

# THE MIND BODY CODE

How to Change the Beliefs  
that Limit Your Health,  
Longevity, and Success

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sounds true  
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# The Mindbody Code

**B**iocognition confirms what you may have already intuitively suspected is a universal truth: your cultural beliefs can make you ill and rob you of your joy. You may simply have lacked the scientific evidence or social support you needed in order to know this for sure. If you have been emotionally wounded by your travels through life, beleaguered by the thieves of love, the biocognitive lessons in this book are your portal to a new journey, one that will empower you to realize your personal greatness.

That the mind affects the body has been well established. The new science of biocognition also recognizes the *cultural* components that affect the mind. Based on the latest scientific studies of healthy brains, healthy longevity, and a strong sense of self-worth, biocognition debunks some very persistent myths: that we are victims of our genetics; that *aging* is an inevitable process of deterioration; and that the life sciences can simply choose to ignore the influence of culture on human health and well-being.

The lessons I will share with you throughout this book did not come easily to me. As a clinical neuropsychologist, I was trained in several very unhelpful practices. I was taught to identify pathology; to confirm a model that interprets life as a constant struggle to maintain health and battle illness; and to view with disdain any theory about mind and body that cannot be measured with established tools. I was trained in a world where gerontologists study the pathology of aging rather than the *wellness* of growing older, and where the pharmaceutical industry entices

health care providers to believe the delusion that we are mere biochemical beings and the hapless victims of our genes.

With the language of biocognition, I describe a very different world.

## BRINGING UNITY TO DIVERGENT SYSTEMS

With few exceptions, the interdisciplinary field of psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) investigates how thoughts and emotions affect the nervous, immune, and endocrine systems—as if we existed in a laboratory void of cultural context. Medical anthropology principally looks at how cultures conceptualize illness, as if we functioned in a biological void. And most theologies preach divinity with little concern for the transient body that houses our eternal spirit. These disjointed approaches to understanding who we are and what we do with life are necessary, but none is sufficient to embrace the totality that makes us greater than our parts.

Biocognitive theory proposes a paradigm in which consciousness develops in a cultural context that has greater impact on our wellness than do our genes. The good news from the science of wellness, as well as from contemplative studies, is that we can learn much from the *outliers* who defy conventional parameters of mind, body, and spirit. Outliers are those people who deviate from the norms of human behavior established through mechanistic rules. The emerging fields of integrative medicine, embodied anthropology, *cultural neuroscience*, and contemplative psychology are providing persuasive evidence of our power to heal and embrace joy—*sustainable* joy—while confirming that reaching our greatest potential is not “too good to be true.”

On our pioneering biocognitive journey toward wellness, we will not fall victim to the usual New Age promises of finding happiness simply by sending good intentions to the universe. Instead, I propose that we achieve what we wish at a speed determined by our cultural beliefs and by the strength of the actions we take that confirm our intrinsic worthiness. In fact, we should deemphasize our quest for a happiness that is dependent on external circumstances, and instead redirect our commitments to an *internal* joy that cannot be plucked from our grasp by the vicissitudes of life.

## PARADIGM SHIFT

As we enter this exciting, uncharted territory together, let's examine what usually happens when we are confronted with new information that could challenge our beliefs. In his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn tells us that science does not progress by simply adding new data to its existing theories. Instead, when new evidence challenges an existing theory, science discards what can no longer be supported and reconstructs the theory to be consistent with the new evidence. Kuhn coined the term *paradigm shift* to illustrate the robust change that takes place under these circumstances. But he also cautioned that such shifts do not happen without resistance. As the mindbody code entails a paradigm shift, it is worth taking a moment to explore this.

When a new theory is formed to accommodate information that contradicts an old theory, first there is disdain—the new theory and its proponents are met with scorn. This is followed by doubt about the new theory's validity. Finally, when the old theory can no longer be defended, the paradigm shifts into acceptance of the new evidence.

