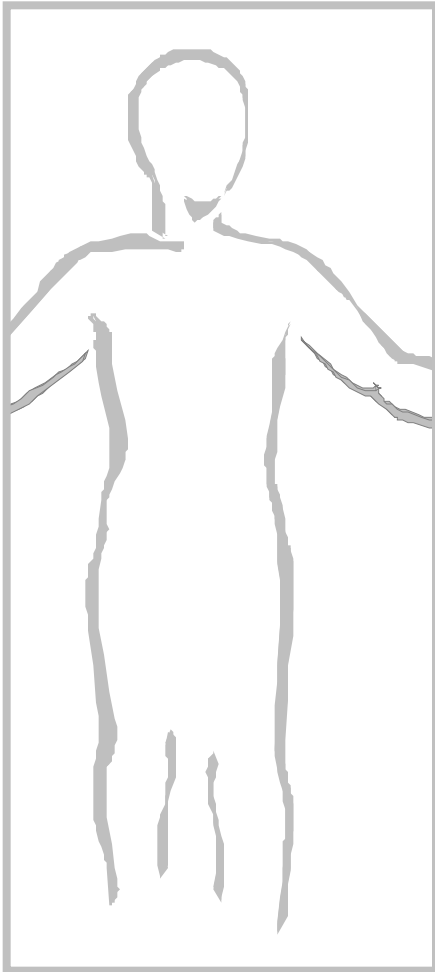


WINNING IS HEALING — BASICS



An Introduction to
Body Awareness and
Empowerment for
Abuse Survivors

A Downloadable E-Book by

Paul Linden, Ph.D.

CCMS Publications
Columbus, Ohio

WINNING IS HEALING—BASICS

An Introduction to
Body Awareness and Empowerment
For Abuse Survivors

Paul Linden, Ph.D.

First Edition

CCMS Publications

Columbus, Ohio

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An Introduction to Body Awareness and Empowerment
for Abuse Survivors
by Paul Linden, PhD

Published by CCMS Publications
221 Piedmont Road
Columbus, Ohio 43214 USA
<http://www.being-in-movement.com>

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First edition 2004

Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication **(Provided by Quality Books, Inc.)**

Linden, Paul.

Winning is healing--basics : an introduction to body awareness and empowerment for abuse survivors / Paul Linden. -- 1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-9716261-1-1

1. Adult child abuse victims--Rehabilitation.
2. Mind and body therapies. I. Title.

RC569.5.C55L562 2004

616.85'82239

QBI04-200032

ISBN 0-9716261-1-1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication

Acknowledgements

E-Book Publication

Service Mark

Professional Trainings and Workshops

Disclaimer

1 – Introduction	1
2 – Power: Softening the Core	6
3 – Background Concepts	18
4 – Powerlessness	28
5 – Learning	41
6 – Body Awareness	48
7 – Power: Stabilizing the Core	57
8 – Power: Love & Spaciousness	76
9 – Power: Legs, Arms & Face	83
10 –Dealing with the World: Boundaries	92
11 –Dealing with the World: Self–Defense	101
12 –Following Your Body	122
13 – Healing the World	136

Index

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all the abuse survivors who have studied with me and from whom I have learned so much. It is dedicated to all the beings on the planet who are in pain, and it is dedicated to all those people who work for the healing of all beings.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Larry Morris, Jim Struve, Linda Schoenberg and Peggy Berger read the manuscript in various stages of completion, and I would like to thank them for their helpful suggestions. Ilana Rubinfeld pointed out that the phrase that summarized the book for me was “winning is healing” and suggested that as the title.

Aside from being a great neighbor and wonderful landscape painter, Bridgette Turner generously lent me her digital camera for the photos. Steve Meyer, who is an Aikido student and a photographer, gave me invaluable help with the photography and served as a model for some photos. John Klein and Melinda Murphy helped take the photos. A number of people served as models for the photographs, and I’d like to thank them all. Peggy Berger both served as a model and shot many of the photos. Renee Bean, Morgan Jones, Glenda Galloway, and Josh Linden also served as models. Virginia Beuhler drew the picture of the long-haired woman.

I’d like to thank Dan Poynter for writing his book *The Self-Publishing Manual*, a very helpful guide to the technicalities of self-publishing.

E-BOOK PUBLICATION

Publishing *Winning is Healing—Basics* as an e-book makes it accessible to people who need it. Rather than having a paper book confined to book stores, putting it on the web means it will be instantly and inexpensively available throughout the whole world. Here is an e-mail I received from a someone who lives half-way around the world from me:

I just want you to know that I recently read some of your articles in the internet, and tried some of the exercises. I have a history of sexual abuse from childhood to adulthood.... In the course of my therapy, I realized that my body needed some sort of [work] too.... Somehow, I couldn't release the tightness in my pelvic area.... After reading your articles, I tried the “soften belly” exercise and got tremendous relief all over my body. Last night I was bold enough to relax the anal and vaginal areas.... I am now enjoying an easing up in my abdominal and pelvic areas. Thank you for putting those articles in the internet! I live in and body movement [modalities] like BIM are non-existent here.

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DISCLAIMER

This book is designed to provide information in regard to body education and abuse recovery. It is not intended to provide all the information that is available or possible. The reader is encouraged to read widely and learn as much as possible about the topic.

This book is designed to fulfill an educational objective. It is not designed to provide treatment for any condition. If any condition requires treatment, then the services of a qualified professional should be sought.

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If you would like information about professional certification in *Being In Movement*® mindbody training, or if you would like to have me do a *BIM* workshop, please contact:

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Nancy had been physically and sexually abused by her father when she was a child. She was referred to me by her psychotherapist for lessons in body awareness and empowerment. Actually, she wasn't just referred, she was brought. Her therapist came to our first lesson because Nancy was too scared to come alone.

