WINNING IS HEALING—BASICS

An Introduction to Body Awareness and Empowerment For Abuse Survivors

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First Edition

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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 Rubenfeld 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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*Winning is Healing—Basics* is being distributed as a PDF file. That is a cross-platform file format (can be read and printed on any computer). The PDF file is 1.8 megabytes and can easily be downloaded at www.being-in-movement.com. Downloading the file will take about 10 minutes with a 56k modem.

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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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WORKSHOPS & PROFESSIONAL TRAININGS

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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Information on BIM workshops and professional training is available at my website: www.being-in-movement.com
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. Constriction can take a number of forms. It may take the form of tensing as a preparation for effort. It may take the form of stiffening in shock. It may take the form of collapse and numbness. Or elements of these can combine. However, constriction makes it hard to think, talk, move, and act freely and effectively. 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.

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 presentation 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 re-
Winning is Healing—Basics

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 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELAXING YOUR BELLY: EXPERIMENT &amp; PRACTICE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel about your belly? Many people are ashamed of their bellies and try to hide them or make them look smaller.</td>
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<tr>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now, stand and alternate tightening your belly and relaxing it. When you relax it, let it plop out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 hardwear: 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 unposed. 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.
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?

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*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.
CHAPTER 3
BACKGROUND CONCEPTS

In order to help you better understand what we are doing together here in this book, this chapter will explain a bit about the background concepts that are the foundation for the work. The more you understand of the teaching/learning process we’re using, the faster and deeper your progress will be.

BEING IN MOVEMENT® MINDBODY TRAINING

I am a somatic educator and a martial artist. For thirty-four years, I have practiced and taught body awareness and movement as a path towards self-understanding, harmony, and efficacy. I have developed a system of body awareness training that I call Being In Movement, and it is the foundation for the abuse recovery work I do.

BIM is an educational process which examines how the structure and function of the body shape and are shaped by one’s sense of Self. BIM examines the self in the world, looking at the interaction among musculoskeletal structure/function; thoughts, feelings, and beliefs; task performance; and ethical behavior. BIM views the body as simultaneously a mechanical object governed by rules of physics and biology and a subjective process of lived consciousness governed by rules of awareness, emotion, energy flow, and purpose. BIM uses movement experiments to help people learn how to examine themselves and develop an integrated mind/body state as a foundation for effective action. Speaking structurally, this state is one in which the musculoskeletal system is balanced and free of strain. Speaking functionally, this state allows stable, mobile and balanced movement. Speaking in terms of intention/energy, this state involves reaching out into the world with a symmetrical, radiant, expansive awareness and will while simultaneously staying anchored in the self. Speaking in psychological/spiritual terms, this state is an integration of power and love.

If you are interested in seeing how this process can be applied in other areas than abuse recovery, you could take a look at the various papers available on my website, www.being-in-movement.com.

HOW TO APPROACH THE EXERCISES

Doing body awareness work can hard work, as well as being empowering and exhilarating. Many people find that therapy is very helpful alongside this work to help with the feelings that arise as you do the somatic exercises.

You can go through the exercises at whatever pace works best for you. You might want to go slowly, doing just one or two exercises a day. You might wish to go even slower, doing an exercise and then giving yourself a few days to digest
the exercise and use it in your life before doing more exercises. Or you might wish to move faster and do a number of exercises at a time. The most important thing is that you go slowly enough not to feel overloaded and overwhelmed by what you experience. It’s a tough call. Getting into contact with your pain is necessary to get rid of it. But becoming overwhelmed by it will not help. So how much is too much? Only you can tell, through trial and error. But my philosophy is to be conservative and go slowly.

If you were working with me, I could monitor your process and pick just the right pace and just the right exercises for you. If you are going through these exercises alone, don’t push yourself. You have plenty of time. It will be better to waste time going unnecessarily slow than to fatigue yourself by going too fast.

*Winning is Healing* is organized in a logical progression. I have organized the exercises to create a gradual process of empowerment. The easier exercises, which you will do first, will strengthen you for the more difficult exercises which you will do later. Since each exercise and each chapter builds on the exercises and chapters before, you will find it most helpful to cover the material in the order it is presented. But if something is not appropriate, you can skip it and come back to it later.

One caution: skipping around in the book, reading an exercise here and there, could be confusing for some people. If you read later parts without first reading some earlier foundational material, you may well misunderstand both my intent and the actual exercises I describe. In addition, if you practice later exercises without the resources developed by the earlier exercises, you may well find yourself unprepared for what you could experience. On the other hand, after you have gone through the book once, it may be very interesting to skip around and re-experience various exercises in different sequences.

Many of the exercises require a partner. You might like doing these exercises in a small group that meets regularly. People could take turns reading the instructions for the exercises and acting as leaders. Doing the exercises with a regular group might provide better structure and motivation. It also might help you get through the exercises if you have people to talk with and support you when you hit the rough spots. And seeing that other people have similar responses in certain areas of work will help you avoid feeling bad about your own difficulties. On the other hand, seeing different reactions can be helpful as well. Everybody starts off precisely where they start off and nowhere else. It is important to respect your limits and needs. Don’t compare yourself to where other people are. You are where you are, and that is where your learning is.

The most realistic practice of the material in this book will lie in putting the body awareness skills to work in your daily life. Nothing succeeds like success. Finding new awareness and new power and using that successfully in your daily activities will strengthen the tendency to remember and use your newfound awareness and power.
THE TEACHING

There are some elements of my teaching that are unfamiliar to most people, and it might help you to be alerted to these elements. The unfamiliarity stems from the fact that my teaching is based on martial arts training.

**Challenge/Response Model:** The first element to consider is the attack/defense model on which my teaching is based. My movement home is in the martial arts. I hold a fifth degree black belt in Aikido and a first degree black belt in Karate. For thirty-four years, Aikido has been my laboratory for study and development. Aikido is a non-violent Japanese martial art. It is both a self-defense form and a way of training yourself to respond calmly, powerfully, and lovingly to threats.

In the martial arts, learning takes place in the context of a problem to be faced and overcome. Without the attack (the problem) there is nothing that needs to be done. And it is in meeting the attack that you can test yourself, determine what you need to improve, and work on change and growth. It is because my roots are in the martial arts that my body awareness teaching takes the form of practical movement experiments and is based on the challenge/response model of investigation.

In all my years of teaching, I have never had someone come to me and say, “My life is perfect. I love everything that comes to me, and I handle it all with grace and ease. Can you please show me how to change that?” People come saying that this or that isn’t easy, or isn’t satisfactory, or isn’t comfortable, and that is what they want changed. They want to find better responses to the challenges in their lives. The challenges that life brings are essentially attacks, and they must be dealt with, so an attack/defense model of teaching/learning makes sense, and that’s what I use.

However, many people find the challenge/response model of investigation odd. They feel it is intrusive or aggressive. However, in Aikido practice, the attack is a gift. A caring, cooperative attacker/partner offers himself as a vehicle for the defender’s practice. Without the attack, the defender would not have the opportunity to practice life-saving self-defense skills. The attacker allows herself to function as a mirror so the defender can see himself. And then the attacker and defender swap roles so the other person gets to practice. Likewise, in work aimed at helping abuse survivors discover their true power, the challenge is a gift that comes from caring.

The fact that facing challenges often makes people uncomfortable is perfect because in that discomfort are revealed the issues they have to face in order to progress. Obviously, just as in therapy, a supportive and nurturing relationship with the facilitator is important. I care about the students I work with, and I try to create a supportive and nurturing atmosphere, but my subject matter is attacks and defenses.

Both survivors and therapists may be disturbed by the process of facing attacks, but for survivors the attack is the whole problem. Whatever else abuse
might be, it is combat. In learning to face and defeat attacks, survivors break the chains of the abuse.

If you read an exercise which seems harsh and disturbing, observe your responses. Keep breathing. Stay in your body. That way, reading the book will itself be an exercise in empowerment. After all, whether you are lifting weights or learning the multiplication tables, pushing your limits is the only way to get better. Try not to let your natural feelings of fear and disgust overpower your determination to confront the enemy and move forward.

It is true that it takes a strong spirit to want to face attacks, learn, and grow. Some survivors are so deeply caught by their powerlessness that they cannot bear the pain of self-examination, growth, and change. The pain of becoming strong may seem greater than the pain of staying powerless, and so they reject the opportunity to be attacked. It always saddens me to see this. However, I know that some people are not at a stage of healing where they can take advantage of the kind of warrior training I offer. Some people need the more verbal, less physical approach of psychotherapy to prepare for the kind of work I do. Some people will grow and eventually become ready, and others will never break free of their powerlessness.

**Maintaining Perspective:** There is a certain approach to feelings that is also part of the martial arts. I have occasionally had Aikido students start crying during practice when some element of the practice triggered old feelings. I have told them that they can cry if they want, but they cannot stop defending themselves. The job in martial art training is to find the calmness and ego distance that will allow you to take a neutral perspective toward your own pain and fear. If you get overwhelmed by that pain and fear, you will not be able to breathe, think or move effectively. Without some psychological distance, you will not be able to defend yourself effectively, and what you most fear will be brought to pass by the fear itself.

I use the same approach in my body awareness training for abuse survivors. When people are caught up pain, terror, numbness, and rage, it is hard to stop to dispassionately study the stuff. But if you can’t study the painful stuff—map it out, notice its regularities, see how it functions and what its results are—how can you ever get enough understanding of it to change it?

Maintaining perspective means finding enough mental/physical distance to be interested in and capable of studying your pain—rather than being overwhelmed by it. This process of simultaneously being under attack and studying both the attack and your ways of dealing with it is the basis of martial art practice. A martial art class is arranged so that the attacks are life-like, so you have a real challenge, but lessened in intensity, so you can afford to practice and develop fighting skills.

An important part of perspective-taking lies in learning to use breathing and body methods to create and maintain a state of mindbody calmness. It is that calmness which allows you to take an objective view of an otherwise overwhelming event.
**Politeness:** Related to my stance as a martial artist is my choice to describe the body work the way it really is. Some people may find some of the descriptions and language in the case studies or exercises disturbing. They may feel that explicit language or explicit descriptions of terrifying and disgusting events have no place in a polite book. However, I have chosen to write the book to portray the actuality of my work with abuse survivors. The language and events are described within the context of their real occurrence in real lessons, and I didn’t elect to “clean up” the presentation because that would have been false to the reality of the work. Disgusting and terrifying things have been done to too many people, and they must be spoken of.

Abuse is not polite stuff. Survivors have the unfair task of healing from the perpetrator’s sickness. In this book you will learn how to create a state of comfort and capability as a foundation for contacting and overcoming abuse. So even in the way I choose to write and talk, I am pursuing that process. By being exposed to the language and events of abuse rather than maintaining a sense of dainty politeness, you will be doing the work of maintaining your power in the face of abuse. By maintaining the state of calm alertness and kindhearted power as you read through the case studies in this book, you will be doing the work the book describes.

**Directive Style:** The very directive approach I take in my work is also related to my martial art background. Martial arts are generally taught in a very directive manner. The task in martial arts training is the rapid and efficient mastery of the defense skills as defined and taught by the instructor, and the job of the student is to learn what the instructor thinks is important to teach. My trauma work is an educational process in which survivors learn skills of awareness and empowerment. The very directive teaching style I use can seem odd or intimidating or even harsh to people used to the very different approach of psychotherapy. However, in reality it is a form of caring and support.

**DISENTANGLING FEELINGS**

Some people are confused by my tendency to study emotions rather than simply respond to them in the ordinary socially appropriate ways. I teach by setting aside the big picture of thoughts, feelings, and ideas and concentrating on objective details of muscle tone, breathing and posture. That clears my vision and prevents me from getting trapped in theories and prejudices. I try to examine what is actually in front of me, without any preconceived ideas to prejudice my view of the situation. My experience is that if I stick with the details, the big picture rapidly becomes clear, often in ways that I would not have gotten to if I’d come with judgments already in place. However, this reductionist way of looking at people might be unsettling to some readers.

Of course I feel empathy and caring as people go through painful feelings, but if I stayed on the level of feelings, I couldn’t help people sort through their behaviors. If I go below them to their physical underpinnings, I can help students
escape from the chains of habitual feelings and find new more useful responses to difficult situations.

It is important to be clear that asking someone to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate emotions is not to say that feelings are bad or that people who have feelings are bad. I am not recommending suppressing all feelings. I think it is perfectly obvious that feelings are the essence of life. However, some feelings really do have to be managed. There really are times when it is more effective not to be swamped by emotions, and there really are emotions that are out of proportion and unhealthful. The trick is to discern inappropriate emotions, but many survivors are so overwhelmed by their emotions (and understandably so) that they cannot maintain enough distance from them to evaluate them while feeling them.

In abuse, people’s feelings are discounted and ignored, so some survivors interpret as abusive any statement that any feeling is inappropriate. If you believe that your emotions are who you are, any suggestion that some emotions are inappropriate or should be managed will be experienced as invalidating and attacking. If feelings are who you are, then calming your feelings will feel like eliminating parts of yourself. Calming yourself will feel like a bit of death. However, think about slum clearance. If slums are defined as being part of the historical truth of a city, and part of the city’s essential character, then knocking down the slums in order to replace them with something better will be resisted. Knocking down inappropriate emotions can be experienced as an attempt to destroy the Self—rather than an attempt to strengthen and heal it. The point of perspective-taking is to gain enough distance from emotions to be willing and able to evaluate and manage them. The trick is to break the chains of old, destructive emotions and live appropriately in the present.

However, people often resist being corrected. All too often, people get defensive when they are offered new information. Rather than seeing a correction as a gift coming from respect and desire to help, they feel that being corrected is demeaning. They feel that having made a mistake means they are bad. Certainly many people have been demeaned when they have made mistakes, and it is understandable that they would react to present corrections on the basis of past experiences. However, it is logically inappropriate to resist being corrected when the correction is appropriate and done in a kind, supportive manner.

It is important to be OK with being shown your mistakes. It’s normal to make mistakes. Relatively few people are perfect. You don’t need to beat yourself up for making mistakes, and you don’t need to protect your feeling of self-worth by refusing new, helpful knowledge. It is most efficient to receive corrections as gifts and then take steps to eliminate the mistakes you have been making.
SAFETY

Let me address readers who will be facilitators. As you work with abuse survivors, it will be important to keep safety in mind.

Readiness: Safety begins with deciding whether someone is ready for this work. I often reflect on who comes to me for lessons. When survivors are referred to me by psychotherapists, I can be fairly sure they can handle the work. When clients have done considerable therapy and have sought out work with the body, with touch, and with self-defense, they are generally ready.

However, there are undoubtedly people who are too fragile to take the pressure of deep body awareness work. I don’t work with people who are suicidal, self-injuring, or in other ways are too distraught or unbalanced to learn centering procedures. Since such people don’t come to me for lessons to begin with, it isn’t much of an issue in my practice. And since I go slowly to start with, if people discover that they are not ready for this work, they can elect not to continue and won’t wind up getting in over their heads.

This work is most appropriate for abuse survivors who are comparatively steady and strong. Are the people you will work with in the early stages of their recovery work or very fragile? Are they ready for the exercises and the feelings you are proposing to explore? Do they have enough ego strength to handle deep contact with their bodies? Do you think that you as a facilitator have enough experience to tell? If you have any doubt about someone’s readiness to do this somatic work, make sure they are evaluated by an appropriate mental health professional. If the person is already working with a therapist, you can (with the student’s permission) talk with the therapist to get feedback about the student’s readiness.

If you are concerned about someone’s readiness for a particular exercise, take the cautious point of view, and don’t do it. I think it is always wise to be conservative and go slowly. Even for people who are well able to handle somatic work, it is always wise to spend time on generic empowerment work before getting into specific personal issues.

Interpretations: An important issue related to safety is the problem of offering interpretations of another person’s experience. It is a human tendency to seek meaning and offer interpretations, but that can be destructive in working with abuse survivors.

Very often interpretations reflect the reality not of the student’s life but of the interpreter’s life. If you fill in a missing element in a survivor’s story or process of thinking, you might be misinterpreting what actually happened.

Even if you are right in your interpretations, it can be damaging. To begin with, you will short circuit the process of learning. Rather than learning how to find their own interpretations, your clients will come to depend on you for interpretations. Beyond that, survivors may resist the interpretations because they haven’t come to them through their own awareness, and that will interfere with any future possibility of their coming to that knowledge on their own.
Retraumatization: Is it safe to touch abuse survivors at all? Or to practice self-defense with them? The argument is often made that survivors of sexual abuse were damaged by touch, so touching them would cause further damage. As Jim Struve, one of the authors of *The Ethical Use of Touch In Psychotherapy*¹, commented, by that argument survivors should not be spoken to either, since they have often been hurt by words. Words and touch are both natural elements of human communication, and the real issue is whether they are used in nurturing, healing ways or not.

Part of the issue of touch is the question of retraumatization. Will being touched or working with physical attacks retraumatize people who have been touched in hurtful ways? In a nutshell, being attacked isn’t in and of itself traumatizing. Losing is traumatizing. Winning is healing!

The difference between further injury and healing lies in empowerment. If a student becomes centered through working with touch or self-defense, he or she experiences triumph rather than trauma. The feeling of success, of being able to *win this time*, produces exhilaration, freedom and healing. It isn’t so much an event itself which is traumatizing but the powerlessness, helplessness and pain which the victim experiences. Consider what it is like falling into deep water. Is that traumatic? Yes, if you cannot swim. But if you are a good swimmer, it’s fun. Being attacked is not a problem. Losing is a problem. Being touched or being attacked and experiencing the ability to successfully handle it breaks the hold of the old traumas.

Facilitators: If you are a practitioner or a survivor acting as a group leader, you should reflect on your level of skill and awareness and make sure not to attempt deeper or more extensive somatic work than you are capable of doing safely. The exercises and skills in this book stand on their own and can be taught from the book without other background or training. However, if you feel nervous about going in some direction of work, you should probably heed that nervousness and not go there. If you feel hesitant to delve into some somatic element, you may wish to further your skills by taking body awareness lessons or by gaining training in *Being In Movement* or other somatic disciplines. (See the note at the front of the book for information about BIM professional trainings.)

Remember to ask permission of your client or fellow survivor before doing anything. “May I touch your tummy?” “Would it be OK to do some work on replacing anger with calmness?” Survivors have had their boundaries forcibly ignored, and so it is especially important to get their informed permission before touching them or doing any other work.

Remember also that just because a person has clearly and explicitly given you permission to do something doesn’t mean that they have actually given you permission. Abuse survivors were trained to acquiesce. They were trained to allow

people with power to do things to them, and they may sometimes give permission because they think that’s what they’re supposed to do. This is a problem. It is a Catch 22. Sometimes a survivor won’t be able to refuse permission until after the work that they aren’t really giving permission to do gets done—with their true permission and participation. Sometimes they will do the work, but they have dissociated with such exquisite skill that you can’t tell they’ve dissociated and aren’t really doing the work at all. As far as I know, I have run into this problem only a handful of times, but it is something to watch for. Just keep this possibility in mind and proceed carefully. It’s all you can do.

Remember, though, you really don’t have to be an expert to use this work. There is much that I do that I couldn’t put into the simple form required for a book, yet there much in this book that you can do. However, you don’t have to know everything to know something. Use what you can, and gradually you will learn to use the rest of the material well.

FRANTIC: CASE STUDY

Martha came in for a lesson feeling frantic. She had realized a couple of days after her last lesson that she felt assaulted by what I had done in the session and was very angry at me. (In the last lesson, we had worked on centering and boundary control. Martha had been sexually abused as a little girl. She had been fondled, so, after getting her permission to try a verbal experiment, I said I would stick my finger up her pussy, and she practiced breathing, staying calm, and telling me clearly and firmly “NO.”)

I asked what I had done which felt like an assault, and she had a hard time even telling me what it was, but finally said it was when I used the word “pussy.” I asked her to define “assault,” and working together we defined being assaulted as being subjected to injurious, detrimental force or pressure of some kind for the benefit of the person applying the force. When she examined my behavior logically and dispassionately, she could easily see that I hadn’t actually injured her or done something for my personal benefit but was simply acting the role of the attacker in a self-defense exercise. I suggested she distinguish between feeling assaulted and actually being assaulted. By keeping in mind that simply feeling something didn’t guarantee the truth of what she was feeling, she was able to gain some distance from the overwhelming emotions she was feeling. That helped her become ready to take control of her emotions and of the world around her.

She could intellectually agree that she hadn’t actually been assaulted, but as she talked about the exercise, she got more and more frantic and began crying. I had her put her hands on her tummy and press her belly outward as she inhaled. Very quickly that calmed her down. She was surprised and said that usually when she forces herself to stop crying her throat hurts, but now she just felt
calm. I pointed out the difference between stopping crying (a negative) and starting Centering (a positive).

Then we went onto the mat, and I told her I was going to stick my finger up her pussy. I moved my hand toward Martha’s crotch slowly so she had plenty of time to remember to relax her belly and breathe. Then I had her swat my arm away, grab my hair, pull my head back to unbalance me, and then throw me down. She was amazed that she could do that and immediately, and enthusiastically, asked if she could do it again. After a few repetitions, she announced that she felt great. She said her body tingled like it was waking up.
CHAPTER 4
POWERLESSNESS

In order to create power, it is important to have a clear understanding of powerlessness, so in this chapter, we will focus on the experience of powerlessness and the different forms that powerlessness can take. Now that you have had at least some experience of the somatic process of empowerment, it ought to feel a bit easier to confront the sensations of powerlessness.

Even though your abuse was unique and your responses to it were uniquely yours, nonetheless there are general patterns that are quite similar in many survivors. As you read, notice what specific elements resonate with your own experience.

There are two general areas of powerlessness. The first is internal, and the second is external. Abuse survivors frequently experience internal mental or physical sensations that are painful and out of control. Such sensations may be self-generated, for example free-floating panic, or they may arise in response to outside events such as being yelled at. The first aspect of winning involves learning skills of physical self-observation and control so that these painful inner feelings don’t rule your life.

The second aspect of winning involves learning to protect yourself from external threats. External threats include both past and present events. To feel free, you must experience your ability to defeat the assaults you experienced in your abuse in the past. You must also practice and master skills for keeping yourself safe in the face of present day threats.

The two areas, of course, are related. If you lack resources for handling threats, you will have inner sensations of fear, anger, and so on. And if you are overwhelmed by such inner sensations, you will be unable to act effectively. So in practical terms, the two areas of challenge must be resolved together.

CONSTRUCTION

How can we get a practical handle on what abuse is and what its effects are? How can we begin to understand powerlessness? When I am faced with a puzzle, I try to create a movement experiment, a small-scale laboratory version of a big, real-life event. What we need to begin the investigation is a small piece of abuse. If it is minimal and small-scale, it will not cause unbearable stress, and it will be safe enough to study. But it must be real enough to arouse a response in you or there will be nothing to study.
THROWING TISSUES: EXPERIMENT

This experiment will help you discover how you respond to abuse. For the exercise, you will need a partner. Your partner’s job will be to stand about six feet (two meters) away from you and throw tissues at you.

Well, as abuse goes, being attacked with a tissue is really pretty minimal. For most people this attack is pretty tolerable. Most survivors (and non-survivors as well) find that this mostly symbolic gesture does arouse some fear, but since the “attack” is minimal, so is the fear. When you have a minimal attack, you can afford to take your time to study it and learn about your responses to it.

Calibration is important, however. The exercise must be matched to the student. I once worked with an ex-Green Beret soldier. As you can imagine, having tissues thrown at him didn’t bother him at all. I had to increase the stimulus intensity a lot until we found an attack that was interesting for him to examine.

In working with people who don’t feel much, it is often necessary to increase the stimulus intensity so that they get a response large enough for them to notice. I might wet the tissue so it hits with a soggy and palpable thud. Or I might throw pillows instead of tissues. I wouldn’t throw bricks, but I might surprise someone by picking up a brick and pretending that I was going to throw it.

On the other hand, I was once asked to come into a therapist’s office to do a session with a client of hers. I walked in, and immediately walked out. The client was so scared that just my presence in the room was intolerable to her. I rummaged around the therapist’s waiting room and found a blanket. I lay down on the floor, covered myself with the blanket, crept up to the office door, and stuck my head in just a couple of inches (about five centimeters). We did the whole session with me in that position. I looked like such an idiot that I was hardly scary at all.

The point is to adjust the intensity of the “abuse” in this exercise so that it is tolerable and safe for you to examine. For most people that means revising the attack downward in intensity. If the gesture of throwing a real (though soft) object is too intense for you, then ask your partner to stand farther back so that the tissue doesn’t reach you. Perhaps having him turn around and throw the tissue in the wrong direction will help. Or ask him to do the movement of throwing a tissue, but with no tissue. Or have her tell you that she will throw a tissue, but not move to do so at all.

You get the point, I’m sure. The “attack” must be intense enough to arouse some response but so minimal that you will feel safe in examining your feelings of being unsafe.

Once you have chosen your preferred attack, have your partner attack you and notice what happens in response to the attack. Have your partner attack you a few times, so you have time to examine your reactions. What do you feel? What do you do? What do you want to do?
There are a number of common reactions to the attack with the tissue. People being hit often experience surprise or fear. They may feel invaded and invalidated. Frequently they tense themselves to resist the strike and the feelings it produces. Some people giggle uncontrollably or treat the attack as a game. Many people get angry and wish to hit back. People may freeze in shock or panic, and some people dissociate (space out).

In describing how they responded to the attack, most people talk about feelings as mental states. They were surprised, angry, afraid and so on. They wanted to escape or fight back. However, a very different way of paying attention to yourself is possible.

Notice the details of your muscle tone, breathing, body alignment, and the rhythms and qualities of movement. Where in your body do you feel significant changes? What are you doing in those locations? By paying attention to the physical details of your responses, you will begin to see more deeply into the ways you handle abuse. And learning to notice what you do is the first step in changing and improving what you do.