For example, when Galileo, who is considered the father of modern science, was able to confirm Copernicus's assertion that the earth was not the center of the universe, as people believed in the seventeenth century, he was put under house arrest by order of the Inquisition and forced to recant his position. Only when his work was published after his death was the disdain for his theory replaced by doubt. And that doubt finally progressed to the paradigm shift in which the sun rather than the earth was accepted as the center of the universe—a heliocentric versus geocentric paradigm. Of course, we now further accept that the sun is only the center of our solar system, not of the entire universe, a further paradigm shift necessitated by scientific discoveries over the intervening centuries.

This slow process of mindset shifts illustrates that our beliefs and behavioral patterns are not relinquished easily. This applies even when we know intellectually that our beliefs and behaviors are less than healthy. This reluctance to change what we consider "known" results from the investments we have made—emotionally, intellectually, and financially—is our personal paradigm.

When we apply this to biocognition, paradoxically enough, we tend to experience more anxiety with *anticipated joy* than with *known misery*. But as we gain fluency in the biocognitive mindbody code, we can move past anxiety and resistance. We can shift our paradigm from living as disdainful disciples of known pain and doubting skeptics of anticipated joy to becoming accepting masters of abundance.

Now let's move from poetics to practicality. I want you to learn to *live* a language that produces results. And you can—if you are willing to replace your fear with the love of discovery. I mention this caveat because my years of clinical practice have taught me that it is easier to heal an illness or change a dysfunctional behavior than it is to confront the people or conditions that support our known misery. For example, I have seen an alarming number of patients who choose to surrender to their illnesses, and in some cases die, rather than assert their emotional boundaries. It is also fascinating to note that such self-sabotaging processes are not conscious, and that these patients will vigorously deny they are sabotaging themselves even when they are confronted with compelling evidence. I am not implying here that illness is a simple matter of being unassertive; there are many variables that contribute to disease. But healing cannot occur if we do not accept our own worthiness—that we are worth healing, even if doing so might shake up our view of the world and how we interact with others. A cure may require external interventions such as psychotherapy, medication, or surgery, but healing requires an internal paradigm shift from fear to love.

Biocognition is more than a theory or a practice. It is a way of life, and this is because each of us is more than a sentient body and a thinking mind. We are individual *living fields of information* that can make sense of who we are by means of the symbols we create from our experiences. Thus, our experiences are embodied interpretations called *biosymbols*, communicated in a *bioinformational field* shared by the communicators—the individual fields converge into a shared field. These two concepts form the terrain of what I call *portals of wellness*.

A *biosymbol* is a word, image, memory, or belief that has been given a cultural interpretation that affects our biology. For example, the word “stupid” is a symbol. It becomes a *biosymbol*, which we experience as

physical sensations and emotions, when someone uses the word to describe our own actions.

## THE FIVE PORTALS OF WELLNESS

We experience our cultural history through the biosymbols we create, and we communicate biosymbols with both implicit and explicit language. We say things like “I can’t stomach that,” “My heart’s not in it,” “I want peace of mind,” and many other expressions representing the *mindbody biosymbols* we use to convey our inner and outer world. I propose five areas of the mindbody space that manifest our most essential biosymbols. These range from our need for safety to our quest for spirituality. I call these areas *portals* because they are gates of expression of the *total being*: causes that cannot be attributed to specific physical locations.

It is essential to note that the correlations I make in this model between areas of the body and specific illnesses are not to be interpreted as linear cause and effect. They are not. Here we are in the realm of mindbody expressions of disharmonies.

### The First Portal: Safety

The first portal covers a biosymbolic area from the feet to the belly. The physiological expression of this portal is most evident when there is a threat to our physical or emotional safety; a fight-or-flight response is triggered to stop digestion and send extra blood to the legs. In times of perceived danger, the mindbody code determines that fighting or running away is more important than digesting food.

The positive side of this portal is the sense of comfort, delight, and calmness we feel at the end of a lovely meal with close friends. And so we get our first glimpse of biosymbols as coauthored mindbody interpretations responding to internal and external conditions.

