

Guidebook of

Somatic Transformational Exercises

*improving the mind-body connection
to improve physical and mental prowess*

FROM THE LINEAGES OF . . .



Hanna Somatic Education®

and complementary others ...

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CDs inside back cover

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HELPFUL INTRODUCTORY IDEAS

The following few pages make it easier to use this guidebook. By understanding a few basic things, you align yourself with a way of thinking about Somatics that helps you to produce results faster and more easily.

On Control and Ease

The word, control, has about it a sense of effort and rigidity. This appreciation of the word is precisely the opposite of its meaning.

The sense of effort is precisely what is absent from a high degree of control. The better the control, the greater the ease. *Poor control* is experienced as effort.

The masters of any art always make it look easy. That is the definition of mastery and the very sign of their mastery.

The novice, whose control errs and falters, struggles.

Control is ease.

However, there is a peculiarity of perception that occurs when people consider something that is momentarily beyond their reach: they perceive the obstacles between how they are and how they would have *to be* to get that “something”. That sense of obstacles colors their sense of what it would be like to achieve their goal. They erroneously identify the achievement of their goal with the feeling of their current obstacles, and they assume that anyone who has reached that goal is experiencing those obstacles.

Thus, the control of mastery seems to be an effort -- whereas it is *getting to that degree of mastery* that involves some effort.

Thus, people disparage control.

This disparagement is the mood of discouragement.

But control is ease. Therefore, it is better to imagine mastery as ease -- and to understand the learning of control as the movement toward ease.

Thus will the tensions of excessive effort and struggle be seen as unnecessary and released, and the way to mastery be paved with truly good intentions.

Why “Slowly”?

Doing things at the usual speed, we tend to do them in the usual way.

The whole point of these explorations is to do something in a *new* way: move.

You may have noticed that you can’t see much detail in things that are moving quickly; it’s much easier to see the details of things that are holding still or moving slowly.

The same is true of your body-image.

In the case of these movement explorations, the slower you move, the more time you have for details to “fade in” to your perceptions. In other words, you will not necessarily perceive the restrictions and habitual tensions of your usual way of moving immediately, during a movement. However, if you slow down and *pay attention to the sensation of movement*, you will discover the ways in which you hold unnecessary tension during movement. You may even discover that you are holding tension that *directly interferes* with the movement you are doing.

At that point, you can use the “Feathering” technique (page 6) to release those interfering tensions. As you do, you will notice your movement getting smoother, feeling more elegant and under your control.

Try going slower with each repetition, maintaining the smoothness of the movement.

At the beginning of this explanation were the words, “The whole point of these explorations is to do something in a *new* way: move.” Those words are, at this moment, an abstract generality to you; they don’t have much meaning. Their meaning will be obvious once you start the movement explorations.

Here’s another set of words that will have meaning once you start the movement explorations: *INTEND, ALLOW, DO*.

That means, “Know exactly what you **INTEND** to do, get the distinct feeling of **ALLOWING** yourself to do it (relax into doing it), and **then**, **DO** it.

What You Need and How Best to Use This Guidebook

The somatic transformations are intended to be done in the sequence in which they appear. To do them, you need floor space of about six-by-nine feet and a pad (blanket, yoga mat, quilt) soft enough for you to lie on in comfort. Arrange to be undisturbed for about half an hour.

1. Read through each instruction until you have an idea what to do.
2. Do the exploration as you remember it.
3. Re-read the instructions for clarification.
4. Re-do the exploration.

Ideally, have somebody read the instructions to you. Some people record them on audio-tape (pacing is important) or form a practice group!

In general, the earlier transformations prepare you for those that follow. *Do each new transformation several times within a week until you get a satisfactory change, before moving on.* If a transformation seems difficult or painful, go more slowly and more gently. If necessary, do an earlier one that deals with your limitation.

Many of the transformations have several stages of integration (levels of complexity). Do the simplest versions (numbered) first; then add the more advanced integrations (indented), as follows:

1. (main instruction, basic level)
 - ⇒ addition (intermediate level)
 - ⇒ addition (more advanced level)

To get the most benefit from a somatic transformation, go slowly enough to sense the movement as you do it, gently enough to be comfortable, and using only the muscles needed to accomplish each movement*. That way, you will continually uncover patterns of tension you have held without awareness and be able to release them into a greater grace and freedom.

