

Embodied Mindfulness: I Slip into a New World by Juergen Funke

"I slip into a new world. The body can be seen as a resonating chamber in which the play of breath becomes a kind of music." – Emilie Conrad

Coming to rest. Entering the inner space with my breath. Connecting to my true self. Disregarding social expectations. Realizing the spaciousness inside as part of my nature. Nothing I have to work for. No need to explain. Just being.

These words express the appeal and the experience of Jamie's approach to breathing practice. I followed the invitation Embodied Mindfulness offered me. My experience of meditation had been Tai Chi, Yoga and Yin-Yoga, Qi Gong and Contemplation. Having entered the stage of the senior in my life I gradually came to acknowledge the need of letting go the strain of high expectations, the need to unburden myself. All my life I have been trying so hard to meet social expectations at the same time trying to resist social norms. I have lived in the conflict of acting like a rebel, but at the same time in constant search of where do I belong. The breathing practice and my dance practice offer the experience of belonging to myself, to nature and to the universe. Instead of trying so hard to connect to other people, I found I can connect to myself, I am a reliable person and a good friend to myself.

During the Embodied Mindfulness Modules 1 and 2, I discovered breathing with others online offered an even wider space. We were connected by breathing together and sharing our experiences in an open-hearted way. We continued to practice in small groups of two or three people online facilitating each other. I took the breathing practice to a Tamalpa Life/Art Process® course and used it to connect to our body in a simple way - offering a period of stillness and deep rest in the middle of the dance session. From the beginning I felt an urge to pass on the breathing practice, to offer this space of connection to others. I had discovered its healing quality.

My Work with one Participant.

Through the feedback in between practices and at the end of each session, I was quite close to my participant's experience of his breathing, the obstacles he perceived and the challenge to overcome them or deal with them. In spite of my initial intention to pre-plan an 8-week sequence of practices from the beginning, it evolved from session to session. This helped me gear the practices to the needs of my participant as I perceived them - and to find ways to help him overcome the obstacles or deal with them. We were traveling together into the open space of an unknown territory, creating landmarks that marked our journey.

In my perception, we have made some progress in our collaboration over eight-session of Embodied Mindfulness. I appreciate his learning curve in taking on a variety of challenging practices. He deepened his self-awareness and achieved greater freedom in applying the practices. Upon reflection were two important themes that came up and were part of my consultations with Jamie.

Stepping out of the pattern of overstrain

One major issue in my approach to Embodied Mindfulness is my perception of the breathing exercises. Again and again, I was tempted to consider them as work or as a technique which can be applied in a technical if not mechanical way. Connected to this perception pattern is the idea of achievement and performance. "Let me do this exercise in the correct way."

I remember another connected pattern when I practiced Yin Yoga which asks you to remain in the same Asana for a longer time like 15-20 minutes compared to the more regular 5 minutes. Doing this practice I experienced great comfort, ease and deep relaxation. However, on many occasions of my practice of Yin Yoga I began to do whatever was asked for only to get to this relaxation. In order to get there, I was willing to overstrain myself. It was as if the trickster played one of his cruel jokes on me. "You can get it if you really want."

In order to address this issue, the consultation sessions helped me step out of this pattern of having to do a lot in order to be able to relax. I now know this pattern pretty well and it relates to my current situation with shoulder impingement in both shoulders. I used to carry too much weight on my shoulders to be part of. I can relate this pattern to my childhood trauma. I felt I had to do everything for my mother in order to survive. Coming back to teaching, it was a session by Emilie Conrad on Youtube that made me aware of the relatedness of my inner psychic structure to the social activity of teaching. She says to her students:

"... how this plays out in social activity is this that I can participate with you without demanding anything." she continues: "how I am with myself is how I am with you - and if I can't be that way with myself, how can I be that way with you?" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AzEv-38mYWo>

I take her wisdom as an inspiration which gives me direction where I want to go to. Stepping out of that pattern of demanding so much in order to relax is a kind of a door into a relaxed sphere, which is there and has always been there. It is a kind of choice, an awareness of where I want go.

Entering my body without expectations

One change I perceived during my Module 3 project and my 3rd participation in the Module 1 course was a different awareness of my own body. Instead of wanting my body to perform I began to perceive it as a space, a land I inhabit and grow on. How does this breath feel? It is a sense of inquiry, of research, of trying out, of being playful. It is an appreciation of not knowing where this action or non-action will take me, a sort of radical departure from all forms of control which helps me to move into more ease with myself.

For years I have been carrying too much weight on my shoulders. The weight to some degree is composed of my expectations on myself today. These used to be my father's and my mother's expectations which were so difficult to fulfill for me as a little boy. Today I feel I can let go of high expectations, but it is hard work because I am so used to overstrain that doing little or nothing is unfamiliar.

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space lies our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." - Victor Frankl

At any time, we can leave our habitual world and step outside or step into a kind of freedom with ourselves. In order to leave the pattern of habit it has been most helpful to take small steps, such as playing with movement added to the breathing, playing with awareness and attention of body parts and areas, and most importantly, playing with the permission to allow my body to rest. Every day in my life is a juggling in between the sphere of goal-oriented life, of to-dos, and a top down arrangement compared to the ease and the lack of expectations of open space, of a bottom-up arrangement in which I begin to listen to my body and its needs. Instead of looking at the world with

two antagonistic perspectives, I propose the mystic perception of us and the world as one. By entering my body like a landscape, I am part of nature as I have always been.

My next steps in Embodied Mindfulness

Closing my essay is like opening the next door and like embracing life in a simple way. I have a great need and wish to engage in cooperation with other practitioners of Embodied Mindfulness (EM) and the Tamalpa Life/Art Process® (TLAP) in order to open up to new ideas and support my creativity. I want to apply ease and regenerative processes into my facilitation and invite playfulness into my courses like we play with the breath in breath practices.

In my experience the TLAP provides opportunities for participants to open up new areas of personal development for themselves to find out who you are beyond social conformism to live your life from the inside in respect for your true being. The EM has a similar direction. However, instead of revealing who you are by confronting obstacles, EM informs you who you are by connecting you with your inner self by resting, taking the pressure off, by listening inside and connecting to your inner space. My idea is to integrate the two approaches to form a blend offering participants revealing and resilient spaces for exploration. In our current situation of multiple crises, the roll-back policies of the far right crypto fascism that threaten human rights and aim at destroying cultural change we need spaces to come back to our own nature, to gradually overcome the impact of individual, collective and historic trauma.

Jürgen Funke is a dancer and embodiment artist who has long been active in the fields of expressive dance, Butoh dance, Authentic Movement, Continuum and performance. From 2020 to 2023, he completed the Tamalpa Life/Art Process® Practitioner training at Tamalpa Germany and was certified as a Registered Somatic Movement Educator by ISMETA (International Somatic Movement Educator and Therapist Association). He continued his journey in the field of embodiment with Jamie McHugh, a long-standing colleague of Anna Halprin, and qualified as an Embodied Mindfulness Practitioner under his guidance. In his work, he enjoys combining all these approaches with the exploration of nature to guide and empower people to explore their own bodies and find an authentic form and creative embodiment. <https://www.instagram.com/jedermenschkanntanzen/>