### The Second Portal: Love

The second portal extends from the solar plexus to the upper chest, and it expresses the biosymbols of love. There is a strong correlation between heart conditions and emotional losses. The biosymbol of a broken heart



can be more than a poetic sentiment; the loss of a partner can increase the onset of cardiac abnormalities.

Conversely, experiments show that love and other positive emotions increase coherence in the rhythmic patterns of the heart rate, one of the indicators of cardiac health.

### The Third Portal: Expression

The third portal reflects the biosymbols of expression and emotional freedom. It extends from the neck to the eyebrows, as well as to the arms and hands. Our facial and hand expressions (clearing the throat when lying or when having to convey unpleasant news) and the tones of voice we use (such as when discussing socially disturbing content or confronting a feared authority) are all examples of how the third portal manifests biosymbols related to expression.

Although there is no decisive, empirical evidence of this, some clinicians suspect there may be a connection between difficulties in vocalizing feelings and thyroid problems. It has been suggested that, in addition to genetic factors, women may suffer from thyroid disorders more than men because of cultural conditions that discourage them from expressing themselves freely.

### The Fourth Portal: Peace

The fourth portal encompasses the area from the forehead to the crown of the head. We experience our thoughts as if they were coming from inside our heads. And although cognition is a collaborative function of mind and body, the forehead seems to be the biosymbolic portal of our mental processes. Expressions such as “I am thinking so much that my head hurts” and “My mind is at peace,” as well as tension headaches resulting from excessive worrying, are but a few examples of fourth portal manifestations.

### The Fifth Portal: Spirit

This spiritual portal is the most difficult to describe using linear language because of its nonlocal essence. In other words, it does not have a set location, and it does not travel through time and space. Yet we can still

give the spiritual portal a metaphorical presence to unify the mental activities emanating from our physical body with a metaphysical entity that transcends our mortality. Poetics such as “spiritual death,” “poor of spirit,” and “the eternal spirit” are some attempts to express what we intuit but cannot describe.



Interestingly, the biosymbolic portals seem to be interwoven in a hierarchical and synergistic architecture: safety forms the foundation upon which love can express itself with peace, and transcend in spirit.

## PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENTIAL TOOLS

Following your brief introduction to a new paradigm that includes biosymbolic language and portals of wellness, it is time for you to begin working with these concepts yourself. The mindbody code is eminently practical, and I devote much of this book to teaching you how to work with it to create the life changes you desire. At the end of each chapter, I have created opportunities for you to begin to assimilate the concepts of biocognition. As you gain fluency with the terminology, you will progress from understanding the theory to experiencing the practice. There are two fundamental principles to guide you through this transformational journey: the *embodied mind* and the *lived theory*.

### The Embodied Mind

To *embody* is to identify how and where cognition is experienced in the body. What physical and emotional sensations do our thoughts trigger, and where does the body manifest the experience? If someone says “I love you” or “I hate you,” those symbols (words) become biosymbols when we interpret them through the filter of our cultural beliefs and express them as embodied sensations and emotions. And the following point is key to working with the mindbody code: If we try to modify a belief without attending to the embodiment process, the change will likely be partial and unsustainable. In other words, changing a belief

requires a *mindbody recoding process that impacts the cultural meaning that sustains the belief*. To intellectualize change without embodiment is like trying to rate the quality of a wine without tasting it.

### The Lived Theory

Living a theory entails embodying its principles in the form of actions. And to sustain a change to live the theory, actions must become rituals.

A ritual is different from a routine. *Routine* is action we take to maintain a level of functioning, whereas *ritual* is meaningful action that defines who we are in our culture. Taking a shower, going to work, shaving, and shopping are examples of routines. Breaking bread with family, celebrations with friends, religious ceremonies, pilgrimages to sacred places, and meditating are examples of rituals. Sadly, a status-driven lifestyle can cause us to confuse egocentric routines with healthy rituals.

In chapter 3, I will explain how cultural beliefs affect the immune system, and in chapter 5, you will learn why healthy rituals, rather than routines, can be stress buffers that counteract the negative effects of social pressures and turbulent times.