Notice what you do in your throat, belly and pelvis. What happens in your chest and back? Notice what you do in your face and head. Notice what you do with your arms/hands and legs/feet. What happens to your breathing? Is there anything else to pay attention to?

Most people notice that they tighten up when they are attacked. They may clench their shoulders or harden their chests. They most likely tense or stop their breathing. They may lean back or lean forward, but it is a tense movement. Sometimes this tension is fear, and people shrink away from the attack. Sometimes this tension is anger, and people lean forward and wish to hit back. Do you do any of these things? Do you do something else?

Some people find that they get limp as a response to being hit. Their breathing and muscles sag; or they look away and space out, simply waiting for the hitting to be over. They may feel their awareness shrink down to a point or slide away into the distance.

Some people find the role of the attacker far harder than the role of the victim. Most people are not used to attacking people, and survivors especially often find it very difficult to use abusive force on another person. However, one idea might help make the attacker role easier for you. It will help to remember that your attack is a gift to your partner. By being concerned and benevolent enough to attack your partner, you are allowing them the opportunity to develop self-awareness skills. Without your gracious cooperation, they would not be able to learn these skills, and when they faced real threats in their lives they would be completely unprepared.

The common denominator among responses of tensing or getting limp is the process of getting smaller. Why do people tighten up or get limp? Why do you do it? Pay attention to your body as a way of paying attention to your feelings, and see whether an answer comes to you.
Chapter 4: Powerlessness

What does this experiment say about abuse and your response to it? If after the exercise you find yourself staying anxious or triggered by this tissue attack, remember that you can use the soft breathing to relax and come back to yourself.

Before we analyze the meanings of the responses in this exercise, let’s discuss a couple of things. First, in many of the exercises in this book, I talk about what “most people feel.” That is a way of focusing the discussion on the responses and experiences which I have seen in my teaching to be most common. That doesn’t mean that different responses or experiences are wrong. You may feel something different, and that is fine. If we were doing these exercises together, I could address the specific experiences you have, but in writing a book, I have to talk about what most people will usually feel. If you find yourself experiencing significantly different results in some exercise, that can be the starting point for heightened awareness of your particular movements and ways of being in your body.

Second, are you sure you felt what you were actually doing? It is very common for people to not notice very obvious movements and responses. Survivors of abuse have often spent years perfecting the skill of not noticing and not feeling. Even people who have not been abused but who have not deliberately developed their awareness will often miss physical responses that to an outside observer are perfectly obvious. Very often people will feel the opposite of what is actually going on in their bodies. Their habits are so strong that they don’t know how to interpret the new sensations which come with new responses. In any case, with practice, people begin to be able to feel and notice what they are actually doing.

Perhaps all that you felt was confused. Try not to let it worry you. Many people feel confused when they begin body awareness training. It’s so new and different. Just keep on reading through the book and doing the exercises. If one exercise doesn’t click for you, then another one will. As you get farther on in the book, it will make more and more sense to you. At some point, you might wish to go back to earlier exercises and try them again. As your sensitivity to and understanding of your body and the exercises increases, you will probably understand exercises that were confusing the first time around.

THE MEANING OF SHRINKING

I often use the Tissue Throwing experiment in beginning work with students. Sometimes I use other equivalent exercises, and often people come in with their own natural equivalents. One student might talk about being slapped by her mother, and another might recount being insulted by his boss. I can have the students shut their eyes and think about the attacks they experienced. Or I can actually role play the actions of their attackers and, as in the examples, slap them
(lightly) or insult them. Whatever the beginning point of my work with a student, once we have decided upon an attack to practice with, I ask them to notice what they feel as they are attacked. I ask them to notice what physical sensations arise and just where in their bodies they occur.

The sensations usually are fear and/or anger responses such as raising and tensing the shoulders, tensing the neck, or clenching the fists. They may include inhaling suddenly, breathing shallowly or breathing primarily at the top of the chest. They also frequently include facial changes such as glaring at the partner or raising the eyebrows and widening the eyes. They may include physically shrinking away from the attack or closing the eyes. Other ways of responding to the attack might be to giggle, to become passive or to treat it as a game.

As a general rule, people find that the response patterns they show in the Tissue Throwing experiment are the familiar and habitual ones that show up when they feel threatened or invaded in their daily lives. The artificial exercises elicit real responses, and that is why they are useful. People often remark that the responses they experience in the artificial exercises are the same ones they remember experiencing as children, in ordinary family interactions or in the situations of their abuse.

Frequently people identify physical responses that they hadn't been aware of previously, and often they aren't sure just what emotions those physical responses “contain.” Whatever the responses, I usually have people magnify and exaggerate them to help them get more in touch with what they are doing and what that feels like. (Of course, if it looks as though a student may be overwhelmed by an amplified response, I go in another direction and have them practice exercises for calmness, and only later would I come back to exercises in amplifying responses.)

As people examine their experiences in this way and discuss what they notice, they realize that there are some important patterns in their experiences: such feelings as fear, anger, vulnerability, or invalidation all involve smallness and twisting in various areas of the body—which is the process of powerlessness. This smallness most often takes the form of constriction and rigidity, but it can also take the form of limping and collapse, or of both rigidity and limpness simultaneously in different areas of the body. The twisting takes the form of muscular, postural and perceptual lopsidedness, imbalance and indirectness.

Whatever you did in the Tissue Throwing exercise, it was important. It would be easy to dismiss the various physical responses to the attack as being nothing but ordinary tension that anyone would experience. However, the forms that you choose for your body and your movements—whether consciously or subconsciously—are expressions of your sense of what you are and what the world is. By experimenting with simple movement situations, you can discover the nature of the beliefs and strategies that underlie your actions. You can evaluate the efficacy of your choices, discover why you have become committed to them, and try out new movements and new ways of approaching the world. This learning is what will lead to personal and spiritual change.
What message is contained in the movements you did, whether you tightened up or got limp? When people pay attention to their responses, they generally sense that the responses are ways of getting ready for the attack.

People experience that tensing is a way of bracing to get ready for the attack. In what sense is bracing a way of being ready? Imagine walking in a park. It’s a quiet day. You’re listening to the birds in the woods and watching the clouds in the sky. You are walking past a flag pole and you can hear the fluttering of the flag in the breeze. All of a sudden, the flag pole falls. Right toward you. You are about to be crushed.

By how far does the flag pole have to miss you for it to not hit you? A mile? A yard? A foot? An inch? Well, it won’t hit you if it misses you by an inch (about 2 centimeters). A yard (a meter) might be better in case it bounces when it hits the ground.

Do you freeze in panic as you see the flagpole falling? But if you freeze, you’re not ready to move. If you stop breathing or tighten up, your muscles and joints will be locked, which is not a good starting point for the simple action of stepping out of the way of the falling flag pole. If you are breathing with ease and comfort, and maintaining fluid flexibility in your muscles and posture, you are ready for dodging the falling flagpole.

Bracing is getting ready for being hit. Bracing is the manifestation of the belief that you are powerless to win so you might as well freeze and wait until the threat is over. Staying relaxed is getting ready for avoiding being hit. If you are relaxed as the flagpole falls, you can step away from its path.

It is obvious that limpness is an acknowledgment of defeat. As people focus their attention on feeling the limp response, they very quickly sense that limpness is about giving up, knowing that there is nothing they can do so there is no reason to try anything.

Powerlessness is the hidden message in tension or limpness. Both ways in which people respond to the tissue attack contain a hidden belief that they cannot prevent getting hit. So they tighten up or get limp—and hope to survive the impact. Clearly this is what children, who truly are powerless, do to survive abuse.

This powerlessness is as much mental as physical, and it creates a vicious circle, as the next exercise will show.

**EYEBROW POWER: EXPERIMENT**

Stand in a forward stride position, with one foot forward and the other about shoulder width behind. Have your partner put his/her hands on your shoulders and push. Your job is to lean forward, get strong, brace yourself, and resist the push. Once you can do this, make one small change. As your partner keeps pushing on you, raise your eyebrows. What happens?

Most people find that their stance immediately weakens and they get pushed back. Why? This isn’t something abstract and esoteric. It isn’t, for ex-
ample, just that your concentration is broken. It is a very physical process. Can you tell what it is?

When would your eyebrows naturally go up? In surprise or fear. However, in the normal fear response, the muscles that raise your eyebrows work in concert with the muscles on the back of the neck and the back. Your eyes open wide to see the problem, and the muscles on the back act to pull you backwards and get you away from what is in front of you causing the fear. Muscularly speaking, it’s a package deal.

The important point is that the muscles which raise your eyebrows and the muscles which pull you to the rear form an integrated system, and activating the eyebrow muscles also activates the muscles which would move you backward—even when you’re not afraid. That’s why your stance weakens.

In other words, what might seem like a “mental” reaction is actually hard-wired in the body. There is nothing here and now that you are afraid of, but raising your eyebrows triggers the physical fear response, and so you move backward. Notice that the experience of fear creates weakness, which of course justifies the feeling of fear. That is the vicious circle of powerlessness.

A central focus in this book is on replacing the reaction of shrinking in fear with other more productive reactions. And the key to the whole process is to feel the mind and body as one and the same. It isn’t paradoxical to attempt to achieve a “mental” response with a “physical” tool. The body is not merely physical. It is the concretization of meaning. Powerlessness and despair are physically the opposite of power and love.

**BODY NUMBNESS**

Abuse survivors frequently create a physical condition of anesthesia as a way of handling the overwhelming sensations. They literally numb their bodies so that internal and external sensations cannot be felt. Or various areas of the body can be made to “go away” or seem smaller or less distinct.

**WITHDRAWING THE JUICE: EXPERIMENT**

Imagine that you are stuck in a sword and sorcery fantasy novel. You have been captured by the Evil Sorcerer. He wants to know where you have hidden the Ring of Power. Naturally, you are not about to tell him, and he is going to torture you to get the information. That’s the way these books are written. The Evil Sorcerer is stubbing out a burning cigar on the palm of your hand to convince you to tell the secret. You are chained to the stone table in the dungeon, so you can’t fight back. What can you do to withstand the pain? You can redeploy your attention.

Survivors often have very powerful methods they have developed for withstanding pain. One simple one is to suck all the awareness “juice” out of
some body part. Try that. Suck all the awareness juice out of your hand and up into your shoulder. You can inhale and use the inhalation to pull the awareness up out of your hand, just as you would draw juice up through a straw. Keep the hand juiceless so that it won’t feel the pain of the sorcerer’s cigar. How does this make your hand feel? Most people feel their hands becoming distant, lifeless and unfeeling.

Remember to breathe the awareness juice back into your hand at the end of this exercise. Don’t let your hand stay lifeless.

Underlying body numbness is a will to non-awareness. Many survivors don’t notice much of what goes on in their bodies. Many survivors have selectively tuned out awareness of certain areas of their bodies. Reducing body awareness is a common and very effective way of surviving the pain and betrayal of abuse. However, anesthesia is no way to live, and staying anesthetized guarantees that you will not gain enough awareness and power to heal from the abuse or prevent further victimization.

SENDING ATTENTION: CASE STUDY

I worked with a woman whom we can call Barbara. She was quite overweight, and she came from an emotionally abusive household. Her father was angry and sarcastic, her mother was distant, and her siblings were also distant. She said that she had the family role of the lost child.

I had her walk around, and I noticed that she kept herself up in her head—that is, she kept her attention and awareness focused in her head. When she sat and talked, she constantly kept her head tipped over to one side or the other. I had her lie down on my body work table, I touched her shoulder and her knee and asked which was farther away from her. She said her knee, and as she reflected on her answer, she recognized that she habitually pulled her attention up into her head. She said she’d been overweight since she was six and had always tried not to pay attention to her body. As she lay on the table, I dropped pebbles on her and asked her to pay attention to where they landed. Not knowing which part of her the pebbles would land on forced her to attend to her whole body and to parts of her body that she normally did not attend to. It also drew her attention from spot to spot as each pebble landed.

Then I placed a pebble on her foot and one on her chest and asked her to shift her attention back and forth from one to the other. That got her to notice how awareness can be sent from one body area to another. I suggested she say aloud “I am overweight,” and when she did, she felt herself immediately draw her awareness up into her head. We talked about the idea that attention can be deliberately deployed in various ways throughout the body and that she had built up the habit of restricting it to her head in order not to feel the pain of her childhood and her body image. I had her concentrate on her foot while repeating that she was overweight. That drew her attention down into her body,
and she experienced that she could stay present with her whole body even while talking about something uncomfortable.

**DISOCIATION**

Beyond just withdrawing from a specific area of the body, it is also possible to withdraw attention from the whole body. The process of dissociation is based on deploying attention away from the self.

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**CEILING FEELING: EXPERIMENT**

You are probably indoors as you read this. However, even if you are not, there is undoubtedly something above you, even if it is just the sky. I will give the directions for this experiment as though you were indoors, but you can modify them if you need to.

Look up at the ceiling and count the tiles (or lines on the plaster, or clouds, or leaves, etc.). Most likely, you are doing what people generally do, which is placing all your attention *up there*, forgetting about your breathing and your belly. In your attempt to attend to what was up there, out there, you forgot to maintain awareness of your inner core. This process of directing attention away from the self and forgetting the body is the essence of dissociation.

Try counting again, this time focusing simultaneously on breathing into your belly as well as counting the tiles.

What did it feel like to go up and out and forget your core? What does it feel like to balance and integrate inner focus with outer awareness?

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Dissociation, as I would define it, is a physical process for deploying attention in and around the body in such a way as to decrease self-awareness. By this definition, body numbness, smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, overeating, depression, over-exercising and so on are all specific varieties of the dissociative process. However, in this section, we will look at a particular way of reducing attention to the whole body/self.

Dissociation is a postural process and, as such, involves shaping the body. Once you understand the shaping process, you will be able to recognize it when you do it yourself or see others doing it. There are two patterns that people most commonly employ to generate the dissociative mental state.

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**SCARING HIM: CASE STUDY**
I once ran into a particularly clear example of body unawareness in action. I was working with a man we can call Oliver. He had all the emotional intensity of a corn field—flat, flat, flat! No matter what he was talking about, no matter how wrenching it was, if you asked him what he felt about it, he replied “Nothing” in a toneless voice. I had tried my usual simple exercises to help him notice what was going on inside of himself, and nothing had worked. So I gave it one final try. (It was a rather extreme experiment. I wouldn’t have done this with just anyone, but we’d been working together for a while. He trusted me, and I judged that the exercise would be safe for him.)

I had Oliver stand, and I pulled a knife on him. Of course I made sure not to actually touch him. I didn’t even move toward him. I just stood in front of him pointing the knife at him. But he was scared. He inhaled suddenly, threw his hands up, and cringed back. He raised his eyebrows, opened his eyes wide, and opened his mouth. (Notice my use of body-based language.) I asked him what he felt when I threatened him with the attack. “Nothing.” And I asked him what he had done physically. “Nothing.”

He wasn’t lying. He simply failed to notice that he had moved at all or felt anything. So I took him on a guided tour of his body. I pointed the knife at him again and asked him to pay attention to his eyebrows. He noticed they went up. Then I held the knife out again and asked him to notice his eyes. He noticed they opened wide. We went through his body that way, until he had an accurate and complete list of his response actions.

Then I asked him what he felt as he did all that. “Nothing.” So I did all the movements he had done and asked him what I looked like. He said, “Scared to death.” I asked, “Are you prepared to assert that you did those scared-looking actions yet had no feelings of fear?” He thought for a while and then said in a slow, puzzled manner, “I must have been afraid, but I didn’t notice it.” Bingo! He had realized that he had been doing the internal process of fear and that he had shut it out of his awareness.

Our next lesson was two weeks later, and he came in and told me a story. “My psychotherapist asked me what I felt about something, and I told her ‘Nothing.’ Then I remembered the exercise we had done here, and I focused on what I did as I thought about the topic we were discussing. And once I had a list of what I did, I concentrated on noticing all the actions simultaneously, and all of a sudden I realized I was feeling sad.”

He had made the leap from noticing actions to feeling feelings. He had learned how to become aware.
Stand up, breathe, feel your feet on the ground. Now, look up over you and pick a spot on the ceiling directly overhead. Next, slide the spot out to the side. If you are right-handed, move the spot four or five feet (about one and a half meters) to your right. If you are left-handed, then move the spot to the left. Bring your eyes back down and look at something about your height in front of you, but continue to mentally focus on the spot on the ceiling. Now, walk around the room, keeping your mind aimed up at the same angle and distance.

To make this clearer, if you had a flashlight and aimed it up at the ceiling at a specific angle, as you walked around holding the flashlight in the same position, the spot of light on the ceiling would move around. It would move around on the ceiling but stay in the same geometrical relation to you as you moved. Keep your mind aimed upwards in the same way and let the focus point on the ceiling move around as you do.

How does that affect the way you walk? How does it affect your awareness of the floor and the environment and any other people who may be present? Most people find that they feel less. They are divorced from what is around them.

How can you bring yourself back from this dissociative pattern? Stand and breathe. Feel your weight on your feet. Locate the spot on the ceiling to which you have sent your mind. Slide the spot across the ceiling until it is directly overhead, and then slide your mind down a vertical line, into your head and down through your body until your mind comes to rest in your belly. Let your awareness reside in your belly and simultaneously continue to slide it farther down until you feel your feet planted on the ground.

**SPACING BACK: EXPERIMENT**

Stand up, breathe, feel your feet on the ground. Now, pick something in front of you to look at. Notice what it feels like to look forward, reaching out with your eyes to get “closer to” and see clearly your object of focus.

Almost everybody has at one time or another played around with looking through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars. Try doing that now. Look at your object as though it were far away and very small. Pull your vision back away from what is in front of you. Now walk around that way, seeing everything as distant, feeling yourself pulled far away from everything.

How does that feel? How does it affect the way you walk? How does it affect your awareness of the floor and your surroundings? Most people find that they feel spaced out, divorced from what is around them.

A variant on the pulling inward feeling is to send your awareness out your back so that you locate yourself behind yourself. Try that. How does it feel?
How can you bring yourself back from this dissociative pattern? Stand and breathe. Feel your weight on your feet. Feel your gaze moving out forward, like light shining toward its target. You can try gently exhaling out forward, sending your breath, along with your gaze, forward out into the world, while keeping your awareness anchored within your body.

A similar spatial shaping can be done with the senses of hearing or smell. Feeling the difference between an ingoing/withdrawing and an outgoing/engaging perceptual organization can be very enlightening to survivors. It gives them a concrete experience of their powerless stance in the world and of a more effective way of being. (Remember that the outgoing/engaging organization must stay inwardly anchored in center to be whole and effective.)

Learning to deliberately choose centering and refrain from using the dissociative pattern is important in beginning to find more present and powerful ways of living and acting. People used to the state of dissociation often experience that staying present hurts. They often complain that they feel worse. I ask them to contemplate whether there really is more pain or whether they are feeling more the pain that was always there.

EMPOWERMENT

We have looked at constriction, body numbness, and dissociation as three different ways of shrinking. It is my feeling that empowerment should be the beginning and ending of any discussion of powerlessness, so let’s go back to the first exercise in the chapter and give it a better ending.

THROWING TISSUES II: EXPERIMENT

This will be the same tissue throwing exercise, but there will be one difference: as your partner throws the tissues at you, use what you have learned about your belly and your breathing. Relax your belly, let your breathing come from the core of your belly, and whatever your partner may do with the tissues, keep your breathing soft and steady.

You can try breathing this way when you act the role of the attacker as well.

What do you notice? How do you feel? What difference does steadying your breathing make?

Most people notice that they receive the attack very differently when they keep their breathing soft. The attack no longer seems so threatening. They don’t react with constriction, fear or anger. Most people experience that when they stay soft, they don’t dislike the attacker but can maintain a spirit of calmness. The attack becomes just an event to deal with.
As the attacker, most people experience that throwing the tissues is no longer a hate-filled act. It becomes just an action to be done.

In other words, steadying the breathing takes a lot of the emotion out of the attack. It reduces the attack to an event to be worked with. And it gives the defender the calmness and presence of mind that you will see later are the foundation for effective self-protection and healing.

This is the key: constriction is a physical action that can be controlled. It can be replaced with relaxation and physical openness.

Of course, you may not have had the results that I describe from the breathing. That’s OK too. Whatever results you had are the truth of your present ways of being and doing, and they are legitimate and something to study and understand. As we go farther in the book, a variety of different responses will be discussed, and the variety of exercises will give each person an opportunity to work with their own unique responses.

In particular, you may not have been ready to use the breathing exercises successfully and may have needed more work before you could steady yourself and reduce the effect of the attack. However, my experience teaching many thousands of people these and other similar exercises suggests that most people will have been successful with this breathing exercise.

For many people this will have been their first experience of ability. I have seen many people fill with a sense of exhilaration and freedom when they realize that they do not have to stay trapped in weakness and fear, that they can in fact find strong and safe ways of being and living.
CHAPTER 5
LEARNING

This chapter will summarize the key ideas underlying the somatic exercises and their application to trauma recovery.

TRAUMA

It is important to consider what trauma is. A traumatic event is one that overwhelms an individual’s coping and survival resources. Trauma is relative to resources. A threatening situation will be experienced as overwhelming and therefore traumatic only if you lack the resources to cope with it easily and successfully. The importance of this is that by increasing your resources for coping with challenges, what was overwhelming in the past can become something you can in the present handle without damage.

We often speak as though trauma were the threatening event, but it is important to keep in mind that trauma is the result of the event, not the event itself. Trauma is the effect on you. The essence of the trauma response is constriction of breathing, posture, and awareness.

It is productive to take the perspective that trauma is a learning process. In abuse, people learn about the world around them, the people around them, and about themselves. They learn that the world is unsafe and that people don’t respect them and will hurt them. Abuse survivors learn that they are powerless and vulnerable, and they incorporate that awareness into their self-identities.

Unfortunately, that produces a self-fulfilling prophecy. Powerlessness creates constriction, and constriction maintains powerlessness. Physical constriction and reduction of awareness interfere with the ability to perceive, think, talk, and act effectively, and thus a vicious circle is created. Living like a victim makes victimization more likely.

What was learned in the past endures until new learning takes its place. The past is over. However, self-identity, information, and habits of action that were learned in the past are the basis of action in the present, and until new learning supplants the old learning, the past learning will control present action.

Survivors usually are living with one foot in the past and one foot in the present. They “see” things in front of them that were in front of them but aren’t actually present any more. They respond to the present as though it were the past and don’t notice relevant differences. This makes sense and in some ways is really beneficial. Humans are very efficient learning machines. Crucial survival information is learned very well and very rapidly. If you were raped by a man wearing a red shirt, you may learn to avoid all men in red shirts. Whatever were the salient characteristics of the traumatic environment, for self-protection
you will learn to watch for all of them—even though in some cool, rational way it might be possible to say that some of the characteristics were not actually part of what made the situation dangerous.

**NEW LEARNING**

Since trauma is a learning process, a systematic approach to remedial learning is an effective element in trauma recovery. If the essence of trauma is the action of constriction, then the essence of healing is learning expansion. As you will experience in doing the exercises in this book, an integrated state of power, love, awareness, and radiance is the mindbody opposite of contraction.

Power derives from a particular way of using the pelvis. The pelvis is set firmly atop the legs and serves as a balanced foundation for the spinal column and head. Movement starts with the legs/hips. Love is rooted in a particular way of using the chest. Being warm hearted or tender hearted means having a soft, free chest and throat. Integrating power and love in the body produces awareness and freedom. Radiance is the sense of expanding outward into the world from a secure base within the body/self.

By working to create a sense of symmetrical, radiant, expansive intentionality, which stays anchored within the body and reaches outward into the world, people can organize themselves for effective ways of meeting their challenges.

The physical process of freeing and energizing breath, posture, and movement is the essence of empowerment. Power is the ability to control the environment to create safety. Releasing and opening the body is the foundation for power and the opposite of powerlessness.

It is important to realize that power and love are fundamentally inseparable. Love without power is weak and ineffective. Power without love is brittle, ultimately self-destructive, and weak. The body is designed to function most efficiently and effectively in an integrated state of power and love.

**MOVEMENT EXPERIMENTS**

I use movement experiments as the context for the process of identifying and correcting old learnings. A movement experiment is a simple body or movement situation which presents a challenge for the student to deal with. These experiments are safe, controlled situations which function as solid metaphors for or limited representations of the real life events or problems the student is dealing with. Because the experiment is a safe, controlled situation, the student can afford to focus his attention on the process of his behavior in addition to the results. Within a movement experiment, I teach the student how to monitor his or her responses, how to evaluate them, and how to construct new and better responses.

I design a movement experiment based on the challenge described for by the student. If the student were beaten, for example, I might offer to throw a tis-
sue at her, as a minimal representation of an attack. The physical details of people's behavior in an experiment reveal their habitual ways of thinking and acting, and trying out new ways of using the body breaks them free from old habits and moves them toward new options.

Small steps and repeated practice are the basis for efficient learning. Understanding and mastery are best developed through breaking down large chunks of learning into smaller, more digestible pieces. You will notice that in the course of the book we will return over and over again to certain ideas and practices, each time with an elaboration and development of them.

**BODY-BASED LANGUAGE**

In teaching a person to monitor her responses, I have her learn to specify what she is feeling by giving detailed and complete statements of precisely where in her body there is something going on and precisely what she is doing at that location. I have her go through her body part by part and notice whether anything is occurring there.

Concrete thinking is the key to using body and movement work to reveal and elucidate patterns of perception, thought, feeling and choice. Thinking concretely means pinning down thoughts, feelings, and intentions by defining them in terms of observable, physical response patterns and tangible physical sensations. Normally, people are so used to feeling themselves as "mental" and "emotional" beings that they don't notice the physical substrate for mental and emotional events. However, emotional and mental responses can be defined in physical terms. Thus, for example, rather than thinking of anger as something in the mind, you could look at anger as a complex physical action, which might include clenching your fists, tightening your jaw, breathing more rapidly etc. The mental aspect of anger, then, would be what is felt or experienced when these physical actions are done in the body.