Often as we worked, Nancy looked compressed and hard. Her chin would go up as she pulled her head back and down. She would clench her fists and tighten her shoulders. Along with that compression, paradoxically, came a general collapse. Her body would sag, and she would space out. After we had worked together for a while, I suggested that to me the combination of hardening and collapsing looked like somebody preparing to lose well. She was hardening herself to be stubborn, take the punishment, and fight back; yet she knew it was hopeless, and her real goal was to just stay stubbornly quiet while she was raped again. Nancy said that was just what her life had been like.

Over the course of six months of lessons, I helped Nancy create in her body an integrated physical state of awareness, power and love. This is a body state of expansiveness and joy. We practiced using that state as a foundation for eliminating dissociation and body numbness and confronting what had been done to her. We used that state of body presence as a foundation for practicing skills of self-defense. She learned to stay present and focused and WIN when I acted the role of her abuser. She experienced that power can be loving and life affirming, and she used that kindhearted power to reclaim her body and her life.

One day toward the end of the time we worked together, Nancy came in for a lesson with a glowing grin, and I asked her what she was grinning about. She said she'd had to go back to her parents' house to get something. When she was little, her father would often lose his temper and choke her unconscious just to shut her up. When she was at her parents' house, he lost his temper again, but this time as he came at her to choke her, rather than holding her breath and dissociating, she automatically breathed and dropped into the posture of balance, power and love that we had been practicing. She parried her father's grab, spun him around, threw him up against the wall and said clearly and loudly, "You can never do that to me again!" Then she left. That is true healing. Through her own skilled efforts, as an adult, she succeeded where as a child she had been defeated.

Nancy did not respond to the attack with tension, fear, and shock, which would have led to her losing yet again. Nor did she respond with rage and brutality, which would have created further inner pain even had she won the fight. She responded with loving power, which allowed her to win and win in a way that was healing to her. Power is often thought of as violent, and winning is often thought of as being synonymous with aggression. *Winning is Healing* will take you beyond

the common conception that power is violence to an experience of the deep spiritual and practical importance of integrating power and love. Winning based on kindhearted power is life affirming and is the only way to escape from the cycle of pain, fear, rage, and violence.

During your abuse, you experienced your powerlessness in a very deep and penetrating way. (Perhaps you weren't abused but are reading this book as a person who works with abuse survivors. Much of this book will be addressed directly to abuse survivors, and some of the book will speak specifically to professionals who work with survivors. Whichever group you fall in, you can read all of the material and take from it what applies to you.) The work you will do in this book will start with helping you gain precise awareness of what you continue to do in your body that maintains that sense of powerlessness. The next step will be to develop a somatic (mind/body) state of power and love. You will then learn to use awareness, power and love as a foundation for creating safety, freedom and joy in your life.

Winning is healing! Losing trapped you. Winning will allow you to reclaim your body and take back your life. Winning means living with power, love, and joy in your body and spirit. This book will show you how to win.

IN A NUTSHELL

As a result of abuse, people learn that they are powerless to protect themselves. People respond to abuse by constricting awareness, breathing, and posture, and then they maintain this constriction after the abuse. This constriction creates a self-fulfilling prophecy: constriction creates weakness, which results in further victimization and reinforces and perpetuates the sense of powerlessness.

Through deliberate, systematic re-training, abuse survivors can learn to create and use a body state of expansive awareness, open breathing, well-aligned posture, and free movement. This somatic state is the foundation for effective and successful action of any sort, and in particular, for effective self-protection. Through re-igniting the innate human capacity for self-protection, the abuse survivor can replace the sense of learned powerlessness with a sense of efficacy and joy.

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The process of empowerment is logically simple. In a movement experiment, I have a survivor face a challenge, and I ask them to pay attention to their body and detect their responses to the challenge. These responses are generally some manifestation of the constriction process. Next I teach the student how to create a new body state of balance, freedom, love, and power. Then I have them face the challenge a second time and deliberately choose to maintain the new body state as a basis for action to overcome the challenge. People generally experience that when they stay centered, they can come up with and execute new

and more effective responses. We start with relatively gentle symbolic challenges, progress through verbal representations of the abuse, move on to minimal physical representations of the abuse, and then end by role playing the actual abuse. At each stage, the task is to stay centered, respond effectively, and win. By the end of the sequence of progressively harder challenges, the survivor has developed a practical ability to stay present, protect her/himself, and respect her/himself.

• • • • •

This method of trauma work focuses on the body. Abuse is done to the body. Being hit or raped is obviously physical. However, even being yelled at or lied to affects the body. The body is affected during abuse, the effects are maintained in the body, and overcoming abuse must include retraining the body.

The body is important in learning to notice and feel yourself. Emotions such as fear, anger, dissociation, shame and so on are all body processes. Getting in touch with your feelings can be most efficiently accomplished by learning to pay attention to the *body events* which bubble along within you, often out of your conscious awareness.

The body is also important in learning to manage your feelings. By replacing habitual processes of constriction with physical freedom and balance, you can overcome the habitual feelings associated with your abuse.

Obviously the body is important in learning to act with effective power. Actions from speaking to walking are all physical, and the more freedom and efficiency you experience in your body, the more effective all your actions will be. In particular, self-protection is a physical thing. Learning to protect yourself from being slapped or raped must include physical self-defense. But even being able to speak up for yourself and demand respect starts with breathing and vocalizing, which are physical processes. If your voice is free and steady, your words will have power.

WHO THE BOOK IS FOR

This book is for abuse survivors and the professionals who work with them. It is for people who want an introduction to how the body can be included in the recovery process. It is for people who want an introduction to empowerment work and how empowerment is a crucial element of abuse recovery.

By “introduction,” I mean a brief indication of the material. The longer version of this book, *Winning is Healing*, is a four hundred and twenty page in-depth treatment of the topic of body awareness and empowerment in abuse recovery. It is a complete training manual, and I wrote it with the thought that people all over the world could study the book and then proceed to do effective work with abuse.