### The Experiential Language

As is the case when you learn any new language, the concepts and terminology you encounter in each chapter of this book will gain experiential meaning for you through dedicated practice. Biocognitive concepts challenge our *belief horizons* (the limits or edges of our knowing) with experiential tools that can transform dysfunctional patterns into *wellness consciousness*. But the mindbody code is experienced rather than spoken, and it is accessed *incidentally*—through roundabout means—rather than directly. Buddhist teachers present their lessons with similar principles of *incidental learning* through an experiential language.

Say that a master wants to teach his student to experience the meaning of humility. “Wash my feet!” he orders the student.

Feeling insulted, the student responds, “Do you think I am your servant?”

The master retorts, “Well, then, let *me* wash *your* feet.”

Here humility is taught indirectly, and its meaning is experienced as a shift of consciousness.

According to biocognitive theory, a belief is a set of learned propensities (predisposed mindbody cultural interpretations) to give context to a perception. Put another way, a belief is a set of cultural assumptions to create meaning. For example, if your culture believes that tall people are intelligent, you will develop a learned propensity to find intelligence in tall people, so you can confirm your assumption. And your belief horizons determine how far the assumptions that maintain that belief can go without being challenged. In this case, you might reach your belief horizon if you learn that an author you consider one of the most brilliant people on earth stands only four feet ten.

Before we can alter a belief that does not serve us well, we must question it at its horizon to defy our old predispositions. This questioning takes place in a contemplative state of calmness, and the conditions that maintain the belief are altered experientially by incidentally accessing the mindbody code. Using a video game to indirectly teach a child eye-motor coordination is an example of *incidental learning*. But I want to clarify that beliefs are not maintained by rigid algorithms. We are not computers that process data; we are sentient fields of bioinformation that seek the greatest contextual relevance possible to find meaning in our world.

To illustrate, a clown preaching in a church would shake up the contextual relevance—a clown's expected context is the circus or a child's birthday party, not a church. But if the clown says to his congregation, "I am your new preacher, and I dressed like a clown to get your attention before I give you my first sermon," he restores contextual relevance.

Greater contextual relevance in that setting would be to have the preacher dress as expected when giving a sermon.

## THE FOUNDATION OF PRACTICE: CONTEMPLATIVE OBSERVATION

We will use a contemplative method (observation, not interpretation) to explore how the dysfunctional mindbody scripts we learned from authority figures (what I term our *cultural editors*) manifest throughout the five mindbody portals I introduced in this chapter.

The transition from an alert-interpretation state of awareness (characterized by beta brain waves) to a contemplative-observation consciousness (involving theta brain waves) facilitates the receptiveness and assimilation we need to redefine the implicit beliefs that drive our dysfunctional behavioral patterns. Reading this paragraph, for example, requires an alert state of beta waves. If you were in a deep state of meditation, you would be in a calm state of theta waves. A five-year-old's brain operates predominantly at theta frequencies, which facilitates learning and assimilation of new information, while a teenager's brain functions predominantly at beta frequencies and, as a result, is well suited to questioning new information.

### The Contemplative Method

It is now time for you to learn the contemplative method that is the foundation of this life-changing work. This section features my own method, but if you know another technique that allows you to experience deep relaxation, it is fine to use that one instead. If you have never tried a relaxation exercise, be patient if you find that it takes you a bit longer than you expect. The key to reaching a contemplative state of serenity is to *not try* to relax! If you try to relax, most likely it will have the opposite effect because to “try” is to concentrate on a goal rather than to witness a process. Trust that you already experienced deep levels of calm when you were an infant, and forgot how to reenter that state only when you learned how to worry. The contemplative method I teach in this chapter will remind you of what you already know, and is the first step in most of the practices presented in this book.

The object of this contemplative method is threefold. It will enable you to:

- ❖ witness for yourself the portals of safety, love, expression, peace, and spirit
- ❖ learn to access the mindbody code
- ❖ identify patterns of stress and their biosymbols