, they invite us to reconsider a fundamental question: what happens when we spend so much time thinking about life that we have less time to actually feel it?

Somatics: Learning to Listen to the Body

The word *somatic* comes from the Greek *soma*, meaning body. In contemporary approaches to movement, psychology, and well-being, somatics often refers to the body as we experience it from within.

There is a difference between observing our bodies from the outside and experiencing them from the inside.

We can evaluate our appearance, measure our physical performance, and think about how our bodies should look. We can also notice the rhythm of our breathing, the tension in our shoulders, the feeling of our feet touching the ground, or the warmth that spreads through us when we feel connected to someone.

The first perspective treats the body as something to observe. The second invites us to experience the body as the place from which we live.

Somatic practices explore this internal experience through movement, breathing, sensory awareness, and attention to physical sensations. Rather than focusing exclusively on what we think or how we interpret an experience, they invite us to notice what is happening in the body itself.

For example, when we feel anxious, we might pause to notice whether our breathing has changed, our jaw has tightened, or our body feels restless. We do not need to interpret every sensation or assume it reveals a hidden truth. Simply noticing can help us become more familiar with our experience.

The body becomes another source of information, alongside our thoughts, emotions, and memories.

Embodiment: The Difference Between Being Alive and Feeling Alive

If somatics invites us to pay attention to bodily experience, embodiment takes the idea further.

Embodiment describes how our bodily existence shapes the way we perceive, think, feel, act, and relate to the world. It recognises that we do not experience life through the mind alone.

We are always in our bodies, but we are not always attentive to the experience of being there.

We can walk beside the sea while mentally rehearsing a difficult conversation. We can share a meal without tasting it, or spend an evening with friends while worrying about tomorrow. We are physically present, but our attention is somewhere else.

Embodiment is the gradual return of that attention.

It is the difference between thinking about a walk and feeling the rhythm of our steps. Between knowing that we are tired and allowing ourselves to rest. Between analysing an emotion and making space to experience it without immediately needing to explain it away.

It is also about pleasure, vitality, and connection: feeling the warmth of sunlight on our skin, allowing ourselves to be moved by music, or noticing the sense of ease that comes from being with someone we trust.

Embodiment is not about escaping the mind. It is about allowing ourselves to experience life through the whole of who we are.

Why Are We Rediscovering the Body Now?

Our growing interest in somatics and embodiment reflects something about the way many of us live today.

We inhabit a culture that rewards productivity, speed, constant availability, and intellectual performance. We are encouraged to optimise our time, improve our habits, and work continuously towards a better version of ourselves. Even self-care can become another task on an endless list.

Digital technology adds to this experience. Our attention moves between screens, notifications, conversations, and an almost continuous stream of information. We are frequently invited to react to something outside ourselves before we have had the chance to notice what is happening within.

Gradually, we can become more accustomed to evaluating our experiences than actually inhabiting them.

We may understand the importance of rest without knowing how to stop. We may learn about emotional awareness without noticing what we feel in the moment. We can become so occupied with improving our lives that we forget to experience them.

This helps explain why approaches that emphasise bodily awareness have become so appealing. They offer an alternative to endless analysis and self-improvement, inviting us to pay attention to what is already happening.

There is also growing recognition that psychological and physical experiences are deeply interconnected. Stress, for example, can involve changes in breathing, muscle tension, attention, and sleep. Movement, rest, social connection, and sensory experiences can influence how we feel and think.

Somatics is part of this broader interest in the relationship between mind and body, although the scientific evidence varies across different practices and therapeutic methods.

Perhaps the deeper appeal lies in a simple realisation: we can understand ourselves intellectually and still feel disconnected from ourselves.

The body offers another place to begin.

Learning to Live More in the Body

Living more in the body does not require a radical lifestyle change or a complicated daily routine. It begins with small moments of attention.

We can feel our feet touching the floor before starting the day, notice our breathing while waiting for the kettle to boil, or walk without listening to anything for a few minutes. We can eat a meal without looking at a screen and pay attention to its taste, texture, and temperature.

These actions may seem insignificant, but they invite us to shift from thinking about life to participating in it.

Movement can also become a way of reconnecting. Walking, dancing, swimming, stretching, or practising yoga can help us notice our physical sensations, energy, and emotions. Rather than focusing exclusively on performance or appearance, we can occasionally ask ourselves: *How does this feel? What do I notice? What do I need?*

Embodiment also means learning to recognise our limits. We might notice fatigue before it becomes exhaustion, tension when we repeatedly agree to things we do not want to do, or restlessness when we finally allow ourselves to slow down.