In training people as teachers of the body awareness work that I have developed, I emphasize over and over again that it is important not to make assumptions about what people feel or mean. It is so easy to assume that when a person says he is "sad" you know what he means and feels, but it may not be so. Another person's experience of sadness may have elements in it that are very different from your experience of sadness. By the same token, when a person frowns, it is very easy to assume that you know what feeling is being shown. Whether it is words or body actions, all you know for sure is the signal you are seeing, but you can't really know what the signal points to unless the person you are listening to or watching tells you what is going on inside himself. Sticking with body-based language is a way of making communication more precise and explicit.

Speaking in body-based language is even helpful in figuring out what you yourself are feeling and meaning. It is easy to miss noticing feelings, but scanning your body for actions you are unconsciously doing is a way of bringing feelings
into awareness. Sticking with body-based language is a way of making your awareness of your own feelings more precise and explicit.

**INTENTIONALITY**

When you want/intend to do a movement, that commitment to an action immediately travels from your “mind” into your “body.” All voluntary movement starts with an intention to move, and as you will feel, this is not a merely mental process but is intensely physical. (In the next chapter, I describe the *Wanting a Pencil* experiment as a way of defining what I mean by “intention.”)

Intending to do a movement begins the actual process of movement. First there is a desire to change something in the world, then a thought of what particular action would be effective, and then there is a commitment to acting on that thought. That intention leaks over into slight muscular changes which set the body up for the movement, and after that would normally come the execution of the large movement itself.

By examining your movements, you can backtrack to the intentions underlying them, and you can discern the operation of intentions that are functioning outside of your conscious awareness. By retraining your habits of movement, you can alter your intentions, which is itself a process of altering your beliefs and your self-identity. BIM trauma work is based on the experience and idea that mind and body are truly one unit, and the work you will do with the process of intention is the practical expression of that.

**THEORY**

A key element of the work described in this book is examining physical actions as manifestations of theories of the self and the world. For example, you might hold your breath when you are yelled at. By focusing on that body process, you might realize that you are holding your breath to tense your body and be strong enough to protect yourself. If that physical action is reframed as a belief that holding the breath is effective in protecting yourself, then it can be tested. A simple movement experiment can be designed to test whether you can protect yourself more or less effectively when you hold your breath or when you breathe.

The beliefs about the self, other people, and the world that are developed through trauma can be operationalized as states of breath and posture, subjected to empirical tests, and confirmed or disconfirmed. What is important is that by learning new, more effective habits of breathing, posture, movement, and action, abuse survivors can improve their theories.

Body-based language is crucial in reframing beliefs and feelings as testable actions. Body-based language makes subjective experiences concrete and measur-

*Operational definition, used in science, defines terms by objective procedures of measurement rather than by abstract verbal processes.*
able. In looking at a belief about yourself, I would ask you to notice the physical reactions that are part of that belief. By amplifying and examining physical responses, people can discover the beliefs that underlie their actions.

The question, of course, is whether a belief is true, and by observing whether their movements are actually effective or not, people can test the accuracy of the beliefs or feelings on which the movements are based. Adopting better movements moves people toward a more adequate system of beliefs about the self and the world and enables people to handle their challenges better.

The sum total of your beliefs amounts of a theory of life. A theory is a collection of ideas about the world. It is a story which sums up the way the world seems to be. It is a map or picture of some section of the world which serves to help us navigate through the events and situations we encounter. A good map gets us where we want to go. A good theory is one which makes accurate and useful navigational statements. A bad theory is one which is inaccurate and leads to poor navigation, and whether a theory is a bad one or not can be determined through practical tests.

While you were growing up, you observed the world around you and made guesses about what was going on, how people felt and would behave, and what would work well to keep you safe. You saved the guesses that seemed to hit the target and discarded those which your experience suggested weren’t true. As you accumulated useful guesses, you created a theory of life. This underlying, though often unconscious, theory of life is what shapes your movements, and by examining and testing your movements, you can uncover, test, and improve your guiding theory of life.

I like to make the distinction between two different kinds of life theories—local theories and universal principles. Local theories are determined by conditions in a limited locality, and universal principles are theories which hold true for the whole world. For example, if you grew up in a family in which expressing a wish was met by belittlement and physical punishment, your theory of the world very likely suggests that it better not to want anything or better not to express your wants. Keeping your desires to yourself and not acting on them is your strategy for surviving. Of course, what you didn’t know was that in other families wishes were met with enthusiasm and encouragement. Your theory is a local theory. It is true, but only for the locality which spawned it (and for other similar localities). A broader experience of families would (I hope) suggest that a general principle is that a child’s wishes and dreams are applauded as the beginnings of the adult’s life goals and accomplishments. Certainly this is a more life-affirming and constructive principle, and it would serve better as the foundation on which to build a life. A universal principle is a theory which is broadly true/useful. Working to go beyond local life strategies to more universal life principles is a difficult process of constant growth and learning.

Actions reveal an underlying theory, and that the theory can be tested by observing the adequacy of the actions. This idea is an eye opener for many stu-
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Dent. It gives them a way of discerning and clearing out damaging learnings that resulted from their abuse.

Raising doubts about a survivor’s theory of life opens a window of opportunity for self-examination. Getting in touch with and disconfirming the idea that holding the breath is useful, for example, can help a survivor get in touch with the circumstances in her life that taught her to hold her breath. It transforms habits of action and feeling and belief into objective units to be tested and improved. Treating feelings as theories to be discarded when they have been proved false can help a survivor move past the effects of the abuse to a more effective and satisfying life.

I have occasionally had people object to this process of eliciting and disproving false concepts. They feel it’s too logical and hard-nosed. Naturally people find it uncomfortable to have their errors of reasoning and learning pointed out in such a concrete way. However, it’s just a process of uncovering and correcting the results of their abuse.

**DE-CONDITIONING**

This whole process of identifying and retraining abuse-based behavior can be looked at as a process of de-conditioning. Conditioned behavior is behavior that has become associated with and gets triggered by some situation or event. Much of the learning that takes place in trauma consists of the development of habitual responses to specific stimuli. For example, your abuser yelled at you and then raped you, so in the present when you are yelled at, you respond as though you were about to be raped.

How do you break conditioned response habits? By exposing people to the old learning situations and having them deliberately construct different behaviors and thereby not allow the old response habits to play. Each time the old situation is faced, the old response is prevented, and a better response is used, the association between the situation and the old response is weakened.

Once a student can create and hold a new, more powerful and effective body patterns, I set up situations which closely mimic the abuse situation to trigger old habits. I have her deliberately refrain from doing old constrictive behaviors and do new and better expansive responses instead. For example, I might yell at a student and have him exhale and relax his shoulders as a way of refraining from holding his breath, shutting his eyes and simply waiting to be hit. Inhibiting old responses and practicing new ones weakens the old learning and allows the gradual construction of a new habit.

Do you think you could swim out into the middle of a swimming pool, dive down three feet, and remove a chunk of water so no more water rushes in to replace it? Most people think that’s impossible, but it’s really quite easy. You just have to bring a brick with you and put it where you don’t want the water to be. Of course, the brick won’t stay there unless you continue to hold it there, but that is not crucial. The point is that you cannot dig a hole in the water, but you
can easily replace the water with something else. Likewise, you cannot just not do a behavior. You cannot dig a hole in your actions. To not do one behavior is to do another, even if that second behavior is nothing more than standing still. In order to not do fear, you cannot simply not do it. You have to replace it with something, and of course the best thing to replace it with is relaxed, warmhearted power.

I start by helping students observe, evaluate and change responses in the context of movement experiments. However, the most important learning takes place as they carry the same process into their daily lives. Once a student can perform a new response in the artificial environment of the lesson, the next step is for her to watch for instances in her daily life when the old dysfunctional body and movement pattern pops up and then deliberately replace it with a new one. I generally give homework exercises to further practice the new response option. My goal in each session is to give a student one important chunk of understanding/skill, something she can take home and work with or practice. That carries the de-conditioning process out into real life.
Body awareness is the foundation for the use of the body as a place of growth and healing. What is body awareness? Being aware of your body means consciously noticing your body. It means consciously feeling your body’s position, its movement, its tone, its rhythms and shapes, and how it responds to various internal and external stimuli. This next experiment, which I picked up many years ago from Timothy Gallwey’s book *Inner Tennis*, is a way of helping you experience more clearly what body awareness is.

**RAISING ARM: EXPERIMENT**

There are two parts to this experiment. DON’T READ THE SECOND PART UNTIL YOU HAVE DONE THE FIRST PART.

**FIRST PART** Stand up in a comfortable position, with your arms down by your sides. Now, raise one arm up over your head. That sounds pretty simple, right? *Try this before going on to read the second part.*

**SECOND PART** Standing up again, raise your arm over your head, to the same position—but this time pay careful attention to experiencing every detail of the process of raising your arm.

What differences did you feel in those two ways of raising your arm? Most people find the two movements very different. In the first, people generally are aware of where the arm started and where it finished, but they don’t notice much about what goes on in the movement between the end points. They pay attention to the end points of the movement but not to the process of movement. This is goal-oriented movement.

When they raise their arms the second way, most people slow down the movement a lot, and they pay attention to the feeling of the movement inch by inch. This is what it means to pay attention to your body and your self. This is process-oriented movement.

**TENSING PARTS: EXPERIMENT**

Put a pencil down on the floor, and walk back about ten feet (about three meters) from it. Now walk over, pick it up, carry it over to a new spot about
ten feet away, and put it back down. This is your normal way of moving. Nothing special.

Now, tighten up one shoulder. Each person will have their own way of understanding and doing that. You might scrunch your shoulder and pull it down. Someone else might brace their shoulder and push it up. Whatever you want to do is fine. While keeping your shoulder tight, walk over, pick up the pencil, and move it back to the first spot.

Does keeping your shoulder tight change your overall movements? When you tighten your shoulder, do you tighten other parts of your body? Or do you loosen other parts? Which parts? If you tighten one part, do you change the position of other parts? Most people notice that when they tighten one part of their body, they affect a lot of other parts.

Just to carry the idea to an extreme, scrunch up your nose as tight as you can, hold it that way, and walk around. What does that do to your feet? Most people find that their feet tense as well. Now walk around again with your nose tight, and suddenly let your nose loosen. What happens? Most people feel that their feet soften and contact the floor more fully.

You can try the experiment again tightening other parts of your body. Does it make a difference which part you tighten? You could also try loosening a particular part of your body. Perhaps let one knee get too loose and wobbly. Or let one arm hang down limp. Does that also affect your overall way of moving?

Try paying extra attention to one part as you walk around. Does the simple act of paying attention to one part exert effects on other parts?

Some people will notice very little even when there are major changes in their movement. Many people are so unused to examining or feeling their bodies that they simply miss much of the rich detail of their physical being. If you happen to be in that situation, don’t give up. If you just keep on practicing, you will become more physically aware, and you will find heightened awareness more interesting and more helpful than you can possibly anticipate now.

Sometimes the postural tension in people’s bodies stems from old injuries. As a general rule, when we hurt ourselves, we automatically stiffen up to restrict movement of the injured part and protect it from further injury and pain. However, by the time the injury is healed, the bracing has often turned into an unconscious postural habit, which will persist in a minimal way until something is deliberately done to eliminate it. Sometimes the injured part is simply weak and you are bracing it to withstand the stress of moving it.

Most abuse survivors carry the specifics of their abuse in their bodies. What position they were in as they were abused, what they were made to do, what they felt, what they tried not to feel—all of that is carried in the ways they breathe and hold themselves.
GRANDFATHER’S LAP: CASE STUDY

I once worked with a woman, Lena, who came because she wanted to learn to overcome the fear she experienced in playing sports. I noticed she had a very odd posture, so at one point in our lessons we worked with that. I had her walk and helped her notice that her elbows were pulled back, her body was twisted and leaned to the back diagonal right, her shoulders were rounded a bit forward, and the weight of her torso was carried back over the rear of her pelvis.

We worked with body alignment for effective walking. Working with the feeling of expansiveness of breath, she opened her whole walking pattern. I had her straighten her legs, arch her back a bit, open up her chest, and move her torso forward. Then we focused on how the legs/hips develop the thrusting power that moves the body forward.

I noticed that it was hard for her to let her legs relax, so I asked her about that. She said the muscles in her genitals were tight, so I suggested she focus on feeling and releasing that. As she did, she felt sadness and tears, but she didn’t know what they were about.

I had the woman create a detailed list of the sensations in her pelvis and the rest of her body as she focused on releasing her genital muscles. Once she did that, I asked her to tune into her body and feel the flow of those sensations. As soon as she asked her body to feel what the sensation of sadness was connected to, she felt a sensation of penetration and had the image of a penis. As she continued to focus on the flow of sensations in her body, a clear image came to her.

She experienced that she was sitting on her grandfather’s lap, facing him with her legs spread. He was bouncing her up and down, and it was fun. Then he took off her panties and put his fingers into her vagina. Then he put his penis into her. She tried to get away by leaning backwards to the right, but he hugged her and restrained her. She pushed on his chest as hard as she could, caving in her chest and rounding her back, straining with her arms to push herself away. That was the same movement pattern that she habitually maintained in her daily movements.

The body stores unfinished actions. Specific movements that people were prevented from doing but which they very much wanted to do are held in suspension. The intentions to do those movements are constantly fresh in the body and constantly energize the muscles for the beginnings of the movements. By going from the movements a student presents to the intentions and feelings underlying the movements, it is possible to gain a sense of what unfinished actions are lurking in the body and what actions need to be done to find a feeling of completion. (Whether images that arise through this body sensing process are accurate and true or not, they are psychologically and spiritually meaningful, and that is what is significant. We will discuss this in greater detail later.)
It is very important to end work on powerlessness with work on empowerment. Immediately after she experienced the image of abuse, we did some work with breath and balance. Then we ended the lesson with self-defense instruction. We started with general instruction on how to escape from a grab. Then I had her sit on my lap as she had sat on her grandfather’s lap, and I hugged her. I showed her that in that position she could easily grasp my head, twist it to sever my spinal column, throw me down on the floor, and get away. She role played that defense movement a few times, and then she took a deep breath and stood up straight. She no longer was trying to pull back away from her grandfather. She had a better option to replace that, and she had finished her unfinished action.

Earlier we did an exercise for noticing the responses of one body part to actions in other body parts. Feelings are actions, and if you pay attention, you will notice a web of responses throughout your body in response to your feelings.

Every part of your mindbody is connected to every other part of your mindbody. What you do in one part of your self influences what you do in your whole self. Everything is linked to everything else. Your body is like a web. If you pull on one strand, every strand gets tugged on.

NOTICING FEELINGS: EXPERIMENT

Paying attention to yourself includes noticing your feelings and how they affect your body and your movements.

Imagine that you have to write a report for someone who is always rude and demanding. He yells at you when he doesn’t get what he wants, and he never bothers to thank you when you do give it to him. How do you feel? Irritated perhaps? Maybe resentful? Perhaps you really would rather chuck the report into the waste paper basket? Get into these feelings. Let them build in you. Notice what your body is doing when you are feeling these negative emotions. How do these emotions affect your breathing and muscle tension? How do they affect your posture? How do they affect the rhythm and quality of your movements? Most people will notice that anger and resentment increase their physical tension and restrict their breathing. The increased tension makes movements stiff and difficult, and strained movements create wear and tear on the body.

Try imagining other emotion laden situations—situations in which you feel various feelings, perhaps love, or confusion, or jealousy, or enthusiasm, and so on. What happens in your body? Can you hold two different emotions simultaneously? What happens in your body when you try this? Does it make a difference which two emotions you try?

In this exercise, we have been naming emotions and detecting their physical configuration. Another kind of emotion exercise is to start with an unnamed
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physical configuration and then attempt to feel its meaning and what it might be called. As one obvious example, clench your fists, tighten your shoulders, lean forward and talk in a harsh, loud voice. What do you feel in your body as you do this, and what emotion might that be? If you move in a silky, sinuous manner, with all your joints “oiled” and smooth, how does this feel? Is it an emotion?

Another approach is to compare how different emotions manifest in the body. For example, what is the physical difference between the experience of love and sycophancy, or righteous indignation and a temper tantrum, or between horniness and loneliness?

A very interesting exercise that can be done in a group is to have everyone do a single named emotion, love for instance, and then compare the body configurations and movement styles that different people show. It is very instructive to notice how different people conceive of and configure the “same” emotion.

Paying attention to yourself includes paying attention to your feelings and how they affect your body. For the sake of these exercises, we are speaking as though “feelings” were separate from and prior to body changes, but it really is more accurate to say that the body action is the primary content of the feelings. However, naming an emotion is a shortcut to doing the somatic gestalt which comprises the emotion. Speaking of the mental experience of a “feeling” allows us to evoke the physical responses which make up the feeling.

Intentions are also actions done in the body, as the following experiment will show. Intentions are actions which organize the body for the other actions of feelings and movements.

**WANTING A PENCIL: EXPERIMENT**

Put a pencil on the floor, and then stand about ten feet away. Stand up comfortably. Look at the pencil. Oh, I forgot to tell you, this is a magic pencil. With this pencil you can write your own ticket. Really. Whatever you write with this pencil will come true. You could have a solid gold sports car or a swimming pool filled with chocolate ice cream. You get the idea. Wouldn’t you love to go over and get that pencil?

Build up within yourself a feeling that it is really a wonderful pencil and you would really like to have it. Actually intend to go pick it up. Actually intend to go pick something up to play with. It must be that kind of authentic wanting. You must feel it in your body.

It is important to be clear about what wanting the pencil means. “Wanting” is not the same as “going.” Don’t actually walk over and get the pencil. Focus instead on the physical feeling of wanting to go over.

It is also important not to become stiff and rigid. When I say not to actually go over and get the pencil, I don’t mean that you have to make your body absolutely
motionless. Don’t freeze up and physically prevent your body from moving in order to focus on wanting to move. Just let your body experience the wanting and react to it naturally and spontaneously—without actually walking over to the pencil.

Another difficulty in this experiment is that “wanting” does not mean merely thinking about getting the pencil. There is, for example, a difference between thinking about loving someone and actually feeling love for them. Thinking about is more of a disconnected intellectual picture, but feeling is something you do with your “heart” and your body. Relax, be natural and create an authentic feeling in your mindbody of desire and intention to walk over and get the pencil. Most people can create this feeling when they focus on it, though many need some personal instruction to figure out how to do it.

What happens when you stand and focus on wanting the pencil? Take some time to let the feeling build. Once you establish this feeling, you will probably feel yourself “involuntarily” tipping toward the pencil. For most people, this movement will be a small drift toward the pencil, perhaps an eighth of an inch (about a third of a centimeter) or so, though some people will actually move quite a bit. Most people will feel as though the pencil were a magnet gently drawing them towards it. (Some people will actually tip away from the pencil. That response generally has to do with whether they feel they are allowed to move toward what they want or have learned to pull away from it instead.)

Some people may find it hard to believe that thoughts immediately create actions. Some people believe so deeply that their minds and bodies are not connected that they cannot figure out how to build up the body feeling of authentic wanting. Some people are so unused to paying attention to the experience of body processes that even when they actually move toward the pencil they do not notice it. Some information may help you understand this exercise.

In the 1930’s, Edmund Jacobson did a series of electromyography experiments involving muscular responses to imagery. He found that if he asked a person to imagine moving a body part, there were nerve impulses directed to precisely the muscles that would actually move the body part in the specified movement—even when there were no movements that were observable externally. In other words, there is scientific evidence for the idea that what you think, you do.

When you have an image of a movement and intend to execute the movement, your brain sends nerve impulses to the muscles which will do the movement. The muscles can act with a range of force, from a barely perceptible tensing to an all-out clenching. However, even below the range of what is barely perceptible to most people, there is still physical activity, the faintest stirrings of the muscles. You could call these faint, normally imperceptible tensings “micromovements.”
The *Wanting a Pencil* experiment is a way to help you begin to notice the micromovements which are the small beginnings of the action of going to get the pencil. The experiment is an attempt to help you make the imperceptible perceptible. With training, you can sensitize yourself to events that are an ordinary part of human existence but which almost no one notices.

This level of body sensitivity is very helpful in improving performance in physical tasks. In the context of abuse recovery, it is helpful in learning to notice unconscious movements and discerning the intentions that underlie them.

### WANTING A RAT: EXPERIMENT

Wanting to move toward something is one of the two basic flavors of movement. The other flavor, of course, is wanting to move away from something, so let’s do an experiment to experience this second process.

Shut your eyes and imagine you are in a dim, dank basement. You look up and there is a hungry giant rat moving toward you. Feel the presence of the rat in front of you. What do you do? Most people automatically and involuntarily flinch away from the rat. This is the usual response, but there is always the possibility of an idiosyncratic response. Maybe someone would move toward the rat, perhaps a person who as a child was so abused that he turned for comfort to a wild rat and tamed it as a friend.

I once worked with a woman who in the *Wanting a Pencil* experiment automatically moved away from the pencil. When I pointed that out, she immediately explained that as a little girl she had been punished for asking for anything for herself—so she simply learned to move away from all her desires. Sensitizing survivors to the subtle feelings of wanting to move towards or away from helps them notice and understand many instances in their lives in which old patterns operate unconsciously.

When you move in a given direction, it is important to consider whether you are moving toward that direction, or away from the opposite direction? Try thinking of various distasteful things, and see how your body moves.

### SQUARE IN THE AIR: EXPERIMENT

This experiment will focus on how intentions operate together. Stand up, in a comfortable posture. With the index finger of one hand, draw a square in the air in front of you. The square should be about eight inches (about twenty centimeters) on each side. Be clear about the corners of the square. As you come to one corner, think in advance that you will make a right angle turn and move in a new direction. If you are drawing in a counter-clockwise direction, at the top right corner, for example, you will change from moving your finger upward to moving it to the left. In other words, set up a clear intention of moving up and then moving left.
Once that is a clear experience, make a change. When you get to your chosen corner, move in the direction you have been moving, but intend the opposite direction. At the top right corner, for example, intend to move to the right, but still actually move to the left. What happens? What do you feel?

Most people will feel the finger waver in its path or slow down. Often, the edge or corner of the square will get round or distorted in some other way. This is the experience of having two intentions interfering with each other. How often do survivors hold conflicting intentions?

In this chapter, we have been focusing on how to develop body awareness and on what it is that we become aware of when we are aware of our bodies. Knowing what you are doing is the foundation for being able to evaluate and improve what you are doing.

In the next three chapters, we will focus on the development of power.
CHAPTER 7
POWER: STABILIZING THE CORE

Power is a vast subject, and to make it a bit simpler, this chapter will start with just one part of it—the optimal functioning of the core of the body, which is the breath, pelvis, and spinal column.

TELEPHONE BOOK: EXPERIMENT

You will need a partner and a telephone book for this experiment. Stand on the telephone book, and ask your partner to push you off. Your job is to stay on the phone book and not get pushed off. (If you don’t have a telephone book, you can do the exercise just standing on a spot on the ground.)

Before the exercise gets too crazy, let’s put some limits on how your partner pushes. Have your partner push you with the palms of both hands, on your chest or shoulders. The push should be a gradual shove not a sudden blow. The push should be reasonably firm but not unreasonably hard.

What do you do to maintain your position and your balance? What do you do with your breathing and posture? Most people brace themselves for the impact. They stiffen up and try to resist the push.

Try the exercise again, getting as tough and hard as you can, bracing yourself to withstand the impact. Does that work?

Now, try it another time, but this time relax. Remember, that doesn’t mean getting limp and spaced out. Let your belly and breathing loosen up. Be soft yet focused when you are shoved. How does that work?

Most people find that when they release their bellies and breath, they feel heavier on the ground. They feel more solid and massive. And they also feel flexible enough to adapt to the push. Most people find it much easier to stay on the telephone book by getting soft. Of course, there are limits to the pressure you can take. Relaxing won’t make you invulnerable. This exercise simply points out that relaxation works better than tension.

True, it doesn’t feel so manly and impressive to be soft. Still, would you rather feel good about being tough and strong—while being defeated? Or would it be acceptable to feel calm and ordinary—and through this discover your power and your safety? I think the choice is obvious.

Though bracing feels like strength, it is really just a compacted form of weakness. Bracing (or efforting) is the process of applying your strength to your own body, rather than to objects in the environment. When you brace, you feel your strength because you are using it in yourself against yourself. Bracing reduces your effectiveness. True strength will feel much less obvious.
Often people feel that anger is a source of strength. Try getting angry and using that energy to resist the shove. You will find that anger, which is a form of bracing, actually weakens you. If you wish to be strong enough to stand your ground, you will have to give up your anger.

I am not saying that people should suppress their anger. Anger is a natural, legitimate response of the organism to invasion. It is a way of generating energy for self-protection. However, it isn’t very efficient or effective. In self-defense, you cannot afford to be angry. You will move best and protect yourself best when you are relaxed and focused. Being angry will just make you stiff, slow, and awkward. In therapy, you should study your anger and process it. In self-defense, you should respectfully set it aside until later, when you have a safe time for processing it.

EXPRESSING OR REPLACING FEELINGS: CASE STUDY

I was working with a couple, both of whom had been sexually abused as children, and they indicated that they didn’t understand what I meant when I said that anger was not useful and that it would be more effective for them to act from a feeling of kindness. In therapy they had learned that they had to express their anger, get it out rather than suppress it and act nice. I suggested that the focus of therapy is going into and understanding feelings, and that is a necessary and important process. However, my process of somatic work is different. It is about learning skills for better functioning, and one element is disengaging from feelings that lead to inefficient action. I pointed out that as children they had been told to suppress their anger and act nice. That was a way of invalidating their rightful feelings. I was validating their feelings but asking them to choose when and where it would be appropriate to express them.