I wrote this introductory version with the idea that many people would prefer a much more readable survey of the topic. Make no mistake—this book is experiential and practical. You will be able to *do* useful things with it. But this book is meant to be quick and easy to read and use. It gives just the core of the work.

If you are an abuse survivor, the book will speak directly to you about practical skills and understandings. You will experience exercises for enlivening your awareness, reclaiming your body, finding your rightful power, learning to access love, and for being able to speak your truth in safety and move on past the abuse. You can go through the exercises in the book by yourself, with other survivors in a group, with a somatic educator, with a psychotherapist, or with other appropriate professionals.

Most of this book will speak to adults who were sexually abused as children. However, what is needed in the process of recovering from non-sexual childhood physical abuse or neglect is very similar. Similar too is recovery from physical assault, rape, or domestic violence experienced by adults. There are also non-abuse traumas such as car crashes, fire, surgery, or life-threatening illness, and many elements of the somatic process will be applicable there as well. The material described here will even be applicable for recovering from traumas that you've inherited. I have, for example, worked with children of abuse survivors or Holocaust survivors, and they learned from their parents some very deep trauma responses that they had to work to recover from. So if you were not abused as a child, or not abused sexually, or not even abused yourself, or traumatized but not through abuse, you can read through the book and take from it what does apply to your particular situation.

Even though the book is written to speak to survivors, it is also for the professionals who work with abuse survivors. If you are a professional, you will learn body awareness techniques that you can use with your clients, and the techniques that help survivors find their power will also help you bear up under the weight of the pain that your clients bring to you.

If you are a psychotherapist, you may be very familiar with abuse issues, but the body-oriented approach that this book shows will help you see things from a new and powerful perspective. In addition, if you come from a therapy perspective, this book will show you an educational perspective for working with abuse survivors.

Massage therapists, dance therapists, body workers, somatic educators, yoga practitioners, martial artists and other mind/body practitioners also have a part to play in helping abuse survivors gain control of different aspects of themselves and their lives. If you are in one of these professions, the tools and information in this book will broaden your understanding of how to use the work you already do and will teach you new skills as well.

If you are a professional, you may wish to get together a group of professionals with whom you can practice the exercises in the book.

EXERCISES & PRACTICES

Most of *Winning is Healing—Basics* consists of body and movement awareness experiments. The teaching and learning will be experimental in the sense that the exercises will present tasks, and you will have the opportunity to experiment with ways of approaching the tasks and evaluate for yourself which approaches work best.

Most of the experiments will take very little time to do. Four or five minutes will generally be enough for each one. Just by spending a few minutes at a time paying attention to your movements, you will be able to make startling changes in your level of awareness and ability to move.

Most of the exercises you will do only once. They are *experiments* designed to test an idea or movement and increase your awareness of your body and your ways of being in the world. Once you have done an experiment, you will have felt and noticed something new that will be part of your awareness, and you won't have to do the experiment again. However, some of the exercises will be labeled as *practices*. In addition to being ways of learning new information, they are specific exercises that you can do over and over again on an ongoing basis to continue to deepen and strengthen new skills and awarenesses. The experiments and practices will be set off from the regular text by being enclosed in solid line borders.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

I would like to suggest a caution. Do only what and as much as feels right to you.

Survivors often find it scary to allow awareness back into their bodies. Or some exercise might remind you of some part of your abuse. As you go through the exercises and increase your awareness and your power, you will feel better and better. However, especially in the early stages of the work, if something seems too uncomfortable, honor that feeling and look for a way to make the exercise a bit easier.

As a survivor going through the exercises, it will be important for you to avoid feeling powerless and out of control. There is a safety contract that is important in all the exercises.

The *safety contract* is that you are the one in charge. If you wish to stop an exercise, by all means do so. If you wish to slow it down, then do so. No explanations needed. You can simply tell your partner or facilitator, and they should slow down or stop the exercise.

CHAPTER 2

POWER: SOFTENING THE CORE

The logical place to start the investigation of trauma is with the process and the effects of traumatization, and then the next logical topic would be how to overcome those effects. However, though that would be a logical progression, it wouldn't be safe. In order to investigate powerlessness safely and productively, people have to first experience their true power, at least in some measure. And in order to even identify constriction as an action, students have to have an experience of expansiveness to compare it to. For those reasons, before taking students into their habitual response patterns, I spend a good deal of time with them cultivating new skills of power and love. Power and love are expansive and symmetrical, the opposites of and antidotes to smallness and twistiness. So we will begin the actual somatic work of this book with some exercises to give you the experience of power.

THE NATURE OF POWER

The way to break through the habit of constriction is to learn power. Warmhearted power changes everything. Responding to a threat by speaking the truth, by voicing your feelings and needs, and saying NO—that is power. Being able to break the perpetrator's arm if he attempted to fondle you again—that is safety.

Powerlessness is constriction of breath, tensing of muscles, shrinking of posture. Powerlessness involves patterns of body sensation, posture and movement which are small and uneven. They are constricted or collapsed, and they are lopsided or twisted. Power is a state of expansiveness and symmetry. The empowered, centered state is open, bright, vigorous, soft, smooth, stable, fluid, massive, light, balanced and even. This is at once a physical, emotional and spiritual state. Physical learning processes lead to a grasp of emotional and spiritual aspects of empowerment.

Power is the ability to control the environment in order to maintain one's safety and secure one's needs and desires. Power involves the elements of force and control. Power has to do with such qualities of body organization as solidity, weight, rootedness, resoluteness and tenacity. The body organization which gives rise to physical power is also the source of emotional and personal power and the capacity for powerful action in one's life.

• • • • •

Many people believe that power is by its essence bad. We have all heard that “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” The brutality and abusiveness that often pass for power are really just fear and weakness manifesting as hurtfulness. True power is not bad. True power is loving and nurturing.