Our bodily sensations do not always tell us exactly what to do. Anxiety does not necessarily mean that something is wrong, and comfort does not automatically mean that a choice is right. But bodily awareness can offer valuable information alongside reflection and conscious reasoning.

We can also learn to notice the physical dimensions of our emotions. Sadness, excitement, anger, and fear may be accompanied by changes in breathing, muscular tension, or energy, although these experiences differ from person to person.

The intention is not to control every sensation or analyse every feeling. It is to become more familiar with our internal experience and respond to it with greater awareness.

◆ A NOTE OF CARE

Importantly, turning attention inward is not comfortable for everyone. People who experience panic or trauma-related distress may find some body-focused exercises overwhelming. Starting with the external environment or seeking guidance from a qualified professional can be more appropriate.

The goal is not to force ourselves to feel everything. It is to develop a relationship with our experience that feels more attentive, flexible, and compassionate.

The Body as a Resource for Well-Being

Well-being is often understood as the absence of stress, anxiety, or discomfort. But a fuller understanding also includes our capacity to experience pleasure, respond to our needs, maintain meaningful relationships, and feel engaged with life.

Embodiment can contribute to this broader picture in several ways.

- ◆ **Emotional awareness.** Noticing bodily sensations can help us recognise emotions and patterns that might otherwise go unnoticed. This awareness may create more space between an experience and our response, allowing us to pause and choose how to proceed.

- ◆ **Stress management.** Gentle movement, comfortable breathing, and attention to the present may help some people manage everyday stress. Becoming more aware of our physical responses can also help us recognise when we need rest, support, or a change in circumstances.
- ◆ **A healthier relationship with ourselves.** When we relate to our bodies mainly through appearance, comparison, or performance, we can lose sight of everything they make possible. Embodiment invites us to value our bodies not only for how they look, but also for their capacity to move, sense, connect, and experience pleasure.
- ◆ **Connection and vitality.** Being present in our bodies can help us appreciate ordinary experiences that might otherwise pass unnoticed: a meaningful conversation, a walk outdoors, music, a shared meal, or a moment of stillness.

These practices are not universal solutions for psychological difficulties, nor can bodily awareness replace professional care when it is needed. But they can form part of a broader approach to well-being that includes physical health, emotional awareness, relationships, and the environments in which we live.

Perhaps one of the most important shifts is recognising that well-being is not only about reducing discomfort. It is also about increasing our capacity to experience life.

Coming Back Is Not Another Self-Improvement Project

There is a paradox in the growing popularity of embodiment: an idea that invites us to stop striving can easily become another thing to strive for.

We can start monitoring our sensations, judging how present we are, or feeling that we are failing because we cannot relax. We can turn embodiment into another routine that promises to make us more productive, balanced, or emotionally intelligent.

But the point is not to become perfectly connected to our bodies. It is not to feel calm all the time, eliminate discomfort, or interpret every sensation correctly.

Our bodies change. Our attention wanders. Some days we feel energised, and other days we feel tired or disconnected. There are experiences we cannot immediately understand and emotions that do not disappear simply because we acknowledge them.

Embodiment is an ongoing relationship, not a permanent state of perfect presence.

It means noticing when we have become disconnected and gently returning when we can. It means recognising that we are human beings, not projects that require continuous improvement.

And perhaps this is where somatics and embodiment offer something particularly valuable in a culture that constantly asks us to do more: the possibility of discovering that well-being does not always come from adding something to our lives.

Sometimes, it comes from becoming more attentive to what is already there.

The Art of Coming Back to Ourselves

Perhaps our growing interest in somatics and embodiment reflects a deeper longing: to feel less fragmented, more connected to ourselves, and more present in the lives we are living.

We want to understand our emotions, but we also want to feel them. We want to make good decisions, but we also want to recognise our needs. We want to become healthier and happier, but we do not want life to become an endless project of self-improvement.

The body offers no instant solution to these desires. It cannot remove every difficulty or tell us exactly how to live. But it can become an important part of how we understand ourselves and navigate the world.

We can learn to notice when we are tired, when we feel connected, when we need movement, and when we need stillness. We can allow pleasure to matter. We can become curious about our emotions without being ruled by them.

We can remember that being human involves more than thinking, planning, and doing. It also involves sensing, moving, resting, breathing, relating, and feeling.

Perhaps coming back to the body is ultimately about coming back to the present — to the life that is happening while we are busy thinking about the life we should be living.

Not perfectly. Not all at once. But one moment of attention at a time.

Because sometimes, the way forward is not to understand ourselves a little more.

It is to become a little more present to the selves we already are.



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