We went onto the practice mat (a mat surface like a gymnastics mat, on which we practice martial arts at my school). I caressed Alice’s neck, and she spaced out, got limp, and started to cry—which is what she did as a little girl when she was abused. I pointed out that she had every right to feel bad about being touched inappropriately, and she had every right to express it, but feeling bad did nothing to stop me from continuing to touch her. I reminded her of all the breathing and movement work we had done, and showed her how to block my arm as I reached out to touch her. Then I showed her how to throw me down. When she did something active to defend herself and stop me from touching her, she realized that she could be relaxed, firm and present, strong and in control—which was far more satisfying than reliving the past.

Then Alan and I did the same exercise. He didn’t get limp; he got angry, but that didn’t help him protect himself. He was too tense and out of control to move effectively. I reminded him too to relax and breathe and then showed him how to throw me down. By the end of the lesson, they had both experienced that neither anger nor grief would keep them safe. They understood how valu-
able it can be to step aside from strong feelings into calm alertness, effective action, and appropriate self-defense.

What does the Telephone Book exercise indicate about rigidity and vulnerability? It’s simple. Our culture suggests that hardness and toughness are strong, and that is wrong. Hardness seems like the obvious way to be strong and resist threats, but as you experienced just now, it doesn’t work.

The search for power through toughness is, I think, part of what perpetuates abuse. Some people who have been hurt, and who feel weak and fearful, find others who are even weaker and hurt them. In the ability to inflict pain, they feel themselves to be strong, no longer the weak victim.

Softness is very unobvious, but it works. “Quick, Henry. There are wolves outside the barn. Throw open the doors so the horses will be safe.” That just doesn’t seem reasonable. Actually, in the case of wolves outside the barn, it isn’t. For abuse survivors, opening seems equally unreasonable. But for abuse survivors, opening is not only reasonable, it is necessary.

Perhaps you have been sexually abused, and your mouth, anus or vagina was penetrated. The obvious thing to do is to clench those sphincter muscles in an attempt to prevent further penetration. Even when there is no actual present threat of penetration, you will keep those muscles clenched just to feel safe. Wideness may feel totally threatening. But when those muscles are clenched you cannot run freely and quickly and you cannot fight freely and strongly. The message hidden in clenching is that you are powerless to do anything more than passively resist. But until you give up the clenching, you will in fact be powerless to run or fight effectively. Your muscles will be tight and preventing you from moving well. The best way to stay strong and unpenetrable is to be soft and wide open. I know this is difficult, but we will work on it more, and you will eventually find openness not just tolerable but even exhilarating.

By the way, what were you feeling as you read that last paragraph? Were you breathing? How did your posture shift? Once a therapist who had read a paper I wrote about body work with incest survivors told me that the paper was so scary that she read the first two paragraphs at her office and then put the paper in her briefcase. She finished reading the paper at home, in her bed, under her blankets, by the light of a flashlight. When abuse survivors read about the elements of abuse, that can trigger feelings that were part of their abuse. Watch for that, and use the tools you are learning.

Go back to your breathing and your belly. Notice if there is tension or restriction. Open those areas. Find your wholeness.

Of course, if you can’t open up, that doesn’t make you bad. Perhaps that last paragraph was such a strong trigger for you that you can’t relax right now. That’s OK. Take a walk, watch TV, do something to calm yourself. It’s a lot like weight lifting. Everybody starts where they start. You may not be able to lift one
hundred pounds, so you start with five. Sooner or later, if you persist in your exercises, you will be able to lift the hundred pound weight.

This chapter contains some basic exercises in opening the core of the body and developing power. Opening the body and developing power are part of the work leading to the development of love, which will be addressed more specifically in an upcoming chapter.

Of course, I don’t simply run individuals who come to me through this process in a linear, mechanical way. I pick and choose from among the exercises I have developed the ones that fit each student’s process of exploration. Ideally, a given exercise will be used when it fits the timing of a student’s journey. However, in a book, all we can do is proceed through the exercises linearly, and that will work as a way for you to learn to find your own power.

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Power is the ability to control your environment to maintain your safety and secure your needs. Power is fundamentally about standing on your own two feet, taking a stand on the earth, having a home base. Power is about weight support and the body’s architecture. In addition to relaxing the belly, pelvic floor musculature and breathing, using the pelvis and spinal column in an architecturally balanced manner is very important in the process of developing power. A series of simple experiments can help you find the architectural truth of your body.

Bones are like the support beams in a building. When the weight of your body falls squarely through your bones to the surface supporting your body, then your muscles don’t have to work much to hold you up. In addition, your body will be in a position of balance which allows free, uncompressed movement in your breathing and your joints. When your body leans off the vertical line, your muscles must work overtime to hold your body up, and your joints will be loaded in imbalanced ways. There will be considerable structural strain and fatigue, and you will experience yourself as weak and incapable. Postural balancing is a process of eliminating the waste of energy involved in misusing the body's system of support beams.

As an example, think about a tall flagpole being held up by guy lines on all sides. As long as the pole stays vertical, only slight adjustments and minor force will be necessary to keep it up. Most of the pole’s weight will be transferred vertically through its own length into the ground. But if it starts to tip off vertical, a lot of force will be needed to keep it from continuing its movement and falling. In the same way, a vertical postural support pattern allows the bones to support the weight of the body with as little effort as possible.

In one way, the flagpole is a good image of postural balance, but in another way it is a very poor image. A flagpole is an inert object, but people are not inert objects. Many people make the mistake of thinking that good posture is really stiff and motionless. “Posture” sounds a lot like “post,” and very often people believe that good posture is like being a sturdy, upright, immovable post. You get
into the right position and you stay there. However, that is a prescription for stiffness and postural strain.

In fact, good posture is a fluid, dynamic process. Good posture is a continuing action, or more precisely, a continuing series of actions—of small movements of adjustment around a central line of balance. Only dead people have “good posture” in the static, unmoving sense. When you are “still,” you are actually in constant movement.

The flagpole image also suggests an unfortunate idea of the nature of postural adjustment. A leaning flagpole is brought back to a vertical position by lengthening the guy wires on the side the pole leans toward and shortening the guy wires on the side it leans away from. Many people think of postural adjustment as a merely mechanical process like straightening up a leaning flagpole. They think that doing strengthening exercises to shorten slack muscles and doing flexibility exercises to stretch tight muscles will bring the body to a vertical alignment. However, posture is a dynamic process of movement, and movements are actions. Voluntary muscles just do what the mind wants. Whether we are doing the movements with conscious awareness or not, movements are choices or intentions, on some mind/body level. Movements are part of the style and meaning of our lives, and therefore postural change has to involve awareness and choice. We have to understand and feel how we are moving and why we move that way in order to most effectively change our posture and our movements. To change our muscles we must change our minds. (Of course, to change our minds, we must change our muscles.)

BODY CORE

Let’s start by examining the movement processes of the core of the body. Consider how you balance your spinal column on your pelvis. It is very much like balancing a bottle upright on a bowling ball. Your spinal column is like a bottle, and your pelvis is like a bowling ball. If the bottle is placed just exactly right on the bowling ball, it will balance and stay upright. However, once it is balanced, if the bowling ball rolls underneath it, the bottle will fall off the ball. Your spinal column, of course cannot fall off your pelvis. However, if your pelvis rotates forward, your lower back will be dragged forward into a sway-backed position; and if your pelvis rotates backward, your lower back will be dragged backward into a slumped position.
PELVIC ROTATION: EXPERIMENT

There is a simple experiment which will help you feel how your pelvis and spinal column operate together to provide postural support. Find a firm chair with a firm, flat, level seat pan (the part of the chair you sit on). If your chair is too soft and cushy, you will sink into it. If the seat pan slants back, it will force you to lean way back.

In order to do this experiment, you will need to be sitting in a chair that offers neutral support. If you don’t have such a chair, you can use a chair with a minimal tilt or bucket, such as a library chair or a cafeteria chair. In that case, fill in the rear edge of the seat pan with a folded towel to create a flat and level surface to sit on.

Sit without leaning against the back support, and try slumping down and sitting up straight. By slumping, I mean a movement in which you let your body collapse downward. Your shoulders go down but not very much forward. Some people, when they are asked to slump, will bend forward from the waist and drop their head down toward their knees, but that is not what I mean by slumping.

Notice that when you slump, your 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 behind the body.) Notice that when you roll your pelvis forward, your body moves up out of the slump to an erect sitting posture. And if you continue rolling your pelvis forward past the point of erect posture, your back arches into a swayback position.

Contrary to what most people believe, straightening up from a slump is accomplished by rolling the pelvis forward not by throwing the shoulders back or by straightening the back. If you aren’t sure about this, slump and feel how your pelvis rolls back. Now, without moving your pelvis at all, try to sit up by moving your shoulders or your back. It can’t be done.

Try rolling your pelvis forward to come up out of the slump, and simultaneously puff out your chest and throw your shoulders back. Notice that these movements of your shoulders, chest or back are extra movements, which use muscles unnecessarily and waste energy.

Some people find it difficult to do the movement of pelvic rotation while sitting, but practicing it in another position can be easier. Get down onto all fours, standing on your hands and knees, with your arms and legs pretty much vertical and straight (but not locked) underneath you. Now, gently arch your back, letting it sag down into a swayback position—like a horse that has had too many heavy riders. And then hump your back up—like an angry cat. Move slowly and gently back and forth from the arched to the humped position,
feeling how your pelvis rolls and your spinal column follows the rolling. Once you have felt the movement clearly, try it again in the sitting position.

Pelvis rolled forward,
back & chest tense,
swaybacked posture.

Pelvis balanced,
chest open,
centered posture.

Pelvis rolled forward,
back & chest tense,
swaybacked posture.
There are two very different sets of muscles which will rotate your pelvis forward. Using one set produces strain and imbalance in your body, and using the other produces balance, power and ease. To understand this, consider that there are basically two ways to tip a bowl forward—lifting the rear edge or lowering the front edge. Which edge of the bowl moves determines where the axis of rotation is, and which edge of the pelvis is the focus of movement determines whether pelvic rotation will be an easy movement or a strain.

Most people sit up “straight” by arching their backs. This is done by using the muscles along the back to pull up on the rear edge of the pelvis. However, this movement pattern creates tension and discomfort, and that is why everyone will sit up “straight” for a minute when exhorted to and then give it up as uncomfortable. In reality, what most people mean by straight is tense and imbalanced, not at all good posture.

The most effective and comfortable way of rotating your pelvis forward involves using two muscles deep in the front of the body rather than muscles along the back. Those muscles are the psoas (pronounced so-as) and the iliacus (pronounced ih-lye-a-kus). These deep, internal muscles are positioned very close to each other and run between the head of the femur (thighbone) and the spinal column. They move the front edge of the pelvis forward and down and create a very strong and comfortable physical organization of the pelvis and spinal column.

**INGUINAL SITTING: PRACTICE**

How can you find this new way of moving your pelvis? My first clue when I was discovering this for myself was a feeling of spacious dignity in the inguinal area, so I call this Inguinal Sitting.

Sit toward the front edge of a firm flat chair, with your back not touching the backrest. Keep your knees spread comfortably apart, your feet flat on the ground and your lower legs perpendicular to the ground (not tucked underneath you or stretched way out in front).
Slump down. Now, just for contrast, start by moving the wrong way, lifting from the back of your pelvis. Roll your pelvis forward by arching your back and lifting your back pockets up toward your shoulders. Notice that the movement takes place in your back around your waist. Notice also how tense this makes your lower back. Most people will tend to pull their shoulder blades down as well as their back pockets up, and this will spread the tension up through the whole back.

Now, let’s find the better way. Slump down. The new movement will be very low in your body, coming from deep in your pelvis, around your hip sockets. Notice that when you sit slumped your pubic symphysis (the bone just above your genitals in the front of your pelvis) points upwards. Roll your pelvis forward by moving your pubic symphysis forward and down so that it points toward the floor. It is important to keep your knees and feet apart as you try to find the proper way of rotating your pelvis. It is also important that you don’t confine the movement to your pelvis only. When your pelvis rolls forward, your torso should travel forward with it. If you move only your pelvis forward and leave your shoulders behind, that will create a deep swayback. However, most people don’t run into problems, and they find that rolling the pubic symphysis toward the floor brings them effortlessly up into a balanced sitting posture.

Many survivors of sexual abuse are very uncomfortable paying attention to or talking about the pelvis. It is ironic that the part of the body necessary for creating power to heal abuse is the part of the body that abuse often chases people out of. Please be aware that even if you are uncomfortable working with the pelvis, it is necessary.

Many abuse survivors have held their bodies so stiff for so long that they have little mobility in their pelvis or back. Other survivors have felt so much pain in the pelvic area that they have drained all the awareness juice out of that end of their bodies. Many people simply can’t figure out how to get the rotation I am describing. Don’t worry if you can’t do it yet. You will be able to when the time is right.

However, there is a different description of the movement which almost always gets it across, even to people who find it hard to figure out. Unfortunately it isn’t a polite description. Oh well, abuse isn’t polite to begin with, and whatever works is cool. So, as you are sitting on your chair, imagine that there is a bowl of lukewarm chicken soup on the floor between your feet. Now, I am aware that some readers do have and some readers don’t have a penis. But imagine that you have one, and roll your pelvis forward to dip your penis into the chicken soup. (If you don’t like chicken soup, tomato soup will do, as long as it is only lukewarm.) This description of the movement, as socially unacceptable as it is, usually gets people focused on rolling the lower front part of their pelvis forward and down.
Notice in the illustrations of the balanced sitting posture that when the pelvis is balanced the body leans just a bit forward—almost putting the body into the stable configuration of a pyramid. Roll your pelvis to sit upright and then lean a bit backward. What does that do? Most people will feel that moving off the line of balance creates tension in their backs and breathing. When you were a kid, did you try to balance your spoon on the lip of your cereal bowl at breakfast? Balancing on your pelvis is just like that. If you find just the right weight placement, the balance will be easy, and if you move off that placement, you won’t be balanced.

You will know you are doing the movement right when you move easily into an erect sitting posture. Your back and shoulders will not be actively engaged in muscular work but will move in a soft and relaxed way, simply as a result of the pelvic rotation.

Also, I made a point of specifying that your legs should be apart. Why? Try pressing your ankles and knees together, and see what that does to your breathing and lower back. Spread your knees apart at least six or eight inches (about fifteen to twenty centimeters). (How much will be best will depend on your body build.) What does spreading your knees do? Most people experience that sitting with their legs together rotates the pelvis a bit backward and creates compression and weakness in their breathing and lower back. Spreading their legs rotates the pelvis a bit forward and creates balance and power.

Rolling the pelvis forward and down to provide a foundation for balanced sitting.
As part of softening your breathing, I had you release the tension in your genital and anal sphincter muscles. Here I have defined a new sitting position by the orientation of the genitals. Many survivors of sexual abuse will feel very uncomfortable about noticing, feeling or mentioning the pelvic area of the body. However, it is just another part of the body, like your elbow. And the proper use of the pelvis and pelvic floor muscles is crucial in developing the body architecture required for power and for getting over the feeling of discomfort in talking about your pelvis.

This new way of sitting places the bones of the pelvis and spinal column in the architecturally optimal alignment. The weight of the body is on a vertical line through the head and torso. It goes squarely through the sitbones into the chair. (Your sitbones are the ischial tuberosities, the two pointy bones in your bottom that press into whatever you sit on. If you aren’t sure where your sitbones are, sit for a while on a flat concrete surface, and you will certainly begin to notice the hard bones pressing into the hard concrete.)

I try not to use the word straight about the body. I prefer the word vertical. Sitting or standing straight has connotations of being tense, held in, in a military posture. Letting yourself be vertical is a comfortable and relaxed way of being in your body. Being vertical has an upward opening and lengthening feeling to it, like a flower growing toward the sun, with its roots joining the earth. Your body gently lengthens upward rather than sagging or slumping, and the upward vertical lengthening allows your body’s weight to fall squarely onto the support surface below your body. I call this being centered.

Vertical does not mean straight like a ruler. In a simple sitting or standing position, the body is vertical when all the body’s normal curves average out so that the skeleton directs the body’s weight straight into the ground. There is a bit of forward lean in proper vertical sitting (as shown in the drawing of the balanced pelvis). Sitting with just a bit of forward lean moves the body’s weight along the thigh away from the rear edge of the body and delivers the body’s weight into the ground in a more stable and balanced way.
Being centered is not just for fun or because it feels good. A centered use of the body’s support structure is the basis for the process of developing power.

**CHEST PUSH: EXPERIMENT**

Are you a pushover? What is your immediate response when I ask that question? Do you get limp and feel “Yes.” Or do you get rigid and feel “NO!”

Let’s try an experiment in resisting and not resisting. You will need a partner to help with this. Your partner’s job will be to push on your chest, and your job will be to maintain your sitting posture and not be pushed over backward. (With women, push on the shoulders.) Sit toward the front of a flat, neutral chair, without leaning back against the backrest. Have your partner stand in front of you.

First, sit up straight, like a model of social correctness. Suck in your gut and throw back your shoulders. Have your partner push on your chest, with a steady pressure, and not with extreme force. In this sitting posture, can you resist the pressure? Unless you are massive and strong, probably not.

Now, slump down, and then come up to a good sitting posture by rolling your pelvis forward in the proper way. (By the way, the psoas and iliacus muscles have very little sensation. You won’t feel them when you use them. You will just feel balanced and strong.) Relax your belly and breathe. Soften and open your genitals and anus. Keep your legs apart. Have your partner push again. If you are sitting right, you will feel the pressure of the push somehow get deflected from a line going back through your chest into a line moving diagonally down and back. The pressure will actually press you into the chair and stabilize your posture, and you will feel that you are not working very hard to achieve the stability.

Of course, there are limits to how much pressure you can absorb. Your partner should be reasonable and not push too hard. With a centered sitting posture, the model in the photograph below is able to take my whole body weight yet stay relaxed. Most people should start off with less weight.

Just for another comparison, sit properly and change just one thing. Bring your legs together. What happens? Most people get tipped back immediately. When the legs are close together, the lower back gets rounded. Moving your legs apart arches the lower back a bit and makes it easier to position the pelvis properly for strength.

For another comparison, sit properly, and then squeeze your anus or your throat. Again, most people become weak and get tipped back easily. These are examples of how closing creates weakness and opening produces strength.
If you haven’t been able to accomplish this way of sitting just from the few exercises given above, don’t despair. Some survivors have such strong and unconscious habits of body smallness that they need a lot of time, and perhaps individualized instruction, to overcome their habitual patterns.

What is it like to sit centered and be able to resist the pressure? Most people feel it as effortlessly strong, powerful yet without resistance against. The exercise is about resisting and not resisting. It is about resistance in the sense of applying power and not being pushed back. It is about not resisting in the sense that the physical power and mental focus are not about antagonism or fighting against. A cliff does not resist the power of the waves. It simply sits, secure in its own strong identity, and the waves crash against it and fall back. When people sit properly, they experience a similar feeling in this Chest Push exercise. They don’t fight against but simply sit strong.

I’m afraid sitting with the legs spread apart might be psychologically uncomfortable for survivors of sexual abuse and especially for many women. Many sexual abuse survivors, both men and women, feel extraordinarily vulnerable when they open their legs and make their genitals “available.” In addition, many women have a feeling that spreading their legs is a sexual invitation or makes them sexually available. Our culture commands women to sit with their legs together. That is the lady-like way to sit, and many women feel that sitting with open knees is a man’s way of sitting. Unfortunately, rather than making a survivor less vulnerable, sitting with the legs pressed together makes him or her more vulnerable. And unfortunately what passes for lady-like in our culture is biomechanically false. Sitting with your legs together is weak and uncomfortable and makes you a pushover. Literally.

However, using your body in a strong, free way allows you to define and protect your boundaries better. Sitting with your legs apart allows you to be
strong enough to push away unwanted touch or unwanted attention. It may be a surprising idea, but you truly become clearer and more assertive mentally and verbally when you are physically stronger and more balanced. And if push comes to shove, you become better able to protect yourself by running or fighting when your legs and back are free and strong. I know that changing such a fundamental aspect of the way you present yourself can be very disturbing, but it truly is necessary to open your legs to find your power. So, would you rather actually be strong, balanced, and comfortable or have the false feeling of being non-vulnerable or lady-like?

For women, wearing short skirts may make it uncomfortable to open the knees, and wearing tight skirts may make it impossible to do so, but you can wear pants or full, long skirts and open your knees comfortably apart. And while I’m on the topic of clothes, women are also expected to wear pointy-toed shoes or, even worse, high heels. They also constrict your feet and make comfort and power impossible. Men’s shoes and formal suits are almost as constricting. Pay attention to what you wear, and see if your clothes are allowing you to access the power you deserve.

I love doing this Chest Push exercise with survivors. There is a certain grin they get when they come into contact with the truth of their own power, perhaps for the first time in their lives. There is a joy that runs through them when they experience themselves as actually strong, with clear boundaries, and with the ability to maintain those boundaries. This exercise says clearly and forcefully, “You are not what your perpetrators made you believe you were.”

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Let’s return to the Soft Breathing practice and add some modifications to it. The Soft Breathing exercise is a wonderful practice of openness and relaxation. By adding this new material about proper sitting, the new breathing exercise becomes a way of practicing open, relaxed stability and power. However, before we get to it, you will need to learn one technical trick for sitting comfortably. Now that you have felt how to align your pelvis and spinal column by using the psoas and iliacus, you are ready to learn how to maintain that alignment without even using the muscles very much. Think about putting a brick under a car wheel to keep the car from rolling. That is just what we are going to do to keep your body balanced and stabilized.

**TOWEL SITTING: PRACTICE**

You need a bath towel for this. If it is really large and thick, it won’t work. And likewise, if it is thin and skimpy, it won’t work. Take an ordinary bath towel and fold it in half widthwise. Then fold it in half lengthwise. Then roll it up, not too tight and hard, but also not too loose.
You can sit either on a chair or cross-legged on the floor. If you are sitting cross-legged, the most comfortable position will be to have both ankles and knees on the floor, one leg in front of the other, rather than one leg on top of the other or one ankle crossed over the other. If you have one leg or ankle atop the other, one hip will be higher and your posture will not be balanced.

Sit with your pelvis rolled forward into alignment. Now lean forward and get your weight off your sitbones. Raise your sitbones off the chair or floor a few inches (approximately eight centimeters), put the towel roll underneath your tailbone, and then sit back down onto the towel roll. It is important that the towel be positioned under your tailbone and not under your sitbones. Your sitbones must still rest on the chair’s seat pan or on the floor.

Then come back to your vertical sitting posture. If you have the towel positioned right, you will feel your tailbone resting on it and the towel supporting your whole spinal column and torso. Most people feel lighter, taller and freer when they sit with a towel roll for support. They feel that the effort they usually expend on holding their bodies up simply isn’t needed.
You can understand why this towel roll is so comfortable if you think of the pelvis as a two legged stool. There is a reason why stools have three legs (or four). It is very simple. Two-legged stools fall over. Well, the pelvis is essentially a two legged stool. When you sit down, the two sitbones are all that contact the surface of the chair, and that is an essentially unstable arrangement. It takes muscular effort to hold the pelvis in position, and people usually use the muscles of the back to hold the pelvis in position. Those are the wrong muscles, and they tire quickly. In trying to reduce the effort, people slump until their bodies hang stably on their ligaments. A better way to reduce strain is to use the psoas and iliacus muscles to hold the pelvis in position. Better still is using those muscles to position the pelvis properly and then filling in the gap between the tailbone and the chair surface. This in effect provides a third leg for the stool and reduces the work even the correct muscles need to do.

You need to be able to move into the stable, vertical posture through your own actions, but once you know how to create a balanced sitting posture on your own, you can use a towel roll to support yourself in this posture.

**BASIC BREATHING: PRACTICE**

Sit on a chair with your feet flat on the floor, or sit cross-legged on the floor. Use a towel roll for pelvic support. (Kneeling, sitting on your heels, with your pelvis positioned correctly is also a good sitting position. It puts the heels under your tailbone and creates the same upright sitting posture. Some people may prefer this kneeling posture for the breathing exercise.)

With your eyes gently closed, breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you breathe in, let your belly (and chest) expand gently. Focus your awareness on the feeling of drawing your breath/awareness down into your body core. (It is convenient to say that you are drawing the breath into your belly, but of course the air stays in your lungs. The image of breathing into your belly is just a way to help you direct the movement all the way down through your body.)

Don't rigidify your chest and upper back when you inhale, but let them expand in a gentle, spontaneous way as well. You should feel that the inhalation starts in your belly and expands through your body into your back and chest as well. As you exhale, it will be almost like a sigh. The air will fall out of your mouth as your belly and chest relax. Make sure to let your lips and jaw relax open. Don't purse your lips and blow.

Breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth is useful for two reasons. It makes the absolutely ordinary process of breathing into something new, which helps you stay focused on it. Also, it is a bridge between an inner and an outer focus. Normally you breathe out through your mouth only when you are talking or expending physical effort. Both those tasks are directed outward into the world. This breathing exercise focuses on what you are doing.
inside your body, but its purpose is to cultivate an inward relaxation which will allow effective functioning out in the world.

Don't force your breath. Breathe in your natural rhythm without trying to hold the breath or control its timing.

If you feel that your breathing gets softer and calmer during the exercise, then you are moving in the right direction. If you feel uncomfortable (perhaps feeling that you aren't getting enough air), then you are holding tension somewhere in your body. If you are learning about this on your own from this book, without an experienced teacher to go to for help, then you will have to figure out the tension pattern on your own. The best way to proceed is just to relax and let yourself be uncomfortable. Don't push the exercise, but do it for a few minutes at a time until you happen to notice where in your body the interfering tension is located. Then you can let go of the tension. If the exercise remains uncomfortable, don't feel that you have to keep on working with it.

Ideally you should relax your belly and breathe from there all the time. However, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth is just for this exercise. In daily life, you should breathe normally, in and out through your nose.