Note: Unlike conventional postural training, you do not need to maintain good posture to have good posture after doing these explorations. Your posture will improve naturally. Do not hold “good posture”, as it only adds tension to your other habitual tensions. If anything, relax into good posture.

* See the instructions for “Feathering” on the page shown in the Table of Contents

The Special Use of Language in this Guidebook

In the instructions, certain terms have specific meanings, as follows:

backward = toward your back

underside = the side on which you are lying or sitting

topside = your uppermost side in relation to the Earth

slowly = slowly enough to feel your movement continuously as you move

gently = two “notches” more gently than you think of as gentle, but with enough effort to feel what you are doing

smoothly = without sudden movements or loss of control

Pause and feel. = Stop moving, and in the position you are in, feel your muscles at work.

Feel what’s working. = Notice the sensation of muscles working.

where the movement comes from = as you move, the location of the most vivid sensation of movement

The very practical reason for this choice of language is so you have an easier time understanding the instructions. Nearly all of these movements are exotic and unfamiliar. We want to make it as easy as possible for you to learn them!

PAUSE AND RELAX -- another relaxation technique

This is another technique for reducing effort in movement.

As you do any of the movements in this Guidebook, you may pause in place, scan the whole body for extra tension, and relax it. You will often undergo a postural shift and experience a feeling of sudden, additional mental clarity.

Review “INTEND, ALLOW, DO” in “WHY SLOWLY?” (page 3).

THE “FEATHERING” TECHNIQUE

Typically, people use much more effort to do a movement than is necessary by involving muscles that are unnecessary for the movement. Such inefficient movement contributes strain to movement and to living. The Learning Explorations found in this Guidebook provide ideal opportunities to develop more efficient, easier movement. One technique to do so is called, “feathering”. It’s called that because you use it to locate the edges of restrictions to movement with the delicacy of a feather.

In a nutshell, it works this way: When doing certain movements, you will notice that as you reach a certain position (unique to you), you must apply more effort to continue moving. You have encountered a **restriction** to movement -- a restriction created, in many cases, by tension held somewhere in the body, usually without awareness and in an unsuspected area. At that point in the exploration, do the “feathering” technique.

The “Feathering” Technique

1. Back off from the position of restriction, then slowly resume movement toward the restriction and *notice the exact position at which you first sense it.*
2. *Back off, again.* Reapproach, again sensing the edge of the restriction with the delicacy of a feather.

Repeat until you have a clear sense of where you first encounter restriction.

3. Now, find the edge and pause. Scan the whole body for tension, the tension of effort.
4. Relax anything you find that is more than needed to do the simple movement you intend.

At that point, the restriction to movement will have disappeared or moved. Continue the movement past the point at which you stopped to do the “feathering” technique, as your newfound freedom permits.

THE “TEASING” TECHNIQUE

The purpose of all of the somatic transformations is to awaken you to your muscular system. This process involves both awareness and control.

It is typical of human beings to have only crudely developed control of the effort or speed of a movement. Hence, the meaning of the word, “gentle”, is nebulous for many of us and equated with “weakness” by others.

It is also typical that people have only a vague sense of how to move to reach (or use) certain muscles.

Finally, by using too much force or effort, people fail to sense the subtle tensions that maintain habitual postures. Too much force produces too much sensation, which drowns out the subtler sensations of habitual postures.

The Teasing technique accomplishes three purposes. It:

- enables you to locate areas of your muscular system with precision movements that engage more and more of the body.
- develops finer control over effort and speed of movement.
- enables you to release patterns of tension that are otherwise beyond reach of your awareness.

You can use this technique with any of the explorations given here. There is also a special section on movement patterns for which The Teasing Technique is particularly applicable.

The technique has three stages:

1. Locate a place where you have tension or discomfort.
2. Learn how to move to tighten that place deliberately.
3. In a series of contractions, tighten and relax at a gradually decreasing level of intensity until you experience a postural release.

More detailed instructions follow, immediately below.