It is important that the power you acquire be loving. Power without love is brutal and abusive. Power with love is healing. Brutal power is harmful to the person who wields it. Abuse survivors will often reject all power because the only power they have ever seen is brutal, and they are repulsed by the idea of becoming anything like their abusers. There is such a thing as warmhearted, loving power, and it is the foundation for true humanity. Even self-defense actions, such as breaking a person’s arm, can be done in a respectful, loving manner. We will work extensively with the integration of power and love in this book.

• • • • •

The painful feelings that result from abuse cannot heal as long as you continue to be powerless. Whatever feelings and behavior have resulted from your abuse, they have persisted partly because they seemed like the best or only way to handle the pain and survive. The goal of empowerment work is to learn how to create a centered, empowered state and use it in place of your habitual patterns of fear and weakness.

Many coping strategies that survivors develop are really expressions of powerlessness. Behaviors from dissociation and body numbness, to overeating, to smoking and alcohol use, or over-exercising can all serve to as forms of anesthesia and thereby help survivors cope with their lives. Though they are effective as ways of coping with the abuse, they are nonetheless painful and costly. Useful but painful coping strategies cannot be eliminated as long as you continue to be powerless. The way to overcome dysfunctional coping strategies is to replace them with new options that are clearly more effective and more comfortable as survival tools.

• • • • •

Practicing mastery of the actual situation of abuse is necessary. If you were yelled at, you need to keep breathing, maintain a focused posture, and tell a person who is yelling at you to stop. If you were slapped, you need to maintain a state of relaxed alertness, actually stop a slap, and experience that you can physically control an attacker. If you were abandoned, you need to be able to speak your truth and take the practical steps necessary to survive your abandonment and find nurturance and connection.

You need to stay fully aware, relaxed, alert, and loving, and in that internal state practice actions of external mastery. That bonding of inner wholeness and outer mastery is what will allow a deep healing of old wounds.

YOUR BELLY

You can begin your mastery of power by developing an awareness of the core of your body.

RELAXING YOUR BELLY: EXPERIMENT & PRACTICE

Get up for a moment and walk around. What does your belly feel like? Do you suck your gut in? Many people hold their bellies tense and sucked in. If you do, how does that affect your breathing?

How do you feel about your belly? Many people are ashamed of their bellies and try to hide them or make them look smaller.

In order to increase your awareness of how you hold the core of your body, consciously tighten your belly, anal sphincter muscles, and genitals and then walk around. Really grip those muscles hard. How does that affect your movement? Notice how stiff and strained this makes your legs, hips and lower back and your movement as a whole. Notice how restricted it makes your breathing.

By the way, as you try this exercise, notice whether your clothes are comfortably loose. If they are tight, there will be a constant pressure on your body. Your muscles will actually tense up and fight the pressure, whether you notice it or not, and it will be hard to relax your belly. As a general rule, in relaxation and in everything else that will be discussed in this book, it will help to wear loose, comfortable clothes.

Now, stand and alternate tightening your belly and relaxing it. When you relax it, let it plop out.

Next try releasing your belly—without doing a preliminary tightening. However you normally hold your belly, just let it plop out. Along with softening your belly, for greater relaxation, consciously allow your genital and anal muscles to relax. Was there tension to release even when you had not first deliberately tensed your belly? What does it feel like to let your belly relax fully?

Most people experience a noticeable release even when they had not first tightened their bellies deliberately, and they realize from this that they had been unconsciously holding themselves tight and that they probably hold themselves tight all the time.

Try walking around again with your belly soft. How does that feel? Most people experience greater ease, fluidity, and solidity in their walk. And that is how walking should be—not tense and constricted. (Occasionally, people who are very stiff will experience discomfort when they relax their abdominal muscles. That is generally because they haven't relaxed and aligned the rest of their body when they relaxed their belly. If you are feeling such discomfort, as you go through the exercises in this book, you will feel more and more comfortable.)

Have you ever been told to suck in your gut? That's anatomical nonsense, though it seems to be a cultural imperative. Sucking in the gut produces a feeling of physical and emotional tension and constraint, though it may be so normal

and familiar that it is never noticed. Why should we all be encouraged to do something which makes us stiff and weak? We have been taught that it looks trim and beautiful/handsome to keep the belly tense.

Think about it for a moment. When do we normally and naturally suck in our gut? When something startles us! Tensing and sucking in the belly is part of the fear/startle response. Isn't it strange that we are all encouraged to live in a permanent fear/startle pattern?

Holding tension in any area of your body makes all of your body uncomfortable, but the muscles in the belly, anus and genitals are especially important. They are the core of the body and the center of movement and balance. Holding tension in these body areas makes it impossible to relax and move freely, strongly and comfortably.

LOOKING RIGHT

Right about now you might be getting a little worried. Am I really recommending letting your belly stay relaxed? Yes, I am. I know that for many people talking about the body or feeling it is uncomfortable. In our culture, the body is often seen as "bad." The belly is bad. Everyone wants to have a flat belly, to get rid of it. Even worse is talking about the pelvis, the genitals and the anal sphincter muscles. Those are our "private" areas, and it's not polite to talk about them.

It is not OK in our culture to talk about the body core. It is not OK to have a naturally rounded, relaxed belly. Suck it in! Pull it up!! But look at babies. Their tummies are soft and free, and that is the anatomically natural way to be.

It is even harder for abuse survivors to talk about the body core. Many survivors of sexual abuse had their pelvises invaded, and they experienced sexuality and sexual arousal as intrusive and demeaning. Even survivors of non-sexual abuse often shut down their body core to suppress gut feelings of fear and anger, and they too don't want to focus attention on a place where they may keep a lot of strong emotion.

More than just *talking* about the pelvic area, many survivors don't want to *feel* that area of the body. There is so much pain associated with it that they just want it to go away. Even worse, allowing the genitals and anus to relax, open up and get wide feels intolerably vulnerable and penetrable.

