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MUSCLES, MINDFULNESS AND MEANING

THE PRACTICE OF GETTING IN TOUCH WITH BASIC MUSCLE SENSATIONS
AS A BODY/MIND/SPIRIT MEDITATION OF INESTIMABLE VALUE
IN THE LIFE PROCESS OF GROWTH AND INTEGRATION

by

Peggy Knorr

When you have a muscle tested in the Touch For Health way, are you ever startled when it comes up weak? "Surprising," you say, "I'm not feeling all that bad!" At other times, you expound on the emotions of tiredness, inadequacy, helplessness, etc. which you feel when you have a weak muscle. When it is strengthened, does it feel any different? You may not feel too much change in the muscle itself, but you probably declare that you have a feeling of lightness and ease, and that you now can hold your limb in position without effort! You might even project your feelings on to the testor, claiming that he or she isn't pushing as hard this time! If this little scenario sounds familiar, you may want to ask yourself, the next time you have a muscle tested, whether you are feeling the actual muscle itself or whether you are feeling the emotions associated with a strong or a weak muscle. In other words, are you talking about the feeling or are you experiencing it?

Mostly, we feel the results of the muscle testing, but not the signals vibrating from the muscles themselves. Our responses, in general, are on a level of feelings and sensations in the body as a whole and as concepts in our minds, but the individual muscular and cellular level sensations have been difficult to pinpoint and have not been felt in consciousness.

We seem to operate on a feeling of good, bad or indifference in our minds, and unless our muscles are painful, we are largely oblivious to the actual signals that they give out, taking them very much for granted and avoiding the ecstasy which is hidden in their depths and which can be ours to experience. Their quiet, beautiful, fluent language with which they are continually talking to us all the time, is lost to us.

To learn to feel your muscles consciously, you must first realize that their language

is one of movement. You can learn about them, touch them (most of them), see where they are and what they look like, learn what they do, how they do it, what their functions are, learn how they relate to the meridians etc. etc.... and this is all very helpful in knowing about them, but to hear them and feel them and understand them, you have to go below the threshold of conscious hearing and listen with your inner sense/ear. You have to reach beneath the knowledge you have about them and feel their fibres draw together as they contract, feel their snake-like quality shortening their whole structure as they tighten up into solidified energy...and then...as Yang turns to Yin, feel the way they have of gradually releasing.... letting go.... softening.... lengthening.... until they are felt as being mellow and limber and supple.

Muscles are something like giants in their castles. Their messages are not too obvious - in fact they can be downright illusive! Going about their regular business, we can hardly detect them feelingwise - only resultwise - in what they do or don't accomplish, but their effect is always present, and we usually treat them with great respect and avoid getting into direct contact with them.

But Beware! When they begin to feel that we aren't using them in the right way, or if they feel unappreciated...or maybe even lonely...Look Out! Great rumblings are felt in the land!...and do we know it!...They can make life miserable for us!

Mostly, though, we seem to feel that as long as muscles are not felt, they must be OK!... Not so!...The ostrich approach will get us nowhere! We need to make friends with these unpredictable giants! Of course, we don't only want to understand them because of the harm they might do to us, but also because of the benefits which a partnership can bring.

I believe that the more we can communicate with our muscles, which after all are an integral part of ourselves, the more we can own and BE our bodies and the more fluid and flexible they can become, and the more we can live in peace with them and enjoy them. And this goes for our whole being. The more we recognize and appreciate and learn to love each part of ourselves, the more we have available to us with which to express the divinity which is us!

When we are in absolute top form, then our whole body sings and radiates shining light! Probably that is the only time when we actually really do feel our muscles, along with all other parts of our body, holographically - individually and as a whole - because then our minds and feelings and body are all unified, like a dynamic orchestra in perfect harmony and timing. Then our whole self vibrates with the rhythms of the universe! Too poetic? Far fetched? Not according to the world's greatest teachers, the mystics, the

ones who have made it!

Most of the time though, we are not in top form and we need to work continuously to stay in balance. I feel that the more we add the power of mindfulness to our Touch For Health balancing, the more the Body/Mind/Spirit will blend into harmony for deeper level benefit. When we practice mindful awareness with Touch For Health, we are programming the mind to begin feeling the body the way it does when it is in top form, activating the muscles to dance and sing. And they rejoice because they have been recognized and appreciated, and their transformed vibrations permeate the whole consciousness.

That is what the trainings of T'ai Chi and certain forms of Movement Therapy are all about. Steady disciplines in which one uses great awareness and concentration to get in touch with one's body from an inside dimension, for an integrated Body/Mind/Spirit. And that's when the orchestra plays from the very heart of one's Being, from the depths of the nucleus of the soul, thundering out with the sweetest music imaginable, to the very furthest cellular extremity of one's existence; from the center-most point of each cell to its furthest periphery and from the microcosmic center...of the center...of the center...of the center.....An impossible vision for us humans to realize, with all our frailties, dis-eases, quirks and foibles? Not at all! In the holographic sense, if we can communicate with one part...or one part of one part within a part.....have we not already communicated with the divine pattern of the whole? Lofty thoughts, completely unconnected with our everyday pragmatic world? Unworkable, inconceivable, except in the far reaches of the mind? A great teacher once said..."if you have done it unto one of the least of us, you have done it also unto ME"....if you work with the very smallest, most mundane part of you that you can contact, you have already contacted ME, the WHOLE, the UNIVERSAL!.....

