

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.