You may wish to do this breathing exercise for only a few minutes at a time until you get used to it. As you continue working with it, you may wish to do it for twenty minutes or more, once or twice a day. If you do this exercise for a few minutes every day, you will build up clear habits of keeping your body relaxed and powerful, and that will be very helpful in handling and resolving your abuse issues. As you continue to play with this exercise, you will find that you can use the breathing pattern even while you are moving around with your eyes open. You will find that a few breaths done this way in the midst of some stressful situation will calm you down and help you react in new, more perceptive and powerful ways.

Breathing and opening your body in this way is very relaxing. Breathing is supposed to be a gentle, internal massage, and it is very comfortable when it is. This internal physical softness creates a psychological state of relaxed alertness. Negative feelings such as fear, anger, anxiety, confusion and so on always involve some form of twisting and constriction or collapse in muscles, breathing, posture and movement. Breathing in an open way is the opposite of this constriction and serves to counteract emotional stress.

**BEING WIDE OPEN: CASE STUDY**

I had one student who came to me for body work because she had severe back problems. She'd been to a neurologist and an orthopedist and they'd found nothing medically wrong, though they did say that in the X-rays her spinal column looked twenty years older than it should have. As I started working with her, I noted that she tensed her muscles wherever I touched her and that she re-
sisted my moving any part of her body. After about twenty minutes, I asked her, choosing my words very carefully, why she constantly kept my touch from penetrating her muscles. She immediately started telling me about childhood incest.

I had her get up, deliberately clench her vagina as tightly as she could and start walking. She felt how strained and awkward that made her gait and how tense it made her back. She felt how the tension in her pelvic floor muscles spread to her hips and low back. She realized that she had spent the last thirty years tensing her vagina to keep her father out, and the resulting physical compression of her spinal column was what had worn down her back. She was in psychotherapy, but naturally her therapist had not worked with her back problem since that was a "physical" not a psychological problem. It was equally natural that her physicians had not dealt with the incest since that was a "psychological" not a physical problem. However, the physical and emotional difficulties were actually one and the same. The real issue was one of traumatic learning and a dysfunctional somatic/emotional coping action.

In the next half dozen lessons, we worked with basic empowerment exercises until she was ready to deal directly with the meaning of the pelvic clenching. I then had her assume a Karate stance in which the legs are spread quite far apart, the feet turned out a bit, and the knees bent. Her automatic response was to tuck her tail under to keep her vagina closed, but I showed her that the ease and stability of the stance depends on rotating the pelvis in the opposite direction and arching the back a bit. She found that very threatening because it held her anus and vagina wide open and accessible. In order to make that position endurable, I showed her a breathing exercise for cultivating a sense of dense, fiery power.

Once she felt powerful in that position, I asked her to block my hand as I went to smack her in the chest. Her automatic response was to cringe and close herself. That response was based on ingrained feelings of inability and took all the power out of the block. It created a feedback loop in which her feelings of weakness produced a weak response, which in turn reinforced her feelings of weakness. We kept working with the stance until she could stay in her wide open position and maintain her stability of breathing, and at that point she was able to block my hand with ease.

In this exercise she felt that closing and constricting herself reduced her power and that she was most powerful and effective when she felt most vulnerable. That paradoxical piece of understanding gave her a whole new view of how she would have to confront her past pain. She realized that being wide open was her only realistic option for staying safe. And it also relieved the tension in her back.
Returning to the process of learning power, let’s try another experiment. This one will be similar to but worse than the *Tissue Throwing* exercise. It will involve being touched on your face rather than having tissues thrown at you.

Be careful. Many abuse survivors have been slapped in the face, or hurt in other similar ways, and this exercise may be too close to home (literally) to be safe or tolerable for you. So if you would rather go back to using tissues, that would be fine. Remember that it is very important for you to respect yourself enough to do what is *appropriate* given your stage of healing.

**SLUGS IN YOUR FACE: EXPERIMENT**

You will need a partner for this experiment in using breathing as a means of reducing emotional stress. You and your partner should stand facing each other. In order to create some stress to overcome, we will use a simple image and movement.

Your partner was out in their garden last night, picking slugs off lettuce plants, and they saved all the slugs. Have your partner rub a handful of the slugs in your face.

What do you do when your partner does that? What happens to your breathing? Does your posture change? Do you stay relaxed and alert? Do you tense up and pull away? Or something else? What do you do in your face?

The imaginary slugs coupled with the real physical intrusion of the touch almost always makes people very squeamish and uncomfortable. Most people who do this exercise—whether they are abuse survivors or not—pull away, grimace, tense up, and restrict their breathing. Abuse survivors almost always have major issues about being touched and react to having slugs rubbed in their faces.

Now, consciously and deliberately relax your belly and breathing as your partner rubs the slugs into your face. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Choose to keep your breathing soft, steady and continuous. How does that affect the way you respond? Most people experience that it vastly reduces the emotional discomfort of the exercise. Many people even find that an intrusion which was very uncomfortable at first becomes quite trivial when they maintain their focus and relaxation. This state of alert relaxation is what I call being *Centered*.

For the sake of clarity, I should say that I am not suggesting that the appropriate response to an attack is to relax and let oneself be intruded upon. However, learning to stay relaxed and focused is a beginning stage in the overall process of learning defenses which will be effective in helping you prevent being victimized.

Just for comparison, try tensing your throat, pelvic musculature and breathing as preparation for having the slugs rubbed in your face. Most people experience that not only brings back the discomfort but greatly increases it. Most of the pain/discomfort that you experienced in having the slugs rubbed in
your face you created yourself through your dislike of the intrusion. Of course there is a certain real physical sensation because you are indeed being touched, but most of the discomfort was added on top of that bare minimum.

Notice that being in mental/emotional control is a very concrete physical process of placing the body in the right state. The fact that feelings are so easily changed by making physical changes shows that the mind and body are truly one. It means that you have the ability to use simple, concrete tools to make important changes in your whole self.

Use caution in this experiment. Many abuse survivors may have extreme and unexpected reactions to being touched this way, or to touching another person in an intrusive manner. Remember, this is just an experiment, not real life.

Of course, some people have gotten used to violent physical contact. They may space out or go numb and not even realize that having slugs rubbed in their faces is stressful for them. Watch for muscular tension in various parts of your body. Watch for restrictions in breathing. They are signs that you are experiencing stress.

Some people truly don’t find having slugs rubbed in their faces stressful. If you are in that category, you might consider consulting with your partner and figuring out something that would be stressful enough to be productive as an exercise for you. Remember that the exercise has to be safe and that your partner has to be comfortable enough with their role in the exercise to do it.

In this chapter, you have practiced becoming aware of and managing your body core. Having a stable and free core is the beginning of letting go of the pain of your abuse. It is also the beginning of developing and using power to keep yourself safe in the world.
CHAPTER 8
POWER: LOVE & EXPANSIVENESS

True power must be loving and open. Power that isn’t loving and expansive is hurtful, both to the person who wields it and to the person who is its object. In this chapter we will examine how to access love and expansiveness as foundations for power.

A valuable first step in developing love is studying its opposite. Studying hatred will give us some insights about the nature of love and how to construct it.

HATRED: EXPERIMENT
Try imagining someone who is a constant source of irritation and obstruction, perhaps a boss who constantly belittles you, or a co-worker who always shirks his own work but tries to take credit for work you have done. You have tried everything you can think of to resolve the situation, but the jerk just makes fun of you for trying. Let yourself feel irritation and resentment. Even hatred.

What happens in your body? What do you do in your breathing? In your chest and your posture as a whole?

Negative feelings such as fear and anger produce constriction, hardness, and imbalance in breathing and the chest, and this will result in cramped, graceless, fundamentally weak movement. This physical compression will also result in stressful, antagonistic ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Feelings take place in your body. By observing and changing your body, you can understand and change what you feel. If there is fear and anger flowing through your body, it will be hard for you to let your breathing find its natural ease. In addition to the processes of softening and stabilizing your core that we practiced earlier, the feeling of love is an important part of letting go of fear and anger and finding your power.

SMILING HEART: PRACTICE
Everyone has something or someone—perhaps a friend, a lover, a child, a flower, a work of art—something that when they think of it makes their heart smile.

Stand with your eyes closed, and spend a few moments thinking about whatever it is that makes your heart smile. What happens in your body? How is your chest affected? What happens to your breathing? What sensations do you feel flowing through you?
Most people experience a softening and warmth in their chests, and a freeing up over their whole bodies.

These sensations of being “warm hearted” or “tender hearted” are the bodily manifestations of love or kindness. If you stop to think about it, you will notice that very often we use physical language to describe emotional qualities. We talk about someone being stiff-necked or warm-hearted or having guts. There is a wisdom to this. Our emotional feelings are rooted in our physical life. By cultivating the physical state produced by this imagery practice, you are actually developing the ability to be more psychologically and spiritually loving. As you practice doing the physical state, it will eventually be something you can access directly, without the image that you used to call it up.

Love is an important step in the development of power, and this is rather surprising to most people. Love has to do with such qualities as softness, fluidity, mobility and lightness, all of which allow the body to move with more ease and balance. Not only does the chest soften when you are in a loving state, but your whole body becomes freer and more unified, and this improves the coordinated delivery of power in any action.

It is surprising how much this increases the power that is available. A number of years ago, I had a fourth degree black belt in Karate studying Aikido with me. I noticed that there was a merciless, knife-edge quality to his movements, and asking him about it elicited the statement that he meant every movement to be lethal and final. However, that lethal intent manifested as muscular hardness. I showed him this exercise on love. Then I had him block my attack and deliver a counterstrike while feeling that he loved and respected me. He was astonished and said that punching with love put fifty percent more power into his punch.

**LOVING ATTACKERS: CASE STUDY**

I was once working with a woman we can call Eleanor. I had been suggesting she learn to love her attacker, and she thought that was just plain dumb. She wanted to beat her perpetrator to a pulp, not love him. To give her a concrete focus for her feelings about her perpetrator, I played the role of a perpetrator. I sat next to her, and touched her leg in a sleazy, intrusive manner. She got disgusted and squirmed away.

She couldn’t imagine loving someone while focusing her power against them to defend herself. To help her feel how that would be possible, I talked about a dog lover seeing a beautiful dog with rabies. She would feel love and

compassion and pity, yet shoot the dog to put it out of its misery and to prevent it from infecting other animals or people. That image of being able to love and kill at the same time clicked for Eleanor because she'd had a dog she loved put to sleep, and she had held it while it died.

I had her do some sword work as a vehicle for experimenting with the process of killing lovingly. (Aikido includes training with the Japanese two-handed sword, and I often use this with abuse survivors.) I had Eleanor execute a downward cut with a wooden practice sword against a pole that I was holding. I had her do the cut first while being in an angry/hard place and then while loving her dog. She could feel the increase of strength when she was doing love.

Next, I had her hold the pole while I did the cut in both states. She could feel that when I cut with love, I moved with more softness and ease and hit harder. In fact, I broke the pole she was holding. She saw that and announced that if loving her perpetrator would let her hit him that hard, then she was willing to learn to love the son of a bitch. We talked about her idea of love, and she said that it had meant being nice, but she didn't want to be nice. Nice meant letting people touch her and welcoming them in. She realized that in order to not be nice, she had decided to be a bitch. By the end of the lesson, she realized that she could be soft and free and well-defended too. She realized she didn’t have to be a bitch to be safe.

Part of the reason that Eleanor rejected love is that she wasn’t distinguishing between love for the attacker and being a loving person confronting an attacker. Love for the attacker means admiring and embracing the attacker as a friend. Being a loving person confronting an attacker means keeping the body free and pliable even while looking at a cruel and hurtful person. Love for is personal love, and being loving is impersonal love. Being loving is the foundation for effective self-protection.

Love creates a soft, even freedom. Power creates a relaxed, integrated stability. Power creates stability and safety, which are prerequisites for the vulnerable softening of love. Love creates fluidity and ease, which are prerequisites for the coordinated delivery of power.

Power and love, contrary to the model that our culture uses, really are inseparable. In fact, they are the same. Love without power is limp and ineffective, and power without love is rigid and harsh. In either case, love or power is diminished to the point where it becomes just a shadow and not true power or love at all. Power is the foundation for the ability to love, and love is the foundation for wise use of power. This is not mere philosophy but is simply a shorthand method of stating that the body and the self must be soft and receptive as well as integrated and strong in order to function well.

Love is soft and power is bright, but both are about openness and freedom. The physical state of power/love is also an emotional and spiritual state, and in this physical state, people will indeed feel loving and act in genuinely loving
ways. Fear, anger and other negative emotions produce tension and imbalance in your body. It will be important in your healing to examine the messages our culture gives about the right way to use the body and discard those messages that interfere with your healing.

SIX DIRECTIONS REACHING: PRACTICE

Stand up with your feet about shoulder width apart and your hands down by your side. Notice that you are standing on the soles of your feet. Where is the center of the earth? Way down below you. With the soles of your feet, reach down into the earth. (This is related to the Wanting a Pencil experiment. In that exercise you wanted a pencil and felt how that intention to get it actually organized your body for moving to go get it.) Remember not to just visualize or think about reaching down, but actually sense in your feet and legs a reaching toward the middle of the earth. Stay with that sensation/action for a moment.

Another image may work better for you. Imagine that your feet are flashlights shining a beam of light down into the ground. Be the beam of light, and feel yourself going down deep into the ground.

Let go of reaching (or shining) down. Now, with the top of your head and shoulders reach upward to feel the sky. And let go of that.

Now try reaching forward with the front of your body to touch the horizon. And then reach backward with the back of your body to touch the horizon behind you.

Reach out to the right with the right side of your body to touch the horizon there. And then reach out to the left with the left side of your body.

If the horizon seems too far away to sense, find something closer, as close as you need for it to be a real sensing process for you. You are probably doing this exercise indoors, so you could reach below the floor and above the ceiling, and out to the walls. Or you could reach out into the air six or eight inches (about fifteen centimeters), if that is easier for you to sense.

Now, do all the directions together. Reach down and up, left and right, and forward and back.

How does that feel? Most people experience this as spacious and invigorating.

You don’t have to shrink. You have the right to take up space, no matter what you were taught as a child. You do have the right to claim space as your own.

You can practice the Six Directions Reaching exercise as you walk around during your daily activities. That will help you practice being more present and more alive. In particular, you can simultaneously do both the Six Directions Reaching and the Feet Walking process you will learn in the next chapter to create a vigorous, energetic way of moving through your world.
You can also use the *Six Directions Reaching* to help you maintain your inner spaciousness when you feel threatened. That will help you respond with more clarity and strength to whatever challenge you are facing.

**SIX DIRECTIONS BREATHING: PRACTICE**

The *Six Directions Breathing* practice is related to the *Soft Breathing* practice you worked with in Chapter 2, and it is an extension of the *Six Directions Reaching* exercise you just practiced. It is a way of practicing the skill of relaxing and balancing your whole body and bringing your inner core into relation with the outer world.

You use the same sitting posture and the same breathing process as in the *Soft Breathing* practice, but you add to that a way of “aiming” your breath as you exhale. In the *Six Directions Breathing* exercise, you exhale in different directions through your body, which will generate micromovements and change your overall way of holding your body. By practicing intending to open your body radiantly outward in a number of directions, you will actually open and balance your body.

Sit quietly in the centered posture, using a towel roll for support. You can sit on a flat chair away from the backrest; or you can sit on the floor with your legs folded and one in front of the other. Shut your eyes. Inhale gently through your nose, and let your belly expand gently as you do. The movement of inhaling should be focused in the core of your body just below your navel, though of course your chest and back will expand gently as well. Then exhale through your mouth, relaxing your mouth and throat.

This process of inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth is just for this exercise. Normally you should breathe through your nose. Exhaling through your mouth is part of vigorous action, and of course, it is how you breathe when you talk, so breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth in this exercise is a bridge between rest and action.

When you exhale, imagine that you are gently blowing the air down your spinal column, out your bottom, to a spot six or eight inches (about fifteen centimeters) below you.

Don’t just think about this or picture it in your mind, but actually feel it in your body, do it in your body. Watch out for tipping your head up and rolling your eyes up toward the ceiling as you imagine the path the air takes down through your body. When people look upward, they are usually engaging in an abstract, visual process of imagination rather than an embodied sensation process of imagination. Exhale down for half a dozen or so breaths.

Then change the direction. Imagine/feel that you are exhaling up your spinal column, out the top of your head, to a spot six or eight inches above
you. Breathe gently. Don’t purse your lips and blow, but just open your mouth, relax your throat, and let the air come out.

After you have done about half a dozen breaths, then exhale out of your right side toward a spot about six inches to your right. Next exhale out of your left side. Then exhale to your rear out of your back, and next exhale forward out of the pit of your belly and the front of your body.

For the last breath, exhale in all six directions at once—down and up, left and right, forward and back.

Exhaling a number of times in one direction gives you enough time to really feel how to aim your breath in that direction. However, once you have practiced this whole sequence and felt how it works, there is a more focused way of doing the exercise. Instead of exhaling in one direction for half a dozen breaths or so, exhale in a seven breath cycle. Exhale once in each direction and then once in all six directions. Then start over.

Always start with the down direction because that is a way of stabilizing the body. Then exhale up. After that it isn’t important in what order you do the horizontal pairs, but exhale into the right and left directions and the backward and forward directions. You can do this exercise for a minute or ten minutes, or for whatever is comfortable and enjoyable for you.

As you practice this exercise and gain skill with the breathing, you will find it productive to aim your breath farther away. Experiment with how far you can focus your breath, and notice what happens as you aim your breath farther and farther away.

You could also experiment with exhaling in lines between the six cardinal directions. Or you could experiment with exhaling to create an expanding sphere around yourself. You could experiment with filling the volume of the sphere with breath or with sensing the skin of the sphere. If you let the exercise talk to you, it will show you a lot of possibilities.

This exercise is a way of practicing holding an open, even, symmetrical awareness of your whole body and the space around you. Most people, when they first start working with this exercise, experience that there are areas of their body or directions of their breath that are not clear for them. Any dim spot in the feeling of your body's field of breath is an area of reduced body awareness and reduced vigor. Finding gaps in your field of awareness and then breathing life back into them is a way of remembering to live fully in your body. More than that, it is a way of contacting the feeling of living fully in the world. This exercise offers a way of practicing relaxing, balancing and empowering your whole body all at once. It would be well worth putting a few minutes into this exercise every day.
CRUNCHI-O’S SALESMAN: EXPERIMENT

Keeping your body balanced and relaxed, expansive and lively, can make quite a difference in your mental alertness and ease. Have a partner stand close to you, too close to you, right in your face, and shout about the benefits of eating and buying Crunchi-O’s, the new improved breakfast cereal made from sun-drenched energy pellets of golden dandelion seeds. You get the idea—loud, intrusive, aggressive and demanding. In your face, literally.

What do you feel? How do you respond emotionally and physically to the intrusive aggression? What happens to your breathing? Does your posture change?

Stand upright in a vertical balanced posture. First, align your pelvis, soften your breathing, and open your heart. Next, add awareness of your legs. Make sure your feet are flat on the ground, legs spread apart a bit, relaxed and energized. Relax your face, and open your breath. Open your heart. Radiate your breath in the six directions. How do you feel?

Have your partner shout at you again and notice how you feel this time. Most people will feel alert and confident, kind and strong, ready to tell the cereal huckster to quiet down or leave.

In this chapter, we have focused on opening the core of the body. Notice when you shut down your core in your daily life. What are you feeling? What is the situation? How effectively are you dealing with it. By opening your core, you can live in the present not the past, and you can access your rightful power to live effectively.
CHAPTER 9
POWER: LEGS, ARMS & FACE

Power and love come from opening the self. We have looked at ways of opening the body core, and in this chapter we will examine how the legs, arms and face can be opened as well.

LEGS

We often talk about being strong as having a ground to stand on or being able to stand on our own two feet. As is frequently the case, our linguistic metaphors have a lot to do with the actuality of our bodies.

Let’s look at how you use your feet and legs and what that has to do with your sense of power. Living in your legs in an alert, vigorous and active way contributes to your ability to find your power. Losing awareness of your legs will make it hard to find the ground.

LEG/PELVIS POWER: EXPERIMENT

To develop your awareness of just how your legs are related to your pelvis, try standing and pushing on a wall. Stand with your feet far enough from the wall that your body inclines forward quite a bit. Put your arms out in front of you and push with both hands. Where in your body do you feel muscles working to push? Are you pushing primarily with your arms, or do you push with your legs as well?

Try pushing by bending your knees quite a bit and then straightening your legs, as though you were trying to push the floor backwards away from the wall. Notice that the shove back and down with your legs creates a strong forward shove on the wall—if you are using your pelvis correctly.

How does your pelvis connect your legs to your arms? Maintain a steady push on the wall, and gradually rotate your pelvis so that you move from tucking your tail to arching your back. What happens to the push as you do this?

Notice that when your back is arched, the force of the push shoves your shoulders back away from the wall, and when your tail is tucked, the push shoves your pelvis back away from the wall. When your pelvis is aligned properly, neither tucked nor arched, you will experience a strong push on the wall. Feeling this will give you a clear experience that your legs generate force and your pelvis transmits it to your spinal column which in turn transmits it to your arms and hands. Many people find that this experiment transforms their awareness so that they begin experiencing the lower half of their bodies as active and powerful.
With the pelvis rotated backward, the force pushes the pelvis to the rear.

With good alignment, the force from the legs is applied to the wall.

With the pelvis rotated forward, the force pushes the shoulders to the rear.
LIVELY LEGS: EXPERIMENT

You can become even more aware of the energy in your legs by examining the weight shift necessary for rising to a standing position. Sit on a firm, flat chair in the comfortably balanced upright position. Stand up, and notice what movements you make to get yourself off the chair. Do you use your hands to push yourself up? Do you use momentum to throw yourself forward and up?

Start the motion of standing up by leaning forward, using your hip sockets as the hinge for the movement. Put your fingers in the creases where your legs join your trunk, just above and to the outside of your pubic bone. That is where your hip sockets are.

What happens to the weight on the soles of your feet as you lean forward? When you lean from the hip sockets, the weight of your torso moves onto your feet. Lean forward and place your weight on your feet, and keep going until you can lift your bottom a few inches (about eight centimeters) off the chair. Feel how active and alive your pelvis, hips and legs have to be to achieve this.

Keep your whole spinal column, from your head to your tailbone, relaxed and lengthened. Hold your bottom a few inches off the chair. Now, slowly lower yourself down again, noticing instant by instant the feeling of carrying and directing your weight with your legs. Once you can move up and down comfortably just a few inches, go all the way up to standing, feeling your legs shoving downward to raise your body upward.

Keep your feet flat on the ground as you sit on the chair, and pay attention to the feeling of your feet on the floor. Pay attention to the feeling of energy in your legs, the sense of contacting the ground with your feet, and the feeling of readiness to rise to standing.

You are waiting for an important and wonderful phone call. At any moment the phone might ring, and you might rise to standing to go answer it. How do your feet and legs feel? If your legs are limp and unaware, your whole body will be weaker. Of course, you don’t want to keep your legs tense and braced in the name of being alert and ready. Your legs should be alive in a calm way.
People generally experience that when they sit with a sense of how their legs contact the ground, they have a foundation for themselves. Their posture opens upward. Their pelvis and lower back will not sag. Their sitting becomes more erect, clearer and more energetic. This new way of sitting is mechanically more efficient and powerful, and it is also much more confident and alert.

Walking with lively legs can transform the way you walk and the way you live in your legs.

**FEET WALKING: PRACTICE**

What is your image of walking? Try walking and noticing how you walk. How do your legs and feet make your body move forward across the floor? Do this barefoot so you can feel your feet without the interference and restriction of shoes. How do you carry your body’s weight? Do you lean forward, hang behind yourself, or balance yourself in the middle of your stride? How does your foot touch the floor? Do you bang your heel into the ground or land softly? How does the weight move from your heel to your toes? How and when during your stride does your foot exert force on the floor to move you forward?

Many people feel that they swing their leg forward, and the weight of the leg drags their body forward. Some people feel that they put their foot on the floor out in front of them and then pull themselves forward with it. Some people feel that when their foot is behind them, they shove themselves forward with it. These differences are not just about how the foot is used but about the way the whole body functions.

What is the most efficient way of walking? You can get some clues by imagining that you are out walking shortly after a rain. Walk around, and try leaping over some imaginary puddles. You will have to use a long, low jump. How do you do that? Jump with your left foot forward, and notice the moment just before your right foot leaves the floor. Where is your weight, and what does your right foot do? To jump well, your weight must be moving forward. If you lean back, you won’t get any distance in your jump. At the moment you jump, your right leg is out behind you, your toes are bent, the ball of your foot is touching the floor. At that moment, you are applying a distinct rearward shove to the floor with the ball of your foot. Your left foot is up in the air in front of you, coming down toward the ground. The rearward shove is what moves you forward.

Leaping over puddles is a somewhat exaggerated movement, but you use the same backward push in a smaller way in ordinary walking. Try focusing on feeling the push as you walk. Keep your weight balanced between your legs—even when one is up in the air. Push back with each foot when it is behind you. This action is very similar to what you experienced in the last experiment.
It is an efficient, coordinated way of using the pelvis and legs to put power into a backward thrust which will create a forward movement.

Remember your basic physics. Every action creates an equal and opposite reaction. When you move forward, there must be a force exerted backward. However, in order to push straight backward, you would need a leg sticking out straight behind, and it could push only on walls and trees and so on.

In reality, when your leg is behind you, it is on a slant, so its thrust is on a slant. You push off from the ball of your rear foot in a back/down direction. However, that back/down direction can be thought of as the combination of a horizontal backward component plus a vertical downward component, and the result of these two pushes will not be solely a forward movement. The downward component will cause an upward thrust. Try walking while paying attention to this process. With each step, press down and back with the ball of your back foot. Feel how the back/down energy of the foot reflects off the floor into a forward/up movement of the body. This is the most efficient way of delivering power to the ground to move you forward in a walking gait.