The “Teasing” Technique

1. Locate a place where you have discomfort you would like to erase.
2. Tighten the area and notice how you move.
3. Relax the effort.
4. Tighten and release repeatedly until you can feel the sensation increase and decrease.
5. With each cycle of tightening and releasing, notice what body parts move and deliberately add them to the action of tightening and releasing.
You will notice that your ability to tighten gets considerably stronger.
6. When you are capable of a strong contraction, contract and hold.
Notice the amount of effort you are exerting.
7. Release and then re-tighten less, though enough to feel the area distinctly.
8. *Slowly* release the area, maintaining continuous awareness of the decreasing tension.
9. Repeat tightening and releasing and decreasing levels of effort until you experience a postural release.

SUGGESTION: Use this technique for “Opening the Dark Vise”, Breathing section, page 21.

Posture, Structure, and the Sense of Self: the Role of Expanded Perception

Upon what are bodyworkers and chiropractors working when they seek to improve body alignment and bodily functioning?

This question has at least two answers:

- living tissue
- the person's self-sense

The first answer is obvious and needs no comment.

The second answer deserves a closer look.

The body is a self-organizing system. That's what "organism" means.

How do we maintain organization? By feeling our condition -- hunger, desire, etc., and acting accordingly, in mostly learned ways. An organisms, we are self-aware and self-regulating. To organize ourselves is to direct ourselves.

So, when a bodyworker or chiropractor induces a bodily change, that change affects our feeling of ourselves, our self-sense. The change itself remains subject to our acceptance or rejection of that altered self-sense.

But there is another factor to take into account: Is our perception of ourselves accurate or distorted?

The question is as legitimate in matters of the body as it is in matters of personality. Both are matters of feeling and dependent upon the perceptiveness of the perceiver.

It so happens that when a person is used to feeling a certain way, they are habituated, in effect, to choosing that way over others. They highlight certain sensations (by paying attention to them) and overlook or reject others, just as they choose one course of action over another.

That being the case, there are no guarantees that they have selected an optimal way of being healthy, happy, or of fulfilling any other goal. In general, it is the opposite; they have selected what they know, and what they

know has brought them to a care-giver. They want want change, but they do no know what it entails, nor do they know if they would be willing to make the change if they did know! Some people want to be “fixed” so they can go back to what they’ve always been doing, with nothing new added!

As to the ministrations of bodyworkers and other manipulative therapists, regardless of whether they have instilled a better functional pattern, it is up to the person to maintain it. Given the clients’ distorted perception and habits of action, how are they going to do it?

You have at least one part of the answer: Their perception must change. In addition, their way of maintaining themselves must change -- and that cannot be done for them; they must set a new intention and get used to new feelings.

These two kinds of change -- perception and action -- arise from the person’s own self-sense and intention.

Intention is not a mental thing; it is a felt thing, like chewing or breathing.

Both a person’s perception of themselves-in-action and their choice of action must change.

That cannot be accomplished only through manipulation from without; it can only be aided by it. The person’s sense of order (and self) is pre-eminent. We must learn and choose to do something new or remain chronically in distress and dependent.

Functional Symmetry Opens a Mysterious Channel for the Exercise of the Will

Balance and symmetry correspond to the state of rest in individuals.
Imbalance and asymmetry correspond to activity.

How is this so?

Balance, particularly static balance, exists when all forces (or tendencies to go into motion) counteract each other. For human beings in a standing or sitting position, this state of static balance can exist only when the left and right sides mirror each other both in how they appear and in how they feel. Unequal tensions and positioning of the two sides result in a displacement of the body's center of gravity away from its center of support -- leading to motion, as when a person leans forward slightly when initiating walking.

This movement from symmetry to asymmetry leads to movement, in general. Walking is inherently asymmetrical; even at the point of greatest balance, the center of gravity is slightly away from the center of support -- if only because one's attention is extended outward (attention leads movement).

This understanding should inform somatic educators, bodyworkers, and those who partake of those practices.

Most people are substantially asymmetrical, both posturally and in their control of movement; they are unable to come very close to rest at symmetrical balance. The tendency they have to go into motion, they must counter constantly with various forms of tension. This constant activity of their nervous system (visible as wavering) sets up a constant disturbance in their attention; it wavers. Their nervous system is noisy. They are not at rest, either physically, or mentally. On the other hand, steady attention gives the will a channel through which to operate. (Is this fact not self-evident?)

