

Intentionality, Body Mechanics, and Holiness: Being In Movement® As a Process of Transformation

by Paul Linden, PhD

The words “heal”, “health”, “whole” and “holiness” all stem from the same root word, and they point toward a single underlying state of being. It is a state of awareness, power and compassion. It is a state of wholeness, in which we live fully ourselves and live in a full relationship to the people and the world around us. There is a progression that goes from healing to health to wholeness and into holiness.

Beneath the surface of many difficulties people face is a single underlying problem — fragmentation, separation and alienation, from themselves, from other people and from the world itself. This is the opposite of health and wholeness. Working with the body is a way of coming into awareness of and healing the fragmentation that is so much a part of us. Being In Movement® is a method of somatic education which focuses on *intentionality* and *body mechanics* as a path of self-exploration and a way of cultivating wholeness.

Intention

What is intention? It is the will to move and act. Speaking in terms of the *body*, it is the physical process of directed extension into space. We can get at what this means by trying an exercise which focuses on the will to move. Stand up with your eyes shut and imagine that on the floor in front of you about ten feet away is something that you really want. It is what you have dreamed of having. Feel how much you want it, and actually commit yourself to the movement of going over to get it. Feel *in your body* that desire to move.

Once you establish this feeling, you will feel yourself “involuntarily” tipping forward. You will actually *move* toward the object you desire just a very little bit. (Most people can create this feeling when they focus on it, though many need some guidance to home in on it.)

This is an experience of how just intending to do a movement begins the actual process of movement on a very subtle level. First there is the thought of what to do, then a desire to do it, and then there is a *commitment* to acting on that thought. That commitment is the intention, and it leads directly to slight muscular changes which organize the body for the movement. Last would normally come the execution of the large movement itself. Whether we are conscious of it or not, this very subtle process of imaging and willing underlies every movement. This process of intention is what shapes the physical body and its movement.

As people begin to pay attention to the body feeling of reaching into the world and willing actions, they usually begin to notice that they do not live fully and equally in every part of their bodies. Ideally, we should be able to turn our attention/intention easily to any part of our bodies or surrounding space, but people often find that they cannot clearly focus intentions with/through certain areas of their bodies or into certain directions of space. There are many reasons for this lack of clarity of focus, from a limited range of daily movements, to sexual abuse, to cultural preferences about body image and movement. (Being In Movement includes body awareness techniques not only for cultivating wholeness but also for tracing back from the lived feeling of fragmentation to the situations and experiences in which people learned to be fragmented. This is often necessary in reclaiming the sense of wholeness, but these techniques will not be discussed in this paper.)

In any case, most people live more in some parts of their bodies and less in others. This is the core of fragmentation and alienation. It is the experience that certain parts of your body are not fully *you*. Living with this alienated body, people feel powerless and unable to live effectively. They feel unsafe and incapable in the world, which further increases their alienation from themselves.

There are many intention exercises that I have developed to help people learn how to live fully and equally in their whole bodies. A simple exercise for creating a more balanced and full intentional field involves standing and reaching into the world. Stand up and feel the soles of your feet. Reach with them down into the ground to a spot five or ten feet below you. Now, while continuing to reach with your feet, also reach up with the top of your head to a spot five or ten feet above you. Reach out to the right with the right side of your body and out to the left with the left side. Reach behind you with the whole rear surface of your body and reach forward with the front of your body. Gently resting in the middle of your body, reach outward — down, up, left, right, forward and back. What does that sense of reaching feel like? Most people experience it as relaxed, aware, balanced, gentle and strong. Most people experience a sense of integration and wholeness when they bring all of themselves into focus in the act of reaching out to all of the world.

Body Mechanics

The imbalance and fragmentation of intention and body image manifest in poor body mechanics. When people have a reduced awareness of their bodies, they will move in ways that are imbalanced and strain-filled. They will over-use some body parts and under-use others. They will move in bent and twisted ways rather than moving in an erect, balanced, efficient manner. In addition to working directly with intention, improving body mechanics is another way of learning to be whole. Two examples of core body mechanics processes will show how focusing on body use can be a path toward wholeness.

The Pelvis: The pelvis and spinal column are the core of the body. It is by the use of the pelvis and spinal column that we position ourselves in the world. The habitual position and manner of use of the pelvis/spinal column unit define our individual postures, which are the movement signatures that portray who we are physically. Lack of structural balance of the pelvis/spinal column unit reduces our ability to move well and interact effectively with the world.