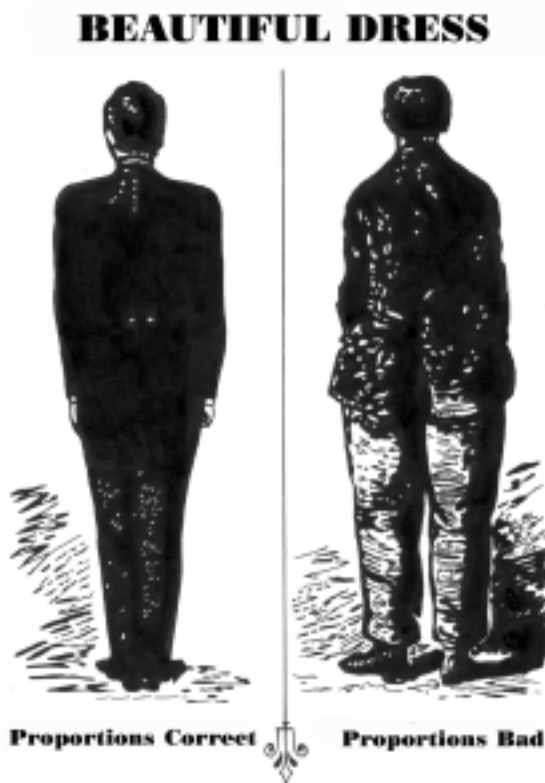
However, using the belly/pelvis properly is crucial in finding your wholeness and your strength. You cannot become whole if you leave out big parts of your body. If talking about this area of the body makes you uncomfortable, that emotional discomfort will translate directly into physical tension in the muscles of your pelvis and belly, which will interfere with your ability to feel, move and act with sensitivity and strength. What we are doing here is just instruction in the basic anatomy and engineering of the body. If you want the "machine" to run right, you have to make sure all its parts are adjusted correctly.

If the *Relaxing Your Belly* exercise makes you uncomfortable (or arouses terror or tears), just hang on for a little while. First we will look further at the

general cultural attitude toward the belly, and after that we will do some exercises to give you new tools which will help with your discomfort.

Many people find the idea of letting their bellies relax to be totally unacceptable. Our culture has very specific ideas about how the body should be used and what makes a person nice to look at. Relaxing the belly is just *not* the thing to do! But let's take a look at some drawings. They are drawings of figures from advertisements that appeared in various places. Looking at ads is a good way of examining our culture's values. The way advertisements show the body exemplifies our culture's ideals of strength and beauty, and I suspect advertisements go a long way toward shaping our ideals as well. Ads are effective when they tap into our ideals, and also they offer role models which shape them.

This first drawing was copied from a cookie wrapper and is a good illustration of the way we think about the body. When I show this to people in workshops, the overwhelming majority agree that the figure on the left labeled "correct" does indeed look much better than the "bad" figure on the right. However, when I ask which man could more easily dodge a car that was heading right for him, almost everyone will choose the "bad" figure. People easily recognize that the so-called bad figure is more relaxed, balanced and ready to move, but they have learned to believe that the tense, constricted, top-heavy, immobile figure is *good*.



This identification of beauty and power with tension can be seen in the second drawing as well. There is obvious tension in the face, the cock of the hips, and the wide stance. The advertisement text that went with the photograph was: “For the coolest guys only, tough new urban hardware: just what you need to carry off a confident attitude.” The verbal message reinforces the equivalence of power and tension by defining “cool” and “confident” as “tough” and stemming from hardness. There is an air of angry sexuality about the ad. The irony is that the man’s stance is tense and immobile, just what would prevent him from moving easily and powerfully if he did have to fight off or escape from some attack. In particular, there is so much tension in the pelvis that free and pleasurable movement there would probably be impossible too.

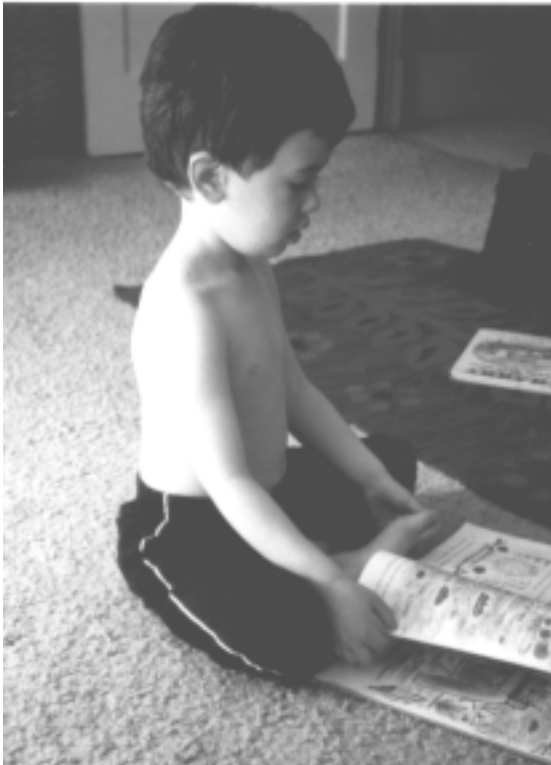
Women too have their stylized ways of doing tension. Look at the next drawing. The text in the ad asked “What makes a swimsuit sexy?” And the answer was “Lots of beautiful shape.” However, look at what is passed off as beautiful shape. Standing on high heels, the woman’s feet are not in contact with the ground. Her knees, hips and low back are locked and rigid. Her left arm is held back in an



awkward and tense position. (Try standing that way and see how you feel.) Her neck and face are tense. She is bound and rigid, without the softness that would allow her to move in the supple, balanced way that is the basis of grace and power. And yet when I show this photograph in workshops, people initially perceive the model as looking beautiful. Perhaps I am unusual, but I enjoy looking at people who are free, relaxed, powerful and graceful. I don’t find tension, awkwardness and weakness at all beautiful.