People generally experience that when they walk with this awareness of the down/back thrust of the feet, they have a ground to stand on and a foundation for themselves. The upward energy opens their posture upward. Their walk becomes more erect, clearer and more energetic. The forward energy makes them walk forward more quickly, lightly and gracefully. When people conceive of walking as falling down onto their forward foot rather than rising off their back foot, they sag and fall down as they walk. When they pull themselves forward with the front foot, they compress and shrink. Feeling the back/down thrust leads to a way of moving that is mechanically more efficient and powerful, and it is also much more psychologically confident and alert.
ARMS

The legs are how we move through space, and the arms are about doing things in the world. You can use your arms in a vigorous, empowered way.

**UNBENDABLE ARM: EXPERIMENT**

This is a basic Aikido exercise. Aikido is a soft martial art, one which emphasizes physical relaxation and mental energy rather than hard muscular strength. Relaxation and mental focus are the foundation for a different kind of strength.

Stand in front of your partner, and have him grasp your right wrist with his right hand. (You can reverse the directions if you are left handed.) Have him put his left hand on your back by your right shoulder blade. Now, your partner should press both his hands toward one another, trying to buckle your arm. If he is successful, your elbow will bend. Your job is not to allow your arm to bend.

Of course, your partner should be reasonable about how much force he uses to try to bend your arm. Too much force applied suddenly can be injurious. In addition, you should make sure to keep a bit of bend in your elbow rather than straightening and locking it.

After you try this, stop to reflect on what you did. Did you get stiff and resist as hard as you could? Most people do. How did that work? Was it comfortable? Did you succeed in keeping your arm from bending?

Try the same task, but this time don’t do it from an oppositional state of mind. Have your partner grasp your hand again. This time unclench your hand, gently open your fingers, and point all of your fingers at an imaginary flower growing on a hillside in front of you. Without straining, reach all your fingertips toward the flower, moving them a little forward in order to touch it. Let your breathing and your whole body stay open and radiant. Keep your focus on reaching outward toward the flower.

Now try the task again. Most people find that when they relax and aim their minds outward, their arms become strong in an oddly uneffortful manner.

There is another more difficult way of doing this same exercise. Stand in front of your partner and put your right wrist...
over his or her left shoulder. Keep your elbow somewhat bent and pointed down at the floor. (If you point your elbow horizontally toward the right, there is a risk you could hurt your elbow.) Have your partner put both hands on top of your elbow and push down to bend it. She or he can build up to a firm pressure, but it has to be gradual so there is no risk of injury. Your task is to keep your arm strong so it doesn’t bend.

Now have your partner push down on your elbow to bend it. Be sure not to resist. But don’t go limp either. Just continue your steady concentration on reaching gently outward toward the flower. Don’t dissociate and lose awareness of your partner. Be aware of him or her, but don’t get involved in a struggle.

Most people experience that when they concentrate on the flower and don’t fight the pressure, their arms have a relaxed strength that will easily resist and not bend.

FACE

We started working with the core of the body and then went into the role that proper use of the legs and arms play in empowerment. Let’s go to the face and eyes for a moment.

FACING FEELINGS: EXPERIMENT

All your muscles respond to your thoughts and feelings, and the muscles in your face and eyes are, of course, especially expressive. Imagine that you are looking at something scary and painful, perhaps a horrible car crash with bleeding victims lying on the road. Notice how your eyes feel. Notice how your lips and cheeks and forehead feel. Now imagine that you are looking at a peaceful and pleasant country scene. What changes?

Begin to speak aloud the story of your abuse. Who did it? What did they do? What did you feel as it was being done? What do you feel in your face, your mouth, your throat as you tell this?

Most people feel that their eyes and their facial muscles tense up when they imagine a painful scene and relax and get more comfortable when they
think of something pleasant. Just as with the pelvis and breathing, if when you are confronting a challenge you deliberately relax your face and eyes, you will feel and be much calmer and stronger.

**SOFTENING YOUR FACE: EXPERIMENT**

We accumulate so much tension and unfinished emotion in the muscles of our faces. Take a moment, shut your eyes, and sit in a relaxed, upright position. Feel your tongue, throat, lips and jaw. Notice how your forehead, eyelids, and cheeks feel. Are these areas of your face soft and relaxed, or are they tense? Do you hold tension in one or another part of your face?

Tense your whole face a bit. Clench your teeth. Squeeze your throat. Notice what happens in the rest of your body when you tense your face. Most people feel a stiffening and hardening throughout the rest of their bodies.

Now, let your face relax. Let your jaw relax. Soften your tongue and throat. Let your cheeks, eyelids and forehead rest. Let your mouth hang gently open a bit.

Relaxing your face is important. Not only does tension in your face communicate itself to every part of your body, but it communicates to the people around you. If your face is tense, people pick up subliminal non-verbal messages of tension and fight-flight-freeze discomfort. If you feel weak and scared, those feelings will come across and signal that you are a good victim.

**SOFT EYES: PRACTICE**

You can learn how to keep your eyes relaxed even while you use them. Sit in the centered position and shut your eyes. Without moving your head, keeping your eyes closed, move your eyes as though you were looking up, down, right and left. What do you feel in your eyes? Are you exerting effort to look in the different directions? Try letting the movements of your eyes be soft and fluid. Move your eyes slowly and gently. It will help if you don’t move too far in any direction. Moving your eyes all the way to the edge of their range of motion takes more effort than staying in the middle of the range of motion.

Start moving your eyes in gentle, soft, smooth, curvy lines. Make sure to let your forehead, cheeks, mouth and tongue relax as you move your eyes. Try some circles and figure eights. Feel how your eye muscles work to move your eyes. Is there some particular spot in the movement that is tense or hesitant? Let the places where you feel any strain soften and release.

Once you are moving your eyes in this relaxed way, slowly and gradually open them—and don't grab the world with your eyes. Let your eyes look at the world softly, as though it's not really important that they see anything clearly.
You will probably find that you can see just as much, just as well, but with more ease and comfort.

Normally we concentrate our awareness in the center of our visual field. *Soft eyes* is the skill of balancing central and peripheral vision so that we can overcome our normal tunnel vision and pay attention to more of the environment than we usually do. Soft eyes comes from the martial art of Aikido, where it is used to scan the environment and attend to numbers of people attacking all at once. Soft eyes is useful more for picking up large movements than fine details, but it is a relaxing way to see and is worth practicing just for that reason. Remembering to use soft eyes will help you see the world in a new way when you get stuck in the old vision of your abuse.

Pick a distant spot to focus your eyes on, and keep looking gently at that spot. Make sure to keep blinking at a normal rate. Without moving your eyes, pay attention to what is already in the left side of your peripheral visual field. Now notice the right side. Now the top, and now the bottom. Blink occasionally. Now pay attention to the whole of your visual field, gently, without gripping the world with your eyes. Most people experience this as a soft, embracing and relaxing way to use their eyes.

In this chapter, we have extended the idea of softening and opening to the periphery of the body, the legs, arms, and face. In, Chapter 10 we will consider how to apply openness in creating effective boundaries and dealing with the world.
CHAPTER 10
DEALING WITH THE WORLD: BOUNDARIES

Finding your power and your love is important as a beginning in the process of healing and growth. However, that is just a beginning. Sometimes I think about the fact that growth is a process that has no end. Life is about continuing to learn, and understand, and grow. As an abuse survivor, there will come a day when the pain will not be the center of your existence, but I don’t think you will stop learning then. You will just turn your attention to new areas of life and learning.

In the meantime, the next major topic to turn to is the use of your new centering skills in setting boundaries and handling the world. To some extent, we have already been practicing that. In exercises like Slugs in Your Face or Crunchi-O's Salesman, you have been practicing applying centering skills to handling intrusions. This chapter, however, will go into more depth on the process of handling the world and doing so from an inner place of power and love.

SPEAKING

Your voice is a bridge between your inner and outer worlds. You produce your voice through processes of breath, muscle tone and posture, which are all inner actions. But your voice is a means of speaking your truth to the world, and that is part of how you connect to and control your outer environment.

Most survivors of childhood abuse were silenced. In many ways, during or after the abuse, they were not allowed to speak. Were you told that what was being done to you was good? Were you told that you were bad or worthless and deserved what was done to you? Were you told to be quiet and not protest? Were you told that it was a secret, just for you and the perpetrator? Were you told that if you revealed what happened you would be hurt? Were you told that no one would believe you anyway? Were such messages conveyed without being made explicit?

Many abuse survivors were simply too frightened to speak. Many were so hurt by so many people that they assumed that no one would listen or care. Many survivors tried to tell and were met with denial. Many survivors kept the secret to protect someone whom the perpetrator had threatened, possibly a parent or a sibling. Many survivors kept the secret to protect their perpetrator or their family. Whatever your situation, you did what you had to do to survive.
**OPENING YOUR VOICE: PRACTICE**

How can you speak clearly and strongly? By relaxing and opening your voice. First, count aloud from one to ten. Notice the rhythm and quality of your breathing. Feel the tone and movement of your lips, tongue, and throat. Listen to the tone and resonance of your voice. Do you detect tension and constriction?

It is possible to open your voice instead. Relax your throat. Let it soften and open. Relax your tongue. Let your mouth be gently open a bit. Allow the air to have space within your body.

An image which works to help many people discover greater freedom in the way they breathe is to imagine breathing around the edges of a hard boiled egg. You have a whole hard boiled egg in your mouth, and you have to relax and expand your throat in order to breathe around it. This may not help everyone, especially abuse survivors for whom the image may remind them of things put into their mouth during the abuse. If the image produces feelings of choking or discomfort, don’t use it. If it gives you a sense of widening your throat and breathing more easily, then it is worth using.

Go back to the *Six Directions Reaching* and *Breathing* exercises. Add them to this process of releasing your throat. Now count aloud again, and see if you can find the sense of ease and spaciousness that is possible.

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**SMALL VOICE: EXPERIMENT**

Stand up, feel your breathing. Count out loud from one to ten. Pay attention to how you speak. Is your voice clear, resonant, and projecting outward? Are you pronouncing your words clearly? Or is your voice small and hesitant? Do you mumble and draw your words inward?

Try speaking clearly and then try mumbling. Notice what happens to your breathing and your posture. Have a partner stand in front of you and test your posture by pushing on your shoulders as you speak clearly and then as you mumble. Your partner should put his hands on your shoulders and start pushing gradually. There should be no sudden impact.

What happens? Most people experience that when their voices are small, their postures weaken. And when their voices are strong, so are their postures.

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**ICK AND AHH: EXPERIMENT**

Stand up, feel your breathing. Count out loud from one to ten, and notice what parts of your body are involved in breathing and vocalizing. More than noticing just what parts move, notice how they feel as they move. Are your lips and tongue tense? Do you speak in a sharp or clipped manner?
Now, try saying “Rat guts, ick!” And for contrast say “Ice cream, ahh!”
(If you don’t like ice cream, think of something else that you like, and say that instead.)
Say “ick” and “ahh.” Feel how your throat and mouth tense when you say “ick” and how they get softer and smoother when you say “ahh.”
The expressions “ick” and “ahh” are very interesting. They simultaneously create and reflect the body processes of repulsion and enjoyment. The sound “ick” has sharp edges and creates constriction in the throat and breathing. The sound “ahh” has round edges and creates softness and openness in the body.
How do you talk when you talk about your abuse? Is it more like ick or more like ahh? Is your throat tense? Are you tense, perhaps angry or fearful?
Find a word or phrase that summarizes some aspect of your abuse. Maybe the word “rape” or the word “secret.” Try saying that word followed by ick or ahh. “Secret, ick!” And now say, “Secret, ahhh!” Can you let your body stay in the open ahhh state even as you speak about your abuse?

**OPERA SINGER: CASE STUDY**
An opera singer once came to me for work on vocal strain. I think it is impossible to separate emotional and structural/functional issues, and I always have people focus on discovering the emotional components of physical strain. So, rather quickly we went from examining the mechanics of how she tensed her mouth and throat to examining what it felt like to do so and why she did it. She told me that her father had forced her to perform oral sex on him. I had her stand and start singing, and as she sang I suggested that it must be awfully hard to get her voice out when her mouth was stuffed full of penis. Needless to say, she practically choked on her music. I had her lie down on the ground. I rolled up a clean washcloth and stuck it in her mouth. Then I asked her to center herself and sing, not letting the penis steal her music from her. And for the final act, I pushed the washcloth hard into her mouth and had her rip it out and push me away. When she stood up and sang after that, the sound was glorious. She was finally free to express herself.

**BLOWING TISSUES: EXPERIMENT**
Many survivors have a hard time thrusting their words out into the world. They have pulled their words in for so long that when they speak, they pull their breath in and hide their voice. What would it be like to aim your voice out into the world rather than aiming it into the dark space within?
Let’s try a little game. Lie down on your back, with a pillow under your head and one under your knees. Put a tissue across your face, inhale gently and fully, and then blow the tissue straight up into the air as far as you can. It will help if you aim for a particular spot in the air above you.

Many survivors can’t easily aim the air out and up, and they cannot move the tissue much. Keep playing with aiming and blowing. When you get the hang of it, you will see the tissue going up far above you into the air. Once you feel that, notice where you aim your breath. It will be up and out.

When you speak, do you aim your breath out into the world where people are? Or do you withhold your breath and your words even as you speak? Try speaking while aiming your breath, your words, and your message out into the world.

How has your abuse affected both your general ability to speak and the ability to speak the specifics of your abuse?

VOICING YOUR PAIN: EXPERIMENT

Say aloud one or two sentences which describe your abuse.

What happens to your breathing and your voice? Most people experience constriction in their throat and tension in their breathing, and they hear that their voice becomes weak and small. The tension held in the body around the fear and anger affects the mouth, throat and vocal cords, of course. The negative messages taken into the body with the abuse stay in the body.

Now, open your voice. Start with the Six Directions Reaching and Breathing exercises, and include aiming your voice outwards. Say the negative message again, but this time be clear in your choice not to shrink or tighten. Be wide and free. By speaking the message but refusing to let it control your body, you can break free from the message.

Keeping your body centered and your voice free will let you use your power and speak your truth. The flip side of the process is of interest as well. Contradicting someone else’s “truth” is part of the capacity for self-protection.

CONTRADICTING: EXPERIMENT

For this exercise you will need a partner, and her job will be to order you around.

Stand up! Walk forward!! Raise your hand!
Go get the book from the table!
Scratch your ear!

Whatever your partner can think of to say is fine. Your job is to look directly at your partner and state in a clear, centered voice, “No.” You could
embroider it by adding “I won’t do that” or “Stuff if up your nostril, buster” or whatever seems like it would be fun.

How does it feel to disobey? Many survivors were conditioned to be passive and obedient. It was the only way to survive. You did not have the ability to choose what you would do. Many survivors learned that it was dangerous to refuse to obey. So now you have the opportunity to practice speaking your choice aloud, enforcing it, and creating safety by your own power.

Reverse roles. How does it feel to order someone around. Do you feel scummy and vile? Many survivors associate all power with abusive power since that was what they experienced as children. Giving someone an order is really a neutral event. Whether ordering someone around is good or bad depends on what the orders are and whether they are for the person’s benefit or not. In this instance, it is actually a gift since it provides a safe and caring opportunity for your partner to practice being strong and clear. As you order your partner around, breathe and center yourself. You are not being a perpetrator.

**ASSERTIVENESS**

Asserting your truth is healing. Being assertive is important. It is an antidote to all the poison you were forced to take in with your abuse. However, assertiveness is much more than it is customarily defined to be. Usually assertiveness is defined as the ability to say clearly and respectfully what your needs and desires are, but there is a major problem with thinking about assertiveness this way. The problem is that assertiveness cannot be merely respectful words. If assertiveness is defined to include centered breathing, posture, voice and movement, then it becomes much more complete and much more effective.

Even beyond that, assertiveness must be more than a verbal request, however centered that request may be. If assertiveness is defined as a verbal process, then when assertiveness doesn’t get results, students will have no options but to retreat back to old habits of helplessness and passivity. It is important to add the capacity for physical self-protection to physical and verbal clarity.

From my perspective, assertiveness is a spectrum of behaviors. Verbal responses to threats are certainly appropriate, but defining assertiveness as stating your needs amounts to defining assertiveness as civilized begging. “Please, sir, I am very uncomfortable about being touched and would rather you take your hand off my leg.” That is a decent and civilized approach to handling conflict, and any decent, civilized person would respond by respecting your needs and complying with your request. However, it isn’t the decent, civilized people you have to worry about but the barbarians. Perpetrators will not honor respectful requests.

If you have learned nothing but verbal skills for self protection, you will have nothing to fall back on when the verbal skills are not enough. I would define assertiveness as the ability to respectfully control your environment to secure
your needs. If words don’t work to protect your body and your space, then you must be able to move on to using physical methods.

Of course, verbal assertiveness is a necessary skill and is the right place to start. It’s better to be humane and civilized and use words to iron out interpersonal difficulties. But self-defense skills are absolutely necessary as a backup to verbal assertiveness. And self-defense skills are a crucial component of healing from abuse. Without the ability to defeat in the present the kind of abuse you experienced in the past, you will always feel like a victim waiting to be victimized again. However, I do not mean by self-defense just the rote repetition of ways of escaping from grabs and such. And I definitely do not mean fighting techniques done in a spirit of anger and revenge, as self-defense courses often teach. I mean the ability to protect yourself physically, using whatever means you can creatively and spontaneously devise, while staying in a powerful, loving and centered state.

**HANDS OFF: EXPERIMENT**

Have your partner sit next to you and caress your arm or your thigh. It will help if your partner can get into a sleazeball mindbody state so the caress feels really slimy and inappropriate. What do you do? Do you shrink away? Are you stunned and silent? Do you get angry? Do you space out?

Can you, keeping your body and voice free and powerful, tell your partner to take their hand off you? That’s verbal assertiveness.

The next stage is physical. Can you reach over and take your partner’s hand off you, clearly and strongly, conveying the message through your movements that you will not permit that violation? Is your movement clear and well-organized when you do that? Or are there little parts of you shrinking away even while you do the “right” protective action? Are your shoulders scrunched up around your ears? Do you lean back while your hands push forward? Are you holding your breath back even while you push forward? Are you hardening your muscles in anger?

Most abuse survivors shrink, whether in fear or anger. Even though they know what the experiment is for, they shrink. Being caressed puts them back into the frame of mindbody they experienced when they were abused. Many survivors space out and dissociate. Many survivors just sit, hoping their partner will take their hand off. The victim mentality is to sit passively and wait for the intrusion to be over—just what survivors often did when they were little. Many abuse survivors lash out in impotent rage—just as they did when they were little.

Most abuse survivors hold their breath even while they speak the message of self-worth and self-protection. Even if they can push their partner’s hand off, they lean back while they push forward. Or they suck the awareness juice out of their hand when they touch their partner.
But if you hold your breath or shrink away you will weaken your self-defense. You have to move toward the attack to deal with it, though that is just the direction you do not wish to go.

Sit next to your partner and try out the movement of leaning away. What is the opposite movement? Sit balanced and upright on your sitbones and lean your whole torso toward your partner. Breathe as you do it. Open your belly, your heart, and your intentional field and put your breath into your hands. Put your hand out and push on your partner. Feel the push flowing toward your partner.

If you don’t know where you are going, that is where you will get to. In order to push, you have to push toward a specific goal. Don’t just touch your partner and shove sort of aimlessly. Put your hand on her. Feel a line of movement going through her, and aim through and past the spot you are touching to a specific spot ten or fifteen feet beyond. Then push through her to that spot. Having that kind of mental focus point is the secret to a strong, clear push.

Now have your partner caress you again. Tell her clearly that is inappropriate and take her hand off and push it away from you. Hold the hand clearly and firmly. Breathe. Stay strong, powerful, and gentle. Keep holding the hand for half a minute or so. Stay in control. Don’t let your mind or your posture waver.

FORGIVENESS

We have been dealing throughout this book with the idea and practice of love, and I hope it has made sense that part of your empowerment is the process of learning to live in a mindbody state of love. Another element in the development of effective boundaries is the related idea of forgiveness. Survivors often resist and reject the idea of forgiving their perpetrators because forgiveness seems to have a feeling of condoning the abuse or becoming friends with the abuser.

I would suggest that another way to look at forgiveness is that forgiveness is a process of letting go of resentment, hardness, and constriction in yourself. It really has very little to do with the perpetrator. If you stay chained to resentment and bitterness, your perpetrator is continuing to control your body. What you want is to learn to let go of those somatic actions and achieve freedom in your body and your actions.

Love and forgiveness are really much more like a flashlight than a radio. Love is something that shines out of you, not something that is a response to a signal sent at you. Ordinarily we think that love is a response to someone or something that is lovable, and that is true of one kind of love, what we might call personal love. But I am talking about a state of being loving, something you maintain in yourself independent of what is around you. This is more an impersonal love.
Think about getting up on the wrong side of the bed. You’re angry and grouchy. Whatever crosses your path, you snarl at. That is an emotion that comes from inside you, independent of what you run across. Unfortunately, the idea of being grouchy is very familiar, but the idea of getting up on the right side of the bed and feeling love toward whatever you see—that is not something we ordinarily think of.

The focus in this book is on centering and empowerment. Naturally, this would emphasize the impersonal aspect of love. Of course, centered isolation is not enough. Don’t make the mistake of thinking that it is enough to stand on your own two feet, all alone, isolated. Having a loving connection with other human beings is a necessary part of life. However, my focus here is on just one specific aspect of love, which is the centering, impersonal aspect.

Forgiveness means being able to contemplate your abuse and your abuser without hardening and weakening your body, and the best way to do that is to stay in the state of power and love.

Part of forgiveness can be seeing your perpetrator for what she or he really was—sick and weak. They were so weak they had to hurt somebody even weaker to feel strong. For a moment contemplate feeling truly good about yourself, healed, whole, and loving. Your perpetrator may not deserve it, but if you felt good about yourself, wouldn’t you wave a magic wand and heal your perpetrator, if you could? Part of forgiveness means not holding hurtfulness in your heart. After all, hurtfulness hurts you more than your perpetrator.

**FORGIVING: EXPERIMENT**

Find your mindbody state of power and love. Construct it by using what you learned in the exercises about posture, breathing, and opening your heart.

Use power as an anchor for your love. Power is like a fresh battery in a flashlight. It lets the light shine brightly and steadily.

Now say what your perpetrator did. And see whether you can aim your love at your perpetrator. Nothing s/he did is a good reason for you to choose to weaken your own body.

You might wish to add another element to the construction of power and love. Look at your perpetrator and say: “You must have been hurt really badly to have needed to treat people the way you did.” How does that reframing affect you? Many people will find that their bodies will soften and get freer, and that, of course, is what this is all about.

This chapter has focused on the practice of having and protecting boundaries. Your boundaries were violated when you were abused, and part of healing is developing good boundaries.
This chapter will extend the idea of centering and boundary control into physical self-defense practice. Developing the ability to protect yourself is the final and most concrete element of empowerment practice. If you are still defenseless against the attacks that defeated you in the past, you will not feel free of the fear and pain caused by your abuse. It is important for your healing that you know in practical, realistic terms that no one will ever be able to repeat the abuse. When you can role play your abuse, stay calm, strong and loving, and successfully defend yourself against the specific assaults you experienced, that will be a major step in breaking free from your past. I have often seen a special smile that lights up a survivor's face when he or she experiences real success in self-protection. It is the smile of freedom.

This chapter will not be a complete self-defense course. My purpose here is to convey only the core ideas of self-defense and a few illustrative techniques to convey the experience. If you want further information, I have a good deal more material on self-defense in the full version of Winning is Healing. There I include exercises in learning to respond to all the attacks that are commonly part of abuse.

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Before we begin actual self-defense exercises, there are some issues that should be discussed. The first is the nature of self-defense. Self-defense is the study of how to use physical force to control people and if needed injure or kill them. Abuse survivors frequently reject the idea of power and physical force because they equate power with abuse. Survivors often believe that it is categorically wrong to injure or even just control another person. That attitude makes it impossible to learn effective self-defense, and I very frequently have to discuss the topic of force and violence as a foundation for self-defense instruction.

I should start by being quite clear that I am not suggesting that hurting people is a good thing. Ideally, any problems you experience with other people should be handled with respectful, assertive dialoguing. People should listen to each other and work out their differences with words, not fists or bombs. It is never good to fight. However sometimes not fighting is even less good. Letting violence have its way because of a dainty sense of ethics doesn’t do much to help the world.

A key distinction is the difference between force and violence. I would define violence as action done from a place of fear and anger. Violence is action
done with a desire to demean and wound. Action done with a wide open heart and belly, with breathing full, with calm compassion, with radiant awareness—that is not violent action. Action done with an open heart is respectful, with a desire to protect and affirm. Violence is in the spirit.

When people use physical force with power and love, as we have practiced, they experience that force is not necessarily demeaning or even spiritually violent. They find that force is itself neutral and that it is the purposes and feelings of the person using it that determine its moral significance. When they do a self-defense move from a place of love and power, they can see the person they are hitting as a human being and feel a sense of empathy with and protectiveness toward him. An action done in this spiritual state may be forceful and result in destroying another person, but it is not a hateful, violent or abusive action.

Let me say that again. I am suggesting that destructive force can be a non-violent action. If destructive force is used in a loving, respectful manner, because it is the only option open for preserving life, then I don’t classify that action as violent. Of course, being able to respond to aggression with love is very, very, very, very difficult, but it is a possibility and a goal. My argument is that you need to come to terms with your ability to use force for self-protection. If you don’t, you will live the rest of your life as the powerless victim your perpetrator wanted you to be.

It is hard for people to grasp how destructive force can be done in a loving manner, and I often use a particular example to help people see this. Imagine that you are a breeder of collies. Lovely, intelligent dogs. You are going for a walk in the woods. You have a twenty-two caliber rifle along because you’re going to shoot tin cans off a rock. All of a sudden you are faced with a beautiful, show class collie—who obviously has rabies. Would you pet it? I don’t think so. Would you hate it? Probably not. You’d probably feel sad that such a lovely dog was so sick. You’d feel compassion. Would you shoot it? The choice is either to shoot it or let it die in terrible pain and perhaps infect other animals or people before it dies. I think you’d have to shoot it. Notice that you would kill the dog but also love it. Love and power are not opposites. They are actually the same.