So there is a virtue in cultivating symmetry and balance.

Now, what does this state of symmetry and balance do to a person's way of moving?

This brings up an interesting point. To move, they go from static balance (symmetry) to *dynamic* balance.

The term may seem a bit difficult to understand. Let's use an analogy. Have you ever considered how odd it is that whether you stand still or whether you move, you still seem to be "here"? Your sense of "here" doesn't move, no matter how fast you go! This is dynamic "hereness"!

Dynamic balance is similar. One more thing, however: your ability to feel "here" has to do with freedom from distraction by your own mind. The steadier your attention is, the more "here" you feel. That steadiness of attention has much to do with symmetrical control of movement (dynamic balance). Without it, a person always feels awkward and self-conscious because they feel physically out of balance and in some danger of losing their balance. They have to keep their attention, to one degree or another, upon themselves.

Getting back to the relationship between balance and steadiness of attention, a person who has developed symmetry of both posture and control of movement has developed a kind of steadiness of attention experienced as "hereness" or "here-and-now-ness". If they have not developed right/left, symmetrical control of movement, then they can experience steady attention and a sense of control only when they are at rest. They have limited dynamic balance.

For that reason, the notion of "alignment" has limited value. No one can maintain their alignment when in movement because movement is inherently asymmetrical and out of alignment with the rest (symmetrical) condition. The answer is symmetrical coordination -- that is, equal coordination and equal facility with the left and right sides of the body. Then, a person's attention can be steadier, even when they are in motion.

One more thing: An odd thing happens when a person attains physical symmetry, even momentarily (a process to be discussed technically, at another time): their mind falls silent. The forces of left and right equalize each other, and with that, the movement of attention into the stresses of biased opinions ends. It is a movement to a more profound balance and deeper peace.

So, how do we experience/recognize symmetry? We start from rest. As you lie on your back, do your shoulders touch the floor equally? Do your legs lie the same way?

If not, you have habitual, asymmetrical tension. Your position is distorted by muscular pulls. You are not as much at rest as you might be.

Your movement toward symmetry will involve learning to locate and to release that habitual tension. That's one thing the somatic learning exercises are good for.

As you practice them, notice where you feel the sensations. As you practice on the opposite side, locate or imagine the mirror image sensations on that side, also. This act is called "sensation location".

For symmetrical movements, like the Arch & Curl, adjust your movements and pacing to create symmetrical (right-left mirror-image) sensations.

Very often, as you do so, if you are paying enough attention and going slowly enough, you will discover tension at some third place in the body. As you relax that third place, you will experience a postural adjustment toward greater symmetry and your mind will clear.

This act is called "symmetrical execution".

So, to summarize

- ◇ sensation location
- ◇ symmetrical execution
- ◇ release of the 3rd point

To the degree that you develop symmetry, your balance will improve, your mind will clear, and your will will have a clear channel through which to operate.

So, cultivate right-left symmetry; get as good with one side as with the other. Develop and enjoy balance and functional symmetry.

Re-read this entire article for a more complete understanding.

INTRODUCTORY DEMONSTRATION

This maneuver quickly demonstrates how learning to sense and control movement increases flexibility in ways previously thought only obtainable by stretching. Its message: *This works and you can do it.*

Basic Demonstration

STARTING POSITION: standing with feet at shoulder-width, legs straight

Bend over and notice how far your hands hang from the floor. Tap your shins with your fingertips where they hang.

1. Reach outward beyond your head, parallel to the floor, with elbows straight.
2. Still hanging, look up with your eyes and tip your head back.
3. Raise your arms higher.
⇒ Match the effort of raising your arms and tipping your head.
4. Tip your head back further.
⇒ Match the effort of raising your arms and tipping your head.
5. Thrust your belly out to arch your spine.
⇒ Match the effort of arching your spine and tipping your head.
6. When all efforts match, take a deep breath.
7. Slow-w-w-ly exhale and hang down.

Now, tap your shins and notice where your fingertips are.