Many ads showing women equate tension with beauty and strength, much as men's ads do. There is, however, a second category of women's poses, and that is, for lack of a better term, the *sex kitten* pose, shown in the next photograph. In this pose, women hold weak, twisted positions, intertwining messages of helplessness and seductiveness. Again, most people I show this fourth drawing to see the woman as beautiful and seductive. My first thought when I saw the ad this came from was that the woman probably had low back problems. Notice how her head, neck, back, hips and legs are held in curves which totally undermine the body's support structure. Nothing sits squarely atop anything. There is no foundation for stability or strength.

Just for comparison, examine this photograph I took of my son when he was about four years old. This photo shows how young children typically sit. The photo was spontaneous and un-



posed. It shows the anatomically normal way to sit, which most adults have lost. Notice how effortlessly straight my son holds his body. Rather than slumping over to look at the book he is reading, he rotates his head on top of his spinal column, maintaining graceful, efficient weight support while aiming his eyes downward. Notice that his shoulders are relaxed and rounded, his chest soft, and his belly released. This is very close to what the cookie wrapper defined as "proportions bad," yet it is supple, graceful, strong and balanced.

Our culture places trimness before us as the ideal of beauty, but if you look under the skin of that idea, trimness turns out to be another name for tension.

Certainly exercising and being in good shape are good for you and are part of looking good. If you exercise and are in good shape, your belly and all the rest of you will be well-toned. However, the artificial trimness of postural tension and deliberate sucking in of the gut is not the same as being well-toned, and it is not good for you.

Sucking in your gut creates tension and weakness throughout the body. If you bring that dedication to tension with you to the task of recovering your strength and wholeness, you will be taking two steps back and one step forward.

In order to become whole, you need to be willing to feel how your body operates and do what will make you truly relaxed and comfortable.

Almost always when I teach about relaxing the belly and letting it plop out, I must spend time combating the notion that sucking in the gut looks better. People very quickly feel for themselves that they breathe and move more easily when they let their bellies out, but often they feel fat and sloppy. They feel embarrassed to go out in public looking relaxed and balanced. For many people it takes a good deal of practice to feel comfortable with being comfortable.

When I teach about relaxation, another question that always comes up is about the difference between relaxation and limpness. Relaxation is not just limpness, though many people think of it that way. I would prefer to define *relaxation* as using only the effort appropriate to the task at hand. If you use one hundred pounds of effort to pick up a fifty pound weight, that is tense and unrelaxed. If you use only fifty pounds of effort, then you are as relaxed as you can possibly be while still getting the job done. If you are lying in the sun with your eyes closed, listening to the birds, resting and dreaming—and expending twenty pounds of effort in your muscles—that certainly is not relaxed. It is more work than the task needs.

People often don't monitor their internal processes as they move and act in order to move efficiently, strongly and gracefully. Empowerment, not limpness, is the goal of the relaxation training that *Winning is Healing* provides.

BREATHING

Breathing is a crucial element in the skill of alert relaxation. Breathing is an odd activity. It is something which normally is involuntary and automatic but which is easily controlled consciously. It is a fundamental process in both rest and fight-or-flight activity. By breathing during fight-or-flight actions in a manner that is involved in rest, you can actually balance yourself between the stable state of rest and the alert state of emergency activity. You can keep your mind and body relaxed and alert and ready to deal with the problems confronting you.

And if the discussion and exercises concerning the belly and pelvis have made you feel anxious, relaxing your breathing will help you let go of the anxiety. Actually, a major purpose for relaxing your belly was to prepare you for relaxing your breathing.

AWARENESS OF YOUR BREATHING: EXPERIMENT

I am quite sure that you are breathing as you read this. But are you aware of *how* you are breathing?

What parts of your body move as you breathe in? Do you feel movement, however great or slight, in your chest, belly, back, neck, legs, or arms? What about in your face? Or anywhere else? Where do you feel the most and least movement?

What parts of your body move as you breathe out?

What are the movements of inhalation and exhalation like? Are they steady, uninterrupted and flowing? Are there stops and starts? Does one part of your breath feel more or less tense than another?

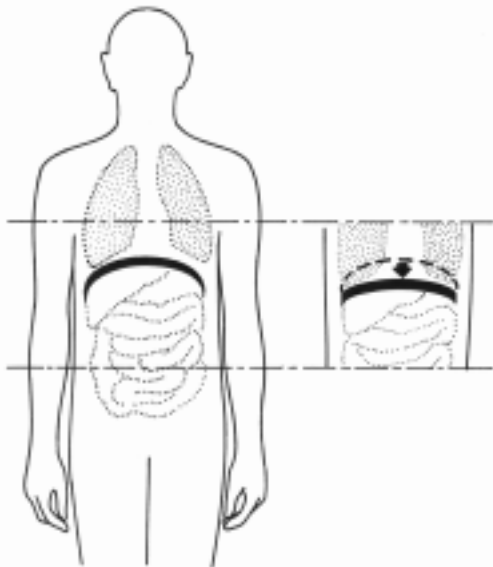


Before you learn the following breathing and relaxation exercise, you need to know some facts about how breathing actually works. The first fact is that the lungs don't do the movements of breathing. The lungs are passive sacks that allow contact between the blood and the air so that oxygen can be taken in and carbon dioxide given off.

So, if the lungs don't do the movements of breathing, what does? Imagine taking a bottle, cutting the bottom off, and taping a balloon onto the bottom. Now imagine pinching the balloon and pulling down on it. That would pull some air in through the neck of the bottle. Next imagine releasing the balloon. The balloon would spring back and the air would puff out.

That is how breathing works. There is a muscle called the diaphragm. It is a dome-shaped muscle in the chest which functions much as the balloon does on the bottle. It is dome-shaped when it is relaxed. When it tenses, it pulls tight, flattens out and pushes down. That is the equivalent of the balloon being pulled down, and it is that action of the diaphragm which sucks air into the lungs.

The key point is that there is a bunch of soft stuff below the diaphragm—the stomach and intestines and such—and that all has to go somewhere when the diaphragm pushes down. Flesh is pretty much incompressible, so it can't be squeezed smaller. It can't move up, of course, and it also can't move down. Down below is the pelvis and the web of muscles that comprises the floor of the pelvis.



Action of the diaphragm.

Have you ever watched a baby breathe? When babies inhale, what happens to their tummies? They expand. When the diaphragm pushes down, everything below is displaced outward, primarily to the front where the abdominal muscles can allow movement (but to some extent to the sides and back since the rib cage allows some movement there as well). This is how infants breathe, and it is the anatomically natural way to breathe, but it is not how most adults breathe.

Stand tall. Throw back your shoulders. Suck in your gut! We are taught to breathe wrong! When will someone naturally throw back their shoulders, elevate their chest, inhale, and suck in their gut? When they are startled and scared. Americans have enshrined the fear-startle response as their idea of the right way to breathe.

I wonder whether this is related to the high incidence of child abuse in our society. A conservative estimate would suggest that twenty-five percent of our children are physically and/or sexually abused, emotionally abused, or suffer from neglect. I have seen estimates that about twenty-five percent of girls and fifteen percent of boys are sexually abused, and that doesn't include the numbers of children who are abused in other ways or simply neglected, but let's be conservative and go with an overall twenty-five percent figure. That's a lot of kids! And there are a lot of adults who, whether they know it or not, feel the pain and terror of being an abuse perpetrator.

The fear-startle response is the body's response to pain and fear, and people who are abused or who abuse others get stuck in the moment of abuse. In other words, their bodies continue to live in the fear-startle response until they heal.

Maybe we have come to think the fear-startle response is normal, and even desirable, because all around us everyone is doing it. It has come to look right to us.

Now you know why we started this section by paying attention to relaxing the belly. It is important in reducing body tension and in setting the stage for the breathing exercise which follows.

SOFT BREATHING: PRACTICE

Stand up. Now, touch your belly and notice whether you suck in your belly or let it expand when you inhale. Then touch your low back, and touch your chest. Do they expand when you inhale?

Let your belly relax, and keep it relaxed as you inhale. Let the air fall gently down into your tummy as you inhale, and let your tummy expand. (Of course the *air* stays in your lungs, but this image will help you feel the *movement* all the way down into your belly.) Your belly should be the focal point of your breathing, but it is important to let your chest and back also swell gently as you inhale.

Compressing your belly as you inhale rigidifies your chest and belly and back and creates a lot of tension in your body. However, if you have gotten used to sucking in your gut as you inhale, breathing in a more relaxed manner will feel strange. At first you may even have the strange sensation that it feels physically better to breathe from your belly, but it is so unfamiliar that it feels uncomfortable to breathe more comfortably.

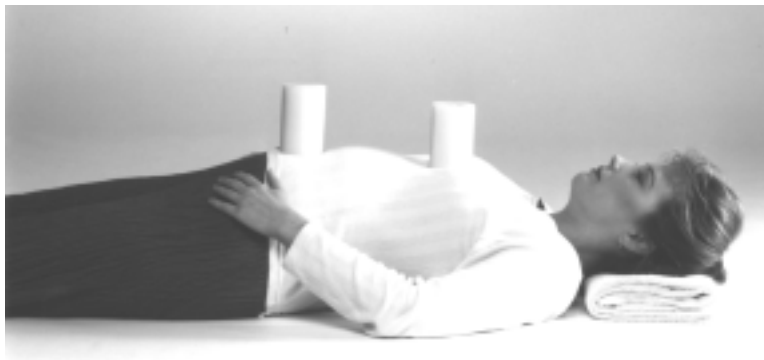
If expanding and inhaling is difficult, at first you may have to deliberately push your belly out as you inhale just to get the rhythm. Later you can give up this extra effort.

Some people find it very hard to figure out how to either expand or push out their bellies. A way to help with this is to lie down on your back, with pillows under your head and knees, put a fist sized stone (or something similar) on your belly just below your belly button, and concentrate on raising the stone by inhaling. Sometimes it helps to physically push the stone upward and then keep your tummy up while you inhale. Pushing up may take some effort, but eventually you should find a non-effortful way of expanding your tummy.

Try walking around as you breathe from your belly. How does that movement feel?



Chest breathing.



Belly breathing.

Done properly, breathing and expanding is very relaxing. Breathing is supposed to be a gentle, internal massage, and it is very comfortable when it is. Most people, when they try walking or doing other movements in the overall state of pelvic release and soft breathing, feel that their movement is easier, better balanced, more graceful, more coordinated and much more solidly connected to the ground.

The point of this chapter was to give you your first experience of using body processes to change yourself. You have had your first experience of a state of empowerment and wholeness which will allow you to move forward in your healing from your abuse. The rest of the book will continue to help you work with new elements of awareness, empowerment, love and safety.

You can do it. You can create changes that you might have thought impossible. The simple exercises you have already done are the beginning of mastery.

INDEX

Note: This index is an attempt to delineate the basic concepts and methods described in the book. I have not included the case studies or exercises in the index, with the exception of one listing, “Practices,” which lists the core exercises in the book.