In our culture, control and power are usually thought of as evil. “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” However, I hope I have convinced you by now that power without love isn’t power at all but really just a brutal form of weakness. What your perpetrator manifested was not really power, simply domineering brutality.

Since power must be founded on love, it might be said: Power purifies, and the search for true power is a path of purification. Power is necessary for life. Just walking across the street demands a certain power. And protecting yourself from violence requires power as well. The power to create safety is not evil. Controlling attackers is not wrong.

However, many abuse survivors are really afraid of becoming abusers themselves since some (though not most) abused children do grow up and abuse people as they themselves were abused. Since survivors’ experiences of power led them
to believe that power is always and necessarily abusive, in order to avoid becoming abusers themselves, they often refrain from manifesting any power at all. However, distrusting yourself so much that you choose to remain powerless just so you won’t become an abuser is not a healthy way to live. Finding the power to be safe and the love to use power wisely—that is the way to health and wholeness.

Many survivors, on the other hand, have used anger to create the strength and determination to protect themselves. The problem is that anger is indeed a violent force and survivors who base their lives on anger really should be concerned about the abusiveness of this way of living. Of course, given what they experienced, it is no wonder that they believed that power really does come from anger. For that matter, our whole culture reinforces the idea that anger and destructiveness are the ways to stick up for yourself. Children’s cartoons show this. TV and movies show this. However, as you have experienced for yourself through the exercises in this book, real strength comes from inner peace. So if you have used anger as your way of saving yourself, don’t blame yourself. It wasn’t your fault, and you can move beyond that now. You can stay safe through acquiring a loving strength.

However much we may dislike it, force is a part of the way life on earth is organized. Buzzards are just about the only peaceful critters around. They don’t even kill to eat. They just sit around communing peacefully with the world and waiting for things to drop dead. We kill to eat. Even vegetarians rip tender little lettuces screaming from the ground and chew them alive. We may strive to create a world of peace, but we need to be able to fight and kill.

We human beings are, after all, hunters and predators. In our early existence, we had to hunt and kill to eat and to protect ourselves. The ability to fight and kill is part of your natural makeup. When that fundamental human function gets squashed by abuse, your whole internal system goes awry. Re-igniting the ability to fight and protect yourself is crucial in helping your life become balanced and healed.

**HORIZONTAL STRIKE: EXPERIMENT**

Learning how to deliver a practical and effective blow is crucial in learning to feel and believe in your own power. In this exercise you will practice delivering a blow with a club.

If you are ready to use your strength and feel some weight, you can practice with a wooden stick. You can buy a hardwood dowel which is three feet long and about one inch thick (about one meter long and two and a half centimeters thick) or you can cut down a mop handle to the right length. You can buy dowels at most hardware stores, and you can buy mop handles at hardware or janitorial supply stores.
However, for both psychological and physical safety, many people need to start with light movements. Rather than using a wooden club, I usually have students use a light plastic golf club tube or a foam noodle. You can get golf club tubes at golf or sporting goods stores, and you can get foam noodles at toy stores.

The light plastic tube allows light and fairly soft movement. Striking with a dowel demands much more focus and power and gives much clearer feedback about the adequacy of the movement, but many survivors are very disturbed by the sensations of power and effort, and for them the exercise is easier to tolerate if they start with the plastic tube and work their way up to using the dowel. In addition, many people are unused to power movements, and there is less risk of muscle strain if you start with light movements.

You will need a target for the blow. I use a heavy body bag (a punching bag which is four feet long—about 130 centimeters), but other things will work. You could pile up four or five old automobile tires, or you could pile blankets on top of a chair or sawhorse.

**Step One:**

The instructions are given for right-handed folks. If you are left-handed, reverse all the following instructions.

Hold the tube in your right hand. If you are using a dowel, to improve its balance in your hand and make it easier to swing, hold it four or five inches (about ten centimeters) from one end. Stand with both your heels on the same line, your right foot forward, about shoulder’s width in front of your left foot. Point your right foot forward and your left foot about forty-five degrees to the left. This is the basic stance I use, and we can call it the right T-stance. The left T-stance would be the same with the left foot in front and all the other directions reversed.

You will use a backhand swing since that is less likely to cause muscle strain than a forehand swing. Wind up for the swing by drawing your right hand across your body to the left and back. Then swing and hit the target. Practice this a number of times until it begins to feel comfortable to you.

Remember as you strike to open your pelvic floor and your throat, breathe in your belly, smile in your heart, and reach your energy out in all directions.

After you have gotten comfortable with the strike, in order to balance your body, practice the strike on the opposite side, holding the club in your other hand and reversing all the movements.

How does striking feel to you? Do you feel physically balanced and strong? Do you feel mentally focused? Does the action of hitting disturb you? Many abuse survivors find it emotionally very difficult to deliver a blow, even to a pile of tires. Most people swing with a fragmented, uncoordinated movement and an unfocused mind. And by “most people” I mean everyone, not just
abuse survivors. Very few of us have learned how to focus and coordinate our movements for graceful power.

**Step Two:**
When you feel ready to increase the level of power, try striking again and this time add your hips to the movement. Stand with your right foot forward again. As you bring your right arm back to the left, pivot your torso toward the left. Then swing, and let the movement and the power of the strike start with and come from the rotation of your hips to the right. You are using your whole body to generate the power, but especially the strong muscles of the legs and hips. Keep your back vertical. Don’t lean or wobble as you strike.

**Step Three:**
Now let’s add more movement to the legs. As you wind up, slide your right foot back and to the left a bit. And as you strike, slide your right foot forward and to the right, in a line that goes past the right edge (your right) of your target. End your pivot movement with the target squarely in front of you and the strike applied strongly to its left edge (your left). Your right hand should stop squarely in front of you at the moment of full contact.

Actually all the motion should stop at once, when the focus is squarely on the target. Your hips should stop turning, your right foot should stop moving, your hand should finish moving—all at once. There is no extended follow through as there would be in a tennis swing for one simple reason. This is combat, not a game. If the person you are hitting were to dodge the blow, and you had followed through with a long movement, there would be nothing between you and him. You would be vulnerable to a counter strike. But if you stop your movement at the instant you strike, you would be hiding behind your arm and weapon, and so your opponent would not be able to move in on you.
When you figure out how to do this strike, you will have a sense of grace and ease. And a feeling of the power that is rightfully yours. It will take some practice, partly because most abuse survivors have never learned to access their power and partly because the martial arts cultivate a style of movement that is very unfamiliar to people in our culture. Focusing on the lower part of the body, using the legs and hips in a relaxed fluid way—that is not how most of us move.

As you practiced the strike, did you remember to breathe? Did you remember to let your pelvis release and expand? Did you open your heart? If you go to your place of loving power, you will be much stronger both physically and psy-
You will not feel hateful or hurtful, you will feel peaceful and assertive. And you will not feel like an abuser simply by having and showing power.

**PAIRED SWORD CUT: EXPERIMENT**

This exercise will give you the opportunity to practice centering as a way of developing intense power, and it will give you the opportunity to practice staying centered as a way of avoiding being triggered by power.

Before we actually get to the main part of the exercise, let’s practice the movement of stepping forward as you strike with a dowel. Start with your right foot back. Raise your stick up, but this time hold it up beside your head. The position is similar to how you would hold a baseball bat.

Now step forward with your right foot and at the same time cut down. For the practice you will be doing soon, you will need to hit your partner’s stick from the side. The cut will involve swinging your stick diagonally, from high outside to low inside. As you step forward with your right foot, cut from high right to low left.

As you put your right foot down, turn it to face straight forward, and simultaneously turn your left foot (which becomes your back foot) out to the left to maintain your T-stance.

At this point, you have finished one cut, and you have your right foot forward. Raise your stick up on your left side, then step forward with your left foot and cut down, from high left to low right. You can advance forward in a series of cuts this way.

You are going to use this stepping and cutting in hitting your partner’s dowel. (One safety note: be sure that you and your partner are both using straight-grained, hardwood dowels. That is necessary so your sticks don’t shatter when you hit.) Your partner will stand in front of you, grasping his stick with both hands and holding it out in front of him at about chest height. In order to make this easier on his hands, your partner should hold his hands touching each other at the base of the dowel. There will be less strength in this grip, but it will allow his stick to move around more easily when you hit it. Your partner should let his sword swing easily when it is hit in order to absorb the impact of the blow. Otherwise he will take all the shock of the impact in his hands.

Take a look at the two photos above. The person on the left starts with her foot back and steps in to strike. The second photo shows the instant just after the strike, when my stick is starting to swing around behind me to my right. My stance is wrong. Can you see what is wrong with it? The momentum of the impact throws my stick around to my right, and my body twists to my right as well. But my right foot forward stance turns my body to my left. In the first photo, my stance is correct, and the impact of the strike would turn my body in the direction it is already turning. In other words, if you stand with your feet reversed, you are in danger of twisting and injuring your back.
Incorrect stance on the right.
Now you are ready to practice cutting against your partner’s stick. *Make sure to stand so far apart to begin with that when you step in you will hit only the tip of his stick. Do not get close to hitting his hands.*

Start with your right foot back, and step forward with your right foot to strike. After you hit your partner’s stick, he should take one step back, continuing to hold his stick up in position. You should raise your stick up, then step forward with your left foot and cut down. You can both continue this stepping and cutting along the length of the room you are in.

Then reverse roles and have your partner cut.

How do you feel in each role? Many survivors are shocked by feeling how much power they can have as the person cutting. Many survivors, when they are the person holding the target sword, are shocked by having that much power directed against them.

The power in this exercise is strictly a neutral event. No one is being hurt, and there is no aggression taking place. Some people may find themselves feeling angry or aggressive as they cut, but that is misplaced emotion. There is nothing here, now, to feel angry about. If you feel angry or afraid, breathe and let go of the physiological process of anger or fear. Replace it with the physiological process of calm alertness. Be in the present, with the simple movements of the exercise.

Many survivors are shocked by the reality of giving or receiving power. It reminds them of their abuse, and many survivors don’t want to have anything to do with this much power. Do you have the right to have and use power?

Stop and think about it for a moment. Power is a natural quality. Just as any rabbit or wolf or ant or walrus has the right and the ability to act to save its life—each in its own ways—so do you. You have the right to use force to defend yourself, and you are learning the skills necessary for doing so. Defending yourself against attack will not make you a bad person. Acting to prevent abuse to yourself or others does not make you an abuser.

We, as humans, to be fully human, must be in touch with and able to use successfully the power we naturally have. As long as you have not reclaimed your power, your abuser is still winning. By choosing to be OK with your power, you are overcoming the powerlessness of your abuse.

Does feeling power make you want to hurt someone? By choosing to generate power and love together, you are overcoming the urge to lash out and destroy. By using power in a non-abusive way, in a life-affirming way, you are creating an inner state which takes you farther and farther away from power-as-abuse.

People who have been abused as children often are surprised by how much psychological impact this exercise has. When I do the exercise with my students,
they often express that they are deeply affected by being in a situation in which someone who has much more power than they is encouraging them, in a caring and respectful manner, to acquire their own power. This is utterly different from their experience as children and is very freeing. Of course, it is what you should have experienced as a child from the adults around you.

**BONKERS: EXPERIMENT**

There is an exercise which can help you get a clear perspective on the way you have been taught to relate to power. We will go back to using the golf club tube, which I often call a *bonker*. If you want something even softer and lighter, you can get a three foot (one meter) foam noodle from a toy store. The thing to keep in mind is that the bonker is a safe sword substitute. The plastic is light enough that when someone is hit by it, the tube bends and produces a loud thwack but it can’t produce any injury at all.

Your partner will execute a strong backhand strike with the bonker. Since the bonker is so light, it will be easiest to hold it with one hand. Your partner’s target will be the back of your thigh. Your job will be to breathe and center yourself and be calm and alert while you are being hit.

The point of this exercise is to be able to discriminate what you feel from what is actually happening. Most survivors will feel a lot when they get hit, but what they feel is not actually happening in the present. It is what they felt in the past. In actual fact, you are not getting injured. This is a cooperative learning situation, and you are not even being violated.

Yes, the hit stings a bit, but put it in perspective. Being hit on the leg with a bonker really isn’t a big deal, is it? No injury, perhaps some minor stinging. You’ve felt much worse, and this is pretty minor. If being hit with the bonker were the most painful thing you’d ever experienced in your life, wouldn’t your life be heavenly? And if it were the most painful thing you’d ever experience in the rest of your life, wouldn’t that be great?

If you do feel fear, shock, anger, or dissociation, use the tools of breathing and centering to bring yourself back to your present body and your present experience.
Now reverse roles and hit your partner.

For many people, hitting a person is even worse than being hit. How do you feel when you think about hitting someone? How do you feel when you do it?

Hitting someone with a bonker is not bad and doesn’t make you an abuser. In objective fact, hitting someone with a bonker is pretty trivial. It produces very little pain and certainly is not physically injurious. It is actually a respectful and caring action. It is a gift since it is done from a caring place with a desire to help your partner learn and grow.

There is no present moment reason to have any emotional response at all, whether as the hitter or the hittee. So breathe, open your belly and open your heart.

Remember the safety contract. You don’t have to do anything you don’t feel ready for. To become whole, you will need to be ready for and do this exercise at some point, but you don’t need to do it today if it would be more than you can handle. Remember the power you have been practicing. If it is not appropriate for you to do this exercise, use the power you have developed and say what you feel. Say clearly that you are not ready, and stand on that choice. Actually, a wonderful exercise would be for your partner to insist that you need to do the exercise, while you stay centered and state clearly that you will not do it.

If you were to do this exercise feeling scared and unready, and you were unable to center yourself and gain power by it, the exercise would be damaging to you. It is not the event of being hit which is good or bad in itself. It is its effects on you. If you use it to become stronger, it is part of your healing. If it reinforces your experience and self-concept of powerlessness, it is retraumatizing. Do this exercise only if you are ready for it.

Having said all that, please don’t be a chicken! Of course the exercise will be unpleasant, but don’t chicken out. If you can do the exercise safely, do it.

This exercise is an opportunity to practice being centered in the face of an actual attack, which you need to learn. After all, if someone really did attack you, you would have to be centered to protect yourself effectively, right? You would need to be centered in order not to be incapacitated by the attack, and you would need to be centered in order to execute an effective defense.

Just to be clear, I am not recommending that standing and centering and being hit is appropriate during a real life attack. During a real and significant attack, it is necessary to defend yourself immediately and not get hit. However, you cannot easily defend yourself against something you cannot bear. Anything you can’t tolerate you can’t defeat! If you can’t bear it with equanimity, you will be all riled up—your breathing and posture will be tight and off balance, and you won’t be able to fight well. Here you have the opportunity in a safe setting to take the feelings you create in response to the attack and artificially separate them from the defense against the attack. By splitting the feelings and the de-
fense apart, you can work on the feelings themselves for a moment. We will get to actual defense techniques shortly.

Remember the discussion on force and violence. Many abuse survivors do not want to be on the receiving end of violence, and the thought of being violent toward another is even worse. For people who feel this way, the Bonkers exercise is very difficult. However, I don’t see the exercise as violent at all, and it will help you access your power if breathe and relax the feeling that you are engaging in violence.

A major change will take place for you when you experience that you can stay in your power and love while hitting your partner. It often takes a good deal of work for people to get the idea that hitting their partner is a trivial, meaningless event (which is why I’ve spent so much time going over this point). You aren't coming from a bad place in yourself, and you aren't injuring your partner. You are simply doing an action. Once you can break the connection between the present action and the past events of your life, you will discover that you can exert power without losing control and becoming abusive and that hitting someone does not make you a bad person. Even hurting someone, if it is truly necessary and done in the spirit of respect, does not make you a bad person. And once you experience that, you will realize that you have the right to defend yourself with destructive force when that is the only or the best choice you have.

More than that, you will begin to realize that you deserve to be protected and safe. This is a key issue. Many survivors wouldn’t hesitate to defend a child, but they feel deeply that they themselves are not worth defending. Feeling that love and power go together helps break through this bind. Abuse survivors learned from their abusers that they (the survivors) were worthless. But feeling loving strength will break people free from the feeling of being unlovable.

You are a worthwhile human being, and you do have the right to protect yourself. If you saw someone about to rape a child, would you protect the child? Of course, if you could. Were you just as worth protecting? If you could borrow Dr. Who’s time machine and go back to the moment of your abuse, would you (using your newfound skills) protect the child you were? Yes, of course. (And if you can’t answer “yes” yet, don’t give up hope. You will find that “yes” within yourself some day.) If you would protect any other child, then you deserve to be able to protect yourself.

Being hit with a bonker is much more like a real attack than having tissues thrown at you, and it gives you the opportunity to really be triggered. Being able to differentiate this objectively trivial present event from the past events toward which you constantly orient is very important in breaking free from the chains of the past. It is very, very difficult for someone who grew up being abused to treat being hit by a bonker as the trivial event it is, but succeeding at it is a tremendously rewarding experience and sign of progress and is utterly necessary for effective boundary control and self-defense.

Beyond just staying calm and present when you are hit or when you are doing the hitting, can you also stay loving? It is a very advanced level of prac-
Winning is Healing—Basics

tice, but staying open to an attacker, feeling good about her or him, is crucial in executing an effective self-defense technique. Feelings of alienation from another person create hardness and smallness in you, and that will interfere with your ability to perceive clearly the attacker and the attack. It will also make your movements and your techniques weak, un-smooth, brittle and poorly timed. If you can open yourself to the attacker, keeping center but not having a hard boundary, your defense techniques will rise to a new level of precision and power.

When I begin having a survivor practice defending against actual assaults, I always ask the student if s/he would like a witness present, a chaperone so to speak. If I am going to lie down on top of a woman and have her practice the escape from that pin, sometimes the student will feel better about the situation if she has someone else present as an objective witness. The witness makes the process a public, above-board procedure—very unlike the secretive situation in which her perpetrator lay down on top of her. In addition, an abuse survivor might find it unbelievable that she or he could successfully resist being slapped or pinned, and having an observer to rescue them if they need it can be reassuring.

Sometimes a student’s therapist will come to act as the witness. Sometimes it is the student’s spouse, partner, parent, or friend. I explain to the witness the theory and practice of empowerment and self-defense, and I instruct them that if they feel uncomfortable with something in the practice to say so and stop the role play. Having an objective witness evaluating whether what I am doing is reasonable and ethical reassures the student that the process really is OK. Though I’ve never had a witness object to anything, I think giving them that power helps the student feel safer.

Having said all that, it is only relatively rarely that students feel the need for a witness. I offer it every time, but by the time they are ready to practice explicit self defense, most students trust themselves and me enough not to need a witness.

One time, I was working with a woman of twenty-three years who’d been sexually abused by her cousins when she was a child. We had just barely begun empowerment work when I had a phone call from my student’s mother. She was very leery of any body or touch work because she felt that working directly with the body was unethical. I explained the nature of my work, and she grudgingly admitted that it sounded reasonable. Nonetheless, she said that if I did anything to hurt her daughter, she would call the police right away. Six months later, when I suggested to the student that she was ready to learn to defeat her perpetrators, she had her mother come to the self-defense session as a witness. She watched her daughter hesitantly throw me off herself. Then she watched as her daughter repeated the defense a number of times, each time with more confidence, until the last escape was done with joy and exuberance. At that point, the mother, with a
broad smile and tears running down her face, said, “Now I know why you work the way you do.”

ELEANOR AND THE SHAME: CASE STUDY

When Eleanor was a little girl, a neighbor had forced her to suck his cock. I had her sit on the couch, and I stood next to her. I put my hand on the back of her head, forced her forward toward my crotch and touched her lips with my finger. (Of course, we had been working together for quite a while before we attempted this rather intense experiment.) Naturally that made her feel uncomfortable and scared, and she immediately started to pull away from her feelings, but I had her work to stay with the sensations that arose in her body. She felt alone, vulnerable, exposed, ashamed. She couldn’t tell anyone about what had happened.

I had her stand up on the table, so she would be highly visible, and I told her that there was still a penis hanging out of her mouth, and everyone could see it. She twisted into a little girl pose and felt very ashamed. She told me that he ejaculated in her mouth, and she didn’t know what it was, but it was icky. He told her to go into the bathroom and spit it out, and she felt shame. I had her focus on her breathing and notice that breath comes in from outside and then goes out from inside. That focused her on the directions of in and out, and I then asked her to focus on the shame and feel whether it came from inside or outside her. She immediately felt that it came from outside. I pointed out that her perpetrator had been secretive. He wasn’t molesting little girls out in the open. He had known the shame of what he was doing, and the feeling of shame was his not hers. She had internalized it. She had taken it inside her with his come.

That thought really struck her. I rolled up a washcloth, stuck it in Eleanor’s mouth, and had her pull it out. At first, when she pulled it out, she used a small, hesitant movement. In order to help her overcome that smallness, I had her practice a large, exuberant, circular Aikido defense technique which ended in a strike to the throat, a throw and a pin. Generating the joyous flow of power and movement made her feel much better.

I then had her lie on the table, with her eyes closed, and I poured a bit of water in her mouth. Her first reaction was to go into shock, but as soon as I reminded her to center she came back and forcefully spat out the water. Then I put the washcloth in her mouth, and just as she was about to do pull it out, I poured some water in. She spat it out, grabbed my wrist in a wrist lock, and threw me down on the floor. After that she felt tired and calm, and much more present and emotionally alive than usual.

Now we will try a few explicit self-defense techniques. Let me remind you once again of the safety contract. Don’t do anything that would be unsafe for
you. If you start an exercise and find that you are not ready for it yet, you should stop.

Your partner, who will role play the perpetrator, should ask for permission at each step of the attack, just to make sure that you are continuing to be OK with the role play. The few techniques that I will show here are relatively simple and relatively safe, but you should go slowly, keep breathing, and refrain from letting yourself be triggered.

**PINNED AGAINST A WALL: DEFENSE**

Being pinned against a wall is an attack many people have experienced. The attacker may push both your shoulders against the wall, or he may choke you and push your head into the wall as he pins you. In any case, it is simple to off balance the attacker and escape.

The key is not to push directly away from the wall toward the pressure pressing you into the wall. The key is to use the attacker’s strength and weight to your own advantage. Put your right hand under your attacker’s left elbow and your left hand on top of your attacker’s right elbow. Push up with your right hand and pull down with your left. At the same time, slide your back a little bit to your right along the wall. That, combined with your arm movement, begins to initiate a circling movement. Continue that circle by turning your body to your left and pushing your attacker around to your left as well. If you do this with enthusiasm and grace, you can slam your attacker into the wall.

Needless to say, don’t slam your practice partner into the wall. Also, remember to practice the movement on both sides.
You really can do much more than you might have believed possible. If you don’t give up, and you keep your wits about you, and you keep searching for possibilities, you will find ways of defeating what seem to be irresistible attacks. A basic principle in escaping from a pin is to make use of whatever openings exist to create some movement. Once you loosen the attacker’s control even a little and create even a little movement, you can parlay that into more and more movement and eventually find a way to escape.

A problem often comes up as abuse survivors begin to practice self-defense. Some survivors worry that if they show their power and fight back, they will get hurt even worse. There is an assumption hidden underneath the concern that fighting back will lead to getting hurt, and that assumption is that you are going to lose. But if you win, you won’t lose! Will resistance make the attacker angry and make him or her hurt you even worse? That may have been your experience during your abuse, but now is not then. If you act strongly and successfully now, an attacker will be rendered unable to hurt you no matter what s/he may wish to do.

An important thing to learn in self-defense is that things are not necessarily what they seem to be. For example, it is obvious that it is terrible being attacked. Well, yes, I guess it is. But aside from that, perhaps the attack is an opportunity not a problem. Can you find it in yourself to be enthusiastic and positive about the attack? This next defense will show you what this means. Remember as you go through this and the other self-defense techniques to keep breathing.

**SPREAD EAGLE: DEFENSE**

Check out this next photo. Imagine having a person standing between your legs. That is a terribly demeaning, vulnerable, dangerous situation, right? You’re flat on your back, and he’s standing by your crotch. You would be helpless, right?
Well, not necessarily. In fact, lying down as you are, you are in a pretty cool defensive position. Anyone stupid enough to get between your legs deserves his fate. All you have to do is roll toward your left side (as shown below) and “scissors” your legs. Pull your left leg along the floor toward your right. And at the same time, press your right leg against the attacker’s left knee. That scissoring movement will break the attacker’s balance. Keep turning toward your left and drive the attacker down hard into the floor.

Be careful with this practice. Your partner has to be skilled enough to fall safely. If he isn’t, then don’t throw him all the way down. Just do the beginning of the throw. Do the practice slowly and carefully. In real life, you would move your legs hard and fast, not only breaking your partner’s balance, but also possibly breaking his knee. Be careful not to do that to your partner.
Experiencing this attack and defense helps people reframe feelings of vulnerability. Vulnerability isn’t black and white. You aren’t vulnerable when someone is doing X or Y or Z to you. You are vulnerable when you lose your center and can’t think clearly. You are vulnerable when you don’t have the defense skills to protect yourself. When you are centered and skillful, you may find that an attack offers wonderful opportunities for you. You may discover a freedom in your life that you would never have believed possible.

BACK TO THE FUTURE: CASE STUDY

Irwin came to me to explore his back pain, so after some centering and body awareness work, I asked him to feel his back. As he kept his attention on the sensations in his back, he felt that he was standing and there was something touching his back. He felt little, about four years old. He felt chest hairs touching his back, so he realized that he and another person were unclothed, and he could feel that it was a man. Irwin had the sense that the part of himself who didn't want him to know or remember what had happened lived in his solar plexus. I had him breathe into that area of his body and affirm that he was ready to know what was hidden in his body. As he said that, he started to feel that there was an arm across his chest. The man was reaching over from behind to choke him. I asked Irwin to ask his ears to listen carefully, and he heard “Shhh,” as the man tried to keep him quiet. Then, in the present, as he lay in
my office, Irwin started to feel pain and burning in his anus, and his body started to rock. He felt that the man had his penis in him.