And where to start?..... With the awareness of one little muscle!

There are many meditative teachings which we can use to experience more of ourselves. Hatha Yoga is one of them. I have already mentioned T'ai Chi and Dance Therapy. Another is Progressive Relaxation, the work of Edmund Jacobson, which is based on experiencing what he calls 'residual tension', in which one is able to release progressively deeper and deeper levels of tension in muscles at rest. Charlotte Selver's Sensory Awareness, is the sensing of exquisite subtleties in profoundly simple movements. Buddhist Satipatthana Vipassana Mindfulness or Insight Meditation and the discipline called The Practice of the Presence of God, are both ways of getting in touch with every movement and intention in ordinary, everyday activities.

And then of course, there is Touch For Health! Since we are Touch For Health'ers, what better place to start, but right in our own back yard....muscle testing....with awareness!....and preparatory to that, fine tuning into your own muscles.

Here is a muscle sensitivity exercise with which you can begin to play the awareness game! It should take around 10 minutes or so, if done at a slow enough pace to allow you to zero in. Don't be deceived with how simple it is!

LET'S TAKE THE PECTORALIS MAJOR CLAVICULAR, RIGHT SIDE.

1. With your right arm at rest at your side, put your mind on your relaxed right PMC. Just direct your thoughts to that area. Remember what it feels like - you'll be revisiting it in Step 6.

2. Still not moving your right arm, feel your right PMC with your left hand, while you flex the muscle up and down a little, (something like Pop-Eye does with his Biceps) so it pushes your left hand up and down slightly. Only flex it enough so that you feel the PMC itself moving, not the arm,(yet).

3. Now, still with your left hand in place, put your right arm in about half way extension position of the PMC (at an angle, down and out to the side, thumbs down), and flex your muscle again, a tiny bit more this time, so it moves your arm ever so slightly up and down. (If you're doing it correctly, your arm will just jiggle a little bit).

4. This time, your arm finally gets to be lifted! (Notice there is a fine line of difference between lifting your arm and letting the muscle lift it!) With your left hand still in place, begin using your PMC very slowly and very gradually, so you can feel it as it is working to contract, bringing your arm up and in all the way. Be aware, if and when the PMC gets jerky or quits working a little, whether another muscle, (usually the Anterior Deltoid), begins to take over, changing the direction in which the arm is being lifted. Play around with this for a while until you really get a deep feeling of the PMC as it pulls into contraction.

5. Repeat Steps 2. thru 4. without your left hand in position, and notice if there are any differences of feeling. You may find yourself zeroing in, in different ways than before.

6. Repeat Step 1. and compare your present muscle feeling with what you remember experiencing when you first started the exercise.

7. Last Step! Compare your right PMC with your left PMC! If you feel any difference, you may want to go through the whole exercise again on your left side, just to even yourself up!

This type of Fine Tuning exercise, as you see, has nothing to do with strengthening or 'fixing' muscles, (although it may do that as a side effect), but has to do with simply experiencing muscles, for greater enhancement of personal clarity. Like any other discipline, it is not always for everyone. The intense concentration required sometimes elicits a spectrum of responses ranging from anger, impatience, anxiety, boredom, fatigue etc. to a 'what's that all about' or 'this is making a big thing out of nothing' kind of feeling. If you experience any of these reactions, I would encourage you to stay with them, recognize them for what they are and see if they change....or maybe try the exercise again at another time. The practice of getting deeper and deeper (or higher and higher) into this type of awareness can lead one into exquisitely peaceful and integrated feelings and intimations of somehow familiar deja-vu pathways in the subliminal recesses of soul dimensions, long since forgotten by the conscious mind. These muscle giants of ours and the genies of our minds, when they are teamed up together, are potent agents for change and growth!

As if this paper has not been poetic enough (!) I ask your indulgence if I add one more thought, this in the form of a poem, written by John Moffit 'To Look At Anything' quoted from Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle.

To look at anything,
If you would know that thing,
You must look at it long:
To look at this green and say
'I have seen spring in these
Woods,' will not do--you must
Be the thing you see:
You must be the dark snakes of
Stems and ferny plumes of leaves,
You must enter in
To the small silences between
The leaves,
You must take your time
And touch the very peace
They issue from.

Peggy Knorr has been involved with Touch For Health since its inception and was one of the original six who attended the first I.T.W. in 1973. She is an E.K. Instructor and also teaches T'ai Chi Ch'uan, T'ai Chi Chih, Body Movement and Sensory Awareness, and the Bates Method of Vision Re-education. She is presently on the path of fulfilling her requirements to become a Touch For Health Foundation Faculty member.