A

Abuse, 15, 127
 nature of, 101
 results of, 2, 41
 Accuracy of images, 124
 Aikido, 88
 Amplification, 32, 122, 126
 Anesthesia. *See* Body numbness
 Anger, 32, 57, 102
 Anomalous sensations, 122, 126, 130
 Anus, 9
 Arms, 88
 Assertiveness, 96
 Attack/defense model, 2, 20
 Attention, 35, 36, 48, 49, 52
 Attitude. *See* Exercises, proper attitude
 Authenticity of images, 124
 Awareness, 48. *See also* Body awareness
 Awareness juice, 35

B

Being In Movement® training, 2, 18
 Belly, 8
 Body alignment. *See* Posture
 Body Awareness, 3, 30, 31, 48. *See also*
 Awareness. *See also* Body numbness
 Body core, 8, 9, 56, 60
 Body image, 9, 13. *See also* Culture
 Body memory, 49, 50
 Body Numbness, 34, 37, 127. *See also*
 Dissociation. *See also* Body awareness
 Body, role in healing, 3
 Body-based language, 22, 30, 43, 44, 51,
 77, 126. *See also* Operationalism
 Book, 3, 19, 31
 scope, 3
 Boundaries, 82, 92, 96, 98. *See also*
 Powerlessness. *See also* Assertiveness
 Bracing. *See* Rigidity
 Breathing, 13
 anatomy, 14
 exercise, 13, 15, 71, 74, 80, 95

C

Centering, 27, 74, 110. *See also* Power
 Challenge/response model. *See*
 Attack/defense model
 Chest, 12, 14, 15, 42, 61, 71
 Children, natural movement, 12, 15. *See*
 also Movement, natural
 Clothes, 8, 69
 Communication, 43
 Conditioning, 46. *See also*
 Deconditioning
 Constriction. *See* Contraction
 Contraction, 30, 32, 33, 58, 66, 76. *See*
 also Expansiveness
 Coping strategy, 7, 41
 Correction, 46
 Culture, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15, 68. *See also*
 Body image

D

Deconditioning, 42, 46, 128. *See also*
 Conditioning
 Defenses. *See* Coping Strategy
 Diaphragm, 14
 Disconfirmation, 46
 Disempowerment. *See* Powerlessness. *See*
 also Empowerment. *See* Boundaries
 Dissociation, 36
 Dreams, 133

E

Education, 18, 22. *See also* Therapy
 Effort, 56, 68, 88
 Electromyography, 53
 Emotions, 3, 23, 26, 51. *See also*
 Mind/body connection
 Empowerment, 2, 25, 128, 129. *See also*
 Power. *See also* Powerlessness
 Empty logic, 24, 131, 132. *See also*
 Interpretation
Ethical Use of Touch in Psychotherapy,
 25

Ethics, 136
Exercises, 19
 calibration, 29
 learning process, 20
 pacing, 5, 18
 permission, 25
 proper attitude, 21, 23
 readiness, 21, 24
 safety, 24
Expansiveness, 6, 42, 81. *See also*
 Contraction
Eyes, 90

F

Face, 89
Facilitator, 24
Fear, 32
Fear/startle response, 9, 15, 33, 34. *See also* Tension
Feelings. *See* Emotions
Fight-or-flight, 13. *See also* Fear/startle response
Following the body, 50, 122, 130. *See also* Tracing
Forgiveness, 98

G

Gallwey, Timothy, 48
Genitals, 9, 66

H

Hatred, 76
Healing, 7, 25, 42, 97, 100
Hunter, Mic, 25

I

Images, 50, 122, 124
Inguinal power, 63, 67
Inner Tennis, 48
Integrity, 136
Intention, 44, 50, 52, 54, 79, 80. *See also*
 Mind/body connection
Interpretation, 24, 43, 125. *See also*
 Empty logic

J

Jacobson, Edmund, 53

L

Language, atomistic, 132

Learning, 41
Legs, 83
 opening, 65, 67, 68
Limpness, 13, 32, 33
Love, 6, 7, 42, 77, 78, 98

M

Meaning, 32, 58
Memory, 124
Micromovement, 53
Mind/body connection, 51, 53, 75
Mouth, 94
Movement
 ideal, 18, 59
 natural, 15
Movement experiment, 2, 5, 28, 42
Mumbling, 93
Muscle, 53, 63

N

Natural movement, 12
Neutrality, 24, 125, 128, 131

O

Operationalism, 44

P

Pain, 74
Passivity, 97
Pelvic floor muscles, 9, 58, 59, 66, 73
Pelvis, 56, 60, 71
 rotation, 61, 83
Permission, 25
Perspective taking, 21, 23, 26
Philosophy of life. *See* Theory of life
Posture, 60, 63, 66, 67, 86, 87
 optimal, 59, 66
Power, 1, 3, 6, 56, 108
 development, 2, 67, 76, 83
 nature of, 1, 6, 7, 42, 59, 68, 78, 101
Powerlessness, 6, 7, 25, 28, 32, 33, 41, 58. *See also* Empowerment
Practices, 15, 71, 76, 79, 80, 86, 90
 nature of, 5
Professionals, 4
Psoas muscle, 63, 71

R

Readiness, 21, 24, 127
Readiness for the attack, 33
Reductionism, 22

Relaxation, 13
 belly, 8
Replacing, 47, 57
Retraumatization, 25, 110
Rigidity, 49, 56, 58

S

Safety, 5, 19, 24, 25, 112. *See also*
 Exercises
 safety contract, 5
Scope. *See* Book, scope
Self, 127
Self worth, 111
Self-awareness, 28
Self-blame, 118
Self-defense, 7, 28, 57, 97, 100, 111, 115
Self-protection, 2, 7
Self-regulation, 28
Silence, 92
Sitting, 61, 63, 66, 68
 centered, 63, 66, 67
 towel support, 69
Speaking, 92
Speaking truth, 7, 124
Spinal Column, 60
Struve, Jim, 25
Symmetry, 6

T

Tension, 12, 30, 33
Theory
 local/universal, 45
 testing, 45

Theory of life, 44
Therapy, 57
Throat, 93, 95
Tongue, 93
Touch, 25
Towel sitting, 69
Tracing, 126
Trauma, 41
 nature of, 4
Truth of images. *See* Accuracy of images

U

Unbendable arm, 88

V

Values, 10
Verticality, 59, 66, 87
Victimhood, 97, 101
Violence, 100
Vision. *See* Eyes
Voice. *See* Speaking
Vulnerability, 9, 58, 68, 117

W

Walking, 86
Will. *See* Intention
Winning, 25

Y

Yielding, 119, 122