Irwin reported that at that point he had gone limp and left his body. After the man was done, Irwin could hear the man’s shoes hitting the floor as he walked around in front of him. Irwin recalled that he was lying on a light tile floor, a bathroom, in his house. Irwin saw that it was his grandfather who had raped him. His grandfather looked angry as he zipped up his pants, and he told Irwin to get dressed and stop crying. His grandfather told Irwin he was bad because of what he made him do. Irwin curled into a little ball, and went away.

We went onto the mat and I taught him a shoulder throw as a defense for the situation in which an attacker was behind him and choking him with one arm. I stood behind him, choking him lightly and pulling him into my body. Naturally that triggered him, and he practiced breathing and centering and staying present even with my body pressed to his back. The throw involved holding my choking arm, bending forward from the hips, and catapulting me up and over his shoulder. In order to do the throw, Irwin had to stand relaxed and stable with his legs and buttocks spread open, and that too offered him the opportunity to resist being triggered.

After he did the throw a few times, he said he felt stronger and bigger. He did the throw a few more times, opening his breath, putting more enthusiasm into the action. Pretty soon he was throwing me down hard enough to bounce me off the mat. (Just in case you’re wondering, that fall is not painful or injurious if you’re trained in how to take it.) Then he stood up straight, took a deep breath and said, “I’ve finally got that bastard off my back.” At that point he had found his power, and he said that his back had stopped hurting.

Sometimes as abuse survivors get into self-defense, they begin to blame themselves for not fighting back and winning when they were abused. If you were assaulted as a child, it is very important to stop and think about the fact that children are by definition powerless, defenseless and dependent. Learning to protect yourself now does not imply that you should have been able to apply then in your defense what you are learning now. You were too little. You were physically weak, and you were inexperienced and untrained. That was part of why your perpetrator picked on you—because s/he was such a chicken that he had to find a truly defenseless victim.

Perhaps you were assaulted as an adult, raped, or caught in a battering relationship. You were still a helpless victim at that time. Perhaps you were victimized as a child and then re-victimized as an adult. That happens frequently because perpetrators look for weak people as targets. In any case, the point I am making is that you should not blame yourself for what you were then. Improve what you are now.

Don’t hate yourself for not having applied when you were abused the self-defense you didn’t know at that time. If you were abused as a child, even if some-
how you could send your current knowledge of self-defense back to the young 
you, could you have fought against an adult’s strength and won? Not likely. And 
if your perpetrator was a parent, all your actual dependency and desperate desire 
for love would have made it even more unlikely that you could have had the 
strength of will to fight and win.

**RAPE PIN: DEFENSE**

The most common assault situation I deal with is the rape pin. Almost 
every sexual abuse survivor has been pinned down as part of the abuse, and it is 
tremendously liberating to experience that you can throw an attacker off you. 
It takes the weight of the world off your body.

However, the key to effectively escaping a pin is not to struggle against 
the weight of the attacker. You don’t want to lift the weight but cooperate with 
it and slide it sideways until it falls off you. It is very important to accept the 
attacker’s weight and use it.

Let’s work with a basic pin. You are lying on your back, and the attacker is 
sitting astride you, holding your hands down on the floor.

The first thing you need to feel is the movement that will dislodge the at-
tacker, and it’s best to practice that alone, without an attacker. Lie on your 
back with your right knee up and your left elbow bent so that your left hand is 
on the floor near your left ear. Slide your left hand diagonally up and out along 
the floor; and at the same time, push into the floor with your right foot/leg so 
that your body begins to roll onto your left side. Do that movement a number 
of times, and then switch to the other side and practice the movement a while. 
The photo below shows the final position of the movement.

Now, lie down on your back, and have your partner sit on you and pin 
your arms. What’s the first thing you need to do? Breathe and center. Remem-
ber all the body awareness work you’ve done so far. Now is the time to use it.

Once you have composed yourself, it’s time to throw the attacker off. 
The next photo shows the defender in the same position as the previous photo, 
but this time the effect of the movement on the attacker is shown. Notice that
your attacker is depending on you. He is placing his weight on you, and he is depending on you for support. As you suddenly thrust your left arm out along the floor, that drops his weight forward/sideways, and he begins to lose balance. Remember that you don’t want to try to lift his weight off you. Lifting his weight up means fighting both his strength and the force of gravity. You want to accept his weight, and cooperate with its tendency to fall down and hit the floor.

Just a bare instant after you thrust your arm diagonally outward, push down into the floor with your right foot. Remember, pushing down with your foot thrusts your hip up and over. That starts your attacker toppling to your right.

Once he does start to go over, you can add a bit of lift/push with your right arm, which he is still grasping. Once he’s falling, his weight will be off you, and it will be possible and effective to push to throw him.

As the attacker, remember to curl up and join the ground softly. You do, after all, want to help your partner practice this movement a number of times, and if you hit flat like a brick, you won’t be able to keep practicing.

 Needless, to say, the movement so far is only the beginning of an effective defense. Once you throw your attacker, you’ll have to disable him. You could close the distance and strike to his throat, take out his eyes, or kick to his groin. However, right here I’d like to focus just on practice of the escape movement.

Remember to practice the escape toward both sides. There are a number of other rape pins, both prone and supine, but practicing this one is enough to give you an idea and experience of what it is like to successfully escape from a pin.
Well, we have practiced moves against three different attack situations. There are many more attacks and defenses, but this chapter has, I hope, given you the feeling of what it is like to feel safe and free.
The work we have done so far has been about containing out-of-control, overwhelming feelings and replacing them with a centered mindbody state. However, there is another face to the process of awareness and empowerment. This other face is about going into the out-of-control feelings, amplifying them, and letting them flow freely in order to study them. Going with the flow of feelings is a powerful way of finding out what is hidden inside you and what it means. I call this following the body.

The process of following your body is a safe, controlled way to let go of control. Following your body is, in effect, a form of somatic free association. You focus on one sensation in your body, or a group of sensations, and let that naturally give rise to the next sensation, and then let that sensation naturally lead to the next, and so on. That train of sensations will take you into feelings, thoughts and images that are meaningful and important. This process makes use of spontaneous, non-conscious, non-logical thinking to help you discover what elements of empowerment you need to practice next.

In following your body, rather than replacing problematic sensations with center, you focus on and amplify the problematic feelings to gain a clearer awareness and understanding of them. Amplifying sensations is done by focusing your attention on the sensations. Or it can be done by requesting your body to allow the sensations to grow stronger. Sometimes amplifying a sensation is best done by movement or by role playing whatever situation the student is discussing.

Following your body is a way of navigating through the complexities of your inner self. The conscious intellect is only a small part of ourselves, and inviting the body’s awareness to be part of the work of abuse recovery will allow a different manner of access to the self.

The following two experiments will let you the feel what it is like for your body to express itself independently of your conscious intellect.

**ASKING QUESTIONS: EXPERIMENT**

Well, would you rather go to the party at Fred and Mary’s house, go out to the park with Jack, catch up on your reading, or take a nap? How would you figure that out? You could fire up your computer, get up a spreadsheet on the screen, and start entering pros and cons for each choice. At the end you could look down the columns and try to figure out which choice has the most pros. A very abstract intellectual exercise!

Or you could “chew” each choice clearly in your body and “taste” which one is most fulfilling.
You probably wouldn't decide how much salt to put in a soup by pondering the problem abstractly. You would taste the soup, paying careful attention to the taste of the soup in your mouth and the feelings it inspires, and you would let a feeling well up in you of what would taste best. In the same way, you can go to a place within yourself where the feeling of each choice of how to spend your time would be clear, and you could let the deeper “computer” within you process the feelings and tell you which choice would be most satisfying. When I say “deeper computer within” I mean to suggest that this is a feeling process in your body deeper than the conscious self.

Let’s try that process. Imagine taking a bite from a ripe, red apple plucked right from the tree (raised organically, with no pesticides on it). And imagine taking a bite from a dirty, squirming rat. Which snack would you prefer? Notice the physical shift in your body. Your body speaks his/her mind immediately and clearly. (This is related to the Wanting a Pencil and Wanting a Rat experiments you did earlier) The physical sense of moving toward something desirable involves opening and softening your breathing and muscles. The sense of wanting to avoid something undesirable (usually) involves tensing and closing.

Try asking yourself some questions and noting the physical responses. Would you rather go to a loud party or a quiet poetry reading? Would you rather drink tomato juice or orange juice? Would you rather see your father or see a friend? Does your body react to these questions? Does the reactions suggest the answers to them?

TELLING THE TRUTH: EXPERIMENT

You will need a partner to help with this experiment. It would probably work best if you stopped reading at this point and asked your partner to read and carry out the instructions for this experiment. If you don’t know what is going to happen, you won’t be biased. (However, if you wish to try this experiment by yourself, it will probably work anyway.)

Have your partner say aloud a series of simple, true assertions. Pay attention to what goes on in your body as you listen to each statement. There should be some time between each so you can feel how your body responds.

Fish live in the water.
Cows eat grass.
The sky is blue.
Cars have wheels.
Libraries have books.
San Francisco is in California.
New York is the capital of the United States.
What happened in your body when you heard that last statement? Most people feel a “quiver” or “twisting” of some kind, which is the body’s dislike of false statements. Your body is designed to feel most comfortable with truth, and it indicates when it touches a lie. Of course, it isn’t quite that simple. If you believe a statement is true, you may respond with greater comfort to that statement even if it is false. Or a deeper part of you may respond with discomfort even though you think you believe it’s true.

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Often in the course of following the body, a person will begin to experience images of past abuse. Frequently there is objective confirmation of the content of those, but most often there is not. Research shows that forgotten memories of abuse do surface but also that images of abuse may or may not be literally accurate, to a greater or lesser degree. So, how do you know whether the images are true or not?

I like to make a distinction between accuracy and authenticity. An accurate statement is one which has objective supporting evidence. An authentic statement is one which has deep emotional power to it and which makes sense of important life patterns.

A statement may be true, but if it has no corroborating evidence, I can’t tell if it’s true or not. Many images of abuse fall under this category. Obviously, most abusers perpetrate abuse in secret and don’t leave helpful evidence lying around for the survivors to discover years later. If a student follows his body and experiences an experience of being raped when he was little, and if there is no external supporting evidence, I can’t tell whether he is creating an image or reliving an experience. But we can tell whether the image is authentic. If there is powerful feeling to it and it makes sense of much in his life, we can say the image is an authentic focus for empowerment work and healing. We can even say that such an image can’t be baseless and we believe that what it shows actually did happen. What we cannot logically and legitimately say is that we know for sure that it did happen.

However, for my specific, limited purposes, the issue of accuracy (or truth) is not crucial. If a person experiences an image of being molested, then I will help them investigate that image and gain the power necessary to confront the image effectively and overcome the negative elements in their life which are connected to that image. Whether they actually were molested is irrelevant to the process of empowerment. If, for example, the student experiences fear, body numbness, and feelings of self-loathing when they contemplate the image, then that image is a handle on those body states and offers a path toward overcoming them. Whether the student actually was molested can be settled only by objective evi-
dence, and if there is no evidence, then we have to live in a state of uncertainty, but the empowerment work which will make them whole can be done anyway.

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It is important that the process of following the body must be a purely innocent one with no suggestions or leading on the part of the facilitator. It is important to let the content of the process proceed innocently from the student’s body. The facilitator should not go beyond the specific reported body sensations or make assumptions about what is being reported. The facilitator should not make suggestions to the student about the origin or meaning of the sensations being followed. It is important to let the student arrive at such ideas on their own. This neutrality ensures that the student will experience only their own images and not material suggested by the practitioner. It also ensures that the student will move at her own pace, which is important for safety. And it ensures that if an image of abuse does come up, the student will know that it came from within her and not from the practitioner.

GOOD FUCK: CASE STUDY

Morton started a lesson by saying that he’d realized that he felt sexual when he was alone but not when he was with people. He had a sense that that came from something that took place when he was around ten, but he couldn’t remember what it was.

I had him lie down on the padded table I use and close his eyes, relax, remember the feeling of being unsexual when around another person, and start to feel his body as he thought about his sexuality. As he lay on the table, his back involuntarily arched, and he felt pain there. Then he had a strong feeling that he hadn’t been lying on his back but on his stomach. Once he turned over, he experienced being about nine, lying on his stomach, with a lot of pressure on his shoulder blades holding him down. I pressed his shoulder blades where he indicated he was feeling the weight, and he started feeling weight all along his body. He heard guttural moans and felt movement of the weight, which he realized was a man thrusting his penis into his (Morton’s) anus. As he lay on the table, Morton felt fear and dread, and pain in his guts and anus. He remembered that when the man finished, he rolled off, slapped Morton on his butt, said “Good fuck,” and heaved a comfortable sigh. Morton said that the man had a thick body, heavy, and he didn’t know who he was. After experiencing the image, we went onto the mat and practiced escaping from the rape pin, which helped Morton get back into his body and calm the fear and pain.

Note that when Morton relaxed and allowed his body sensations to flow freely, just thinking of his lack of sexuality brought the pain in his back which eventually led to the awareness of his rape.
TRACING SENSATIONS

There are two ways to follow your body. The simple way consists of just paying attention to what you feel physically. Tracing, which is a more systematic variant on this simple sensate focus, includes a specific procedure for asking the body verbal and physical questions and allowing the physical sensations that are the answers to flow freely. Physical questions are physical actions which amplify physical sensations. In the last case study, when Morton expressed that he felt pressure on his shoulder blades, I pressed his shoulder blades. That was the physical equivalent of mirroring verbal statements, and it was done to increase Morton’s focus on the sensations. In practice, simple following of the body and tracing sensations blend together.

Tracing is a procedure that you cannot do for yourself. It is something that requires a facilitator to create a series of questions. These questions, as we shall discuss in more detail, serve specifically to focus awareness on the flow of sensations in the body.

Patterns: As I sit and talk with a person, I look for anomalous patterns, some feeling or action that seems odd or out of place. Often students will describe some event or person that seems very disturbing for no obvious reason. They might react strongly to a physical posture, a situation, action or task. Or they might recount a dream that bothered or puzzled them. They might describe a fragment of a memory of abuse or describe a full memory of abuse in an affectively flat way. In any case, the important element is that something seems anomalous.

Whatever the anomalous something might be, if the sensations in it are not clear, I have the student go through it a number of times so they have the time to note the specific physical sensations that arise as they dwell on it. “Going through it” might involve role playing, telling a dream, feeling a physical sensation, recounting some event, saying a phrase, performing some action, and so on. Whatever expresses the anomalous sensation or situation is the beginning of the tracing.

By going through the situation a number of times, the student has the opportunity to get clear on what their experience is. The key is to have the student give a detailed description of the physical sensations they feel. They describe where in their body they feel something and precisely what they feel there. This list of physical sensations is the path in to the experience which is the core of the anomalous situation.

Body: In tracing, the facilitator has you pose questions to your body and wait for your body to answer. That active engagement with the physical sensations brings them to the forefront of consciousness and magnifies them.

Tracing means using your intellect to ask a question—but not using your intellect to find the answer. It means letting a part of you answer that is different
from the part that you normally identify as you. Tracing means refraining from deliberating, mulling over, trying to think out the answer to the question. Asking questions of your body is much like asking questions of another person. You must put the question into a clear form, but once you have done that, there is nothing more you can do except wait. You have to be patient and calm and simply wait for the other person to respond. And they may or may not respond. No application of effort on your part can speak the answer, because the answer has to come from outside you. When you receive an answer from your body, it will feel as if a part of you is speaking that is different from the part that you ordinarily identify as I.

We identify the self as the conscious I, but in asking questions of the body, we will be directing the questions to something other than the conscious I, and it will feel as though the answers will be coming from something that is not you. Actually, of course, it is you, just as your kidneys are you, but a part of you which is normally outside conscious awareness.

I often wonder about the spelling of the word “I”. It is such a simple little word for such a big, complex thing. Surely there should be many more letters, or at least a much more complicated letter if there is to be only one. Such a simple letter, just a line. Almost a pun on the numeral 1, as though we were trying to reassure ourselves that the self is simple and unitary. In fact, the self is anything but.

The self is a complex, layered thing, and the process of tracing sensations in the body is really a process in which the conscious, cognitive element or layer of the self poses a question to the body or sensate layer of the self and then sits back and awaits an answer. Letting the body guide the process of your growth allows you to draw on a deeper wisdom within yourself in disentangling your issues.

Tracing is a rapid way of moving through the maze of your unawareness, but you may or may not be ready for it. You may wish to ask your body whether you are ready to have deep answers revealed. If the answer is “NO,” then respect that and don’t push too hard too soon. I often start the process of body questioning by asking the student if they truly wants to strip away all veils and see her inner truth. Sometimes I tell the student that I have a magic wand which will instantly reveal their deepest pain, the full truth of what happened to them, and I ask if they would like that. If there is any hesitation, then I know that the person is still using anesthesia as a protective device and they need more empowerment before they will be ready to give up the anesthesia.

Tracing sensations often brings to awareness what seem to be incidents of forgotten abuse. Frequently people who are not aware of any abuse in their past come for body lessons with emotional or physical loose ends which, when traced,
lead to images of past abuse. However, it is important to note that tracing sensations often leads to events that are not any form of abuse. Anomalous or disturbing sensations are almost always connected to some disturbing event, but there is more than one kind of disturbing event in the world. A car crash, a fire, or a life-threatening illness all can leave residues in the body. This book is about abuse, so that is the focus, but it is very definitely not appropriate to look for abuse at the bottom of every imbalance in the body.

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The reason for working to identify what looks like the source of puzzling body sensations is that that information is necessary for setting up specific movement experiments for de-conditioning the sensations. By having an image that represents (whether accurately or not) the original learning situation, it is possible to design movement experiments for re-learning.

I have one purpose for engaging in tracing sensations—finding out what are the areas of powerlessness in a person’s life and what empowerment processes they need to go through. Each image that is experienced expresses the powerlessness that the student is living and points to the strengths he needs to gain. By helping the student go into his body and excavate his fear and pain, I find out, and the student finds out, just what elements of empowerment are necessary for him to practice.

TOXIC, BUBBLING LIQUID: CASE STUDY

In one of Alice’s later lessons, she started off by saying that she felt a lot of anger, but she was afraid of her anger, because she was afraid if it got out of control she’d kill someone. She said that she had been abused physically as well as sexually. I pointed out that her model for power had been her father, who had hit her and her sister when he was angry, so she had good evidence that feeling anger would lead to abusive behavior.

I had her go into her body and feel her anger. She said it was in her stomach, and she felt it as a toxic bubbling liquid. She said the liquid was her self-hatred. As she said that, her right leg started to twitch, and when I asked her what her leg was doing, she said she was stomping. I pointed out that it was such a small movement that it wasn't really a stomp at all, and I had her amplify the movement and stomp harder. Alice said she was stomping on someone, so I had her get up from her chair, and I put a thick foam pad on the floor and had her stomp it. She said it didn't make the noise or impact that hitting the floor had so it wasn't as good, but I pointed out it was more like stomping on a real person. She started to cry. I asked who she was stomping, and she said “My father.” She said she was stomping on his penis.

I asked her what direction the hate/anger came from, and she said from below. Where exactly? From her vagina. I asked her to ask her vagina how the
hate came there, and she experienced the image of being four years old. Her fa-
ther was lying on her, and she couldn't move. He put his penis into her and kept
moving. It hurt. After a few minutes, he got up and left, and she lay on the bed,
feeling like she was dead. She said she could feel the toxic liquid pouring out of
her. I asked where, and she said her vagina. When she heard herself say that, she
realized that what she felt was her father's semen coming out of her vagina as
she lay there. I pointed out to her that the liquid was her father's hatred which
he put into her. It wasn't self-hatred. Then we went onto the mat and did self-
defense. I lay on top of her and had her throw me off. When she found her
openness in her voice, breath, and vagina, she performed a strong throw and
freed herself. When she did, she felt alive and energized, and the anger was
gone. Instead of staying trapped in powerlessness, with her father's hatred held
inside her, she found her own power and released both his hatred and her own
anger.

Empowerment: Empowerment is the foundation for tracing. Moving to-
ward sensations and amplifying them is, of course, just the opposite of numbing
the body and refraining from feeling things. In order to be willing to do this, and
in order to do this safely, a survivor has to have done a considerable amount of
empowerment work. Powerlessness is the reason that sensations and awareness
are reduced, and in order for the underlying self-system to allow the increase of
awareness, it has to be convinced that the old powerlessness has been overcome.

In order for increasing awareness to be safe, before doing any awareness
work, a person has to have in place the skills necessary to handle what he is go-
ing to become aware of. This is somewhat paradoxical. You won't know just ex-
actly what you need to handle until after you have done the tracing, but in order
to do the tracing you have to acquire beforehand the skills to handle what will
come up. The solution lies in the difference between generic and specific
empowerment. Generic empowerment is a process of acquiring general skills of
breathing, posture, movement, and self-defense. Specific empowerment is the
process of learning to be strong and effective in the face of the specific chal-
lenges you experienced in your images or actually experienced in your life. Ge-
neric empowerment is done before the tracing and allows it to proceed. Specific
empowerment is done right afterwards to resolve the images brought to focus by
the tracing.

In order to ensure that the imaging process is safe and productive, I always
end with empowerment work. Without such work, the last experience the student
will have in the session is of having been abused and defeated. With
empowerment work, the last experience of the session is of empowerment, de-
conditioning and victory. It makes a world of difference.

Immediately after the imaging experience, we work with breathing and cen-
tering, just to remind the student to be in her body. Whatever violation was just
experienced, we sit and discuss it, remembering to breathe calmly and open the belly. Discussing the abuse while centering is the beginning of self-defense.

Then we go on to practice the self-defense techniques that would enable the adult to deal with the past violation in the current present. If the student was choked, I will choke them. If they were hit with a stick, I will attack them with a stick. If they don’t already know the defense appropriate to the particular attack, I teach it to them. We go through the techniques slowly and lightly at first and move into stronger and faster execution of them as the student gains skill.

Of course, it is important to be sensitive to a student’s readiness. It is important to end with some clear empowerment, but if the student doesn’t feel ready to replay the whole assault right away, that replaying and re-scripting can be done over the course of the next few lessons.

It is very important to surround work on powerlessness with work on empowerment. For the process of tracing to work at all, and for it to be safe, a lesson in which responses are traced must start with generic empowerment and end with specific empowerment. That way the survivor enters the past feeling confident and leaves the past feeling victorious. That sense of meeting the past and conquering it is what breaks the chains of the past and lets the survivor move on with her life.

**Anomalous Sensations:** The first step in tracing a sensation is connecting to the sensation and the process of going into the sensation. One way of doing that involves being sensitive to the cues included in a person's physical bearing and on that basis setting up simple, direct situations to amplify these actions.

As one example, I was working with one woman who mentioned that she'd always hated having men ejaculate on her. As she said that, I saw that she was doing a lot of tension and rigidity in a specific spot on her neck, so I had her lie down and close her eyes. I got a container of hand cream and squirted some on that spot. As soon as I did that, she experienced an image of being a very little girl and having a man ejaculate on her face and neck. (Would she have experienced such an image if I’d squirted the cream on another area of her body? I don’t know. Would everyone who’d been sexually abused experience such an image if squirted with cream? I doubt it. Would anyone who had not been sexually abused, and abused in this way, come up with this image? It seems unlikely. I think the image was uniquely personal and authentic, not just an artifact of the hand cream.)

This woman connected with the image of abuse through a very simple process of following the body. The right cue elicited the whole image right away. Tracing is rarely that simple. Usually it is necessary to teach people how to connect to sensations in such a way that a flow to further sensations is created.
TWISTING FOOT: CASE STUDY

I was working with Martha, a woman who had recently experienced an image of childhood sexual abuse. We had done a self-defense exercise in which I’d had her push me away when I came too close, and she mentioned that she’d been more assertive since then in her daily life. She was saying how empty she felt, how she’s spent so much energy on suppressing the abuse that she hasn’t had a life. She felt worthless. As she said all this, she was leaning back on the couch, sitting quietly, except for her right foot, which was twisting around in an odd, nervous way. I had her notice her foot and go into the movement, and she immediately felt pain in her leg. As I had her dwell on that, she experienced herself being in her crib, with her right leg caught in the bars. She was stuck, and she cried as loudly as she could, but no one came. She felt worthless, not valued, that they didn’t even come to find out why she was crying. She finally fell asleep, with her leg still in the bars.

After she remembered that, I looked at her and told her she wasn’t worth shit, whereupon she burst out crying. She said she didn’t want to do the exercise, because she couldn’t bear to hear those words. I asked her why self-defense instructors punch students and said it was to help them learn how to not be punched. I pointed out that for a self-defense instructor, punching a student is a sign he cares about the student. Then I said the reason I told her she wasn’t worth shit was because I valued her. She looked directly at me and said in a clear firm voice “I am valuable.”

Logic: There is a specific form to the language of the verbal questions involved in tracing. First, it is important to ask logically empty/open questions, that is, questions in the form of "If now is the right time, you may or may not notice whether it is light around you, or not light, or possibly something else."

The question starts with a reminder to the student that now may not be the right time to go into the sensations and with a statement that the student may or may not feel something. Giving explicit permission to not go in or not feel makes sure that the inner self knows it has control over what is going on and does not feel threatened. In addition, giving permission to not succeed in the process takes the pressure off the student and makes it more likely they will succeed.

A question structured as a statement in the form of “You may or may not notice that it is X or not-X or something else” is logically empty because it cannot be other than true. It is certain that the person either will or will not notice something, and it is certain that it must be light or not light or something else around them. Again, this makes it impossible for