A basic exercise for experiencing this involves examining how the pelvis is used in sitting. Sit on a flat chair without leaning against the backrest. Experiment with the movement of slumping down and sitting up straight. What part of your body do you move to create the action of rising up out of the slump? Most people believe that straightening up is done by throwing their shoulders back or by straightening their backs, and practically no one notices that straightening up is really a function of pelvic rotation. When the pelvis rotates backward, the stack of vertebrae has no foundation on which to rest and it curves and slumps down. (The pelvis can be thought of as a bowl which contains the guts, and "backward" is the direction in which the bowl would rotate to spill out the guts toward the back of the body).

Slump down, feeling how your chest caves in, your head falls forward and down, and your back rounds itself. Then try rotating your pelvis forward. How do you do this? There are two very different ways of rotating the pelvis forward. To understand this, consider that there are basically two ways to tip a bowl forward — lifting the rear edge or lowering the front edge. Most people will use the extensor muscles of the back to lift the rear edge of the pelvis. This creates tension and discomfort in the back, which is why everyone will sit up "straight" for a minute when exhorted to and then give it up as uncomfortable.

The most effective and comfortable form of forward rotation involves using a muscle deep in the core of the body rather than muscles along the surface of the back. It is possible to use the deep, internal psoas muscle (which runs between the top of the thighbone and the front of the spinal column) to create a movement which drops the front edge of the pelvis. This creates a very strong and comfortable physical organization of the pelvis and spinal column. This new awareness of pelvic functioning is easy to learn through direct hands-on teaching but difficult to learn through written instructions. However, a hint might help. Try slumping again, and notice that when you slump, your pelvis rotates so that your genitals point upward. Now, rotate your pelvis so that your genitals point at the floor. Many people find

that following these directions gets them to do a new movement, one that takes place very low in the body, in the hip sockets rather than the back, and this is the movement that engages the psoas.

This new movement is initiated specifically from the pelvis itself, without actively initiating movement from the back and shoulders but simply letting these body parts move as a result of the pelvic rotation. Rotating the pelvis forward to the correct position in the correct way provides a foundation for the spinal column and the torso as a whole and thereby creates upright posture.

Most people experience that using the deep core of the body rather than the back to organize their sitting produces an experience of effortless physical balance, strength and stability. They also experience that this form of body organization produces a psychological feeling of personal power, alertness and strength of will. This sense of physical/psychological stability and ease is a major element in living in a whole way. It is a feeling of being unified, confident and worthy.

The Chest: Another aspect of body use is also very important in achieving wholeness. It has to do with a particular way of living in the chest. This can be experienced through working with imagery and body responses. Imagine someone who is a constant source of irritation and obstruction. Get into the feeling of anger and resentment. Notice what happens in your body. Most people experience that negative feelings such as fear and anger produce constriction, hardness and imbalance in breathing and the chest. This way of using the chest produces physical awkwardness and weakness in movement, and this powerlessness is a contributing factor to further feelings of fear and anger.

What is the opposite of this constriction and fragmentation? Everyone has something or someone — perhaps a friend, a lover, a child, a flower, a work of art — something that when they imagine it makes their heart smile. Stand with your eyes closed, imagine whatever it is that makes your heart smile and notice the changes in your body. Most people

experience a softening and warmth in their chests and a deepening of their breathing. These sensations of being "warm hearted" or "tender hearted" are the bodily manifestations of love or compassion.

This process in the chest relaxes and knits together the whole body. Observing your use of your chest is a way of examining how sensitive, empathetic and compassionate you are. Joining the power of the pelvis to the gentleness of the chest results in a more whole wholeness.

Holiness

Paying attention to our ways of being in our bodies and our ways of moving is a way of paying attention to *ourselves*. Working with *intention* and body *mechanics* is a concrete way of identifying our fragmentation and moving toward integration. Focusing on intention aims us in the direction of examining our choices. Focusing on body mechanics aims us in the direction of examining our actions. Each way of examining ourselves offers different information about what we are.

Being In Movement is a practical technology for self-awareness and change, and its focus is on helping people find more centered ways of being and doing. This has practical importance for improving performance in any task, from playing music, to running, to working with computers. It also is important in such emotional work as healing from abuse.

Becoming whole means replacing hardness and fragmentation with softness and integration, which is a way of replacing fear, anger and alienation with strength, respect and empathy. The practice of wholeness is the gateway to holiness, the ability to live in awareness, strength and compassion.

Publications by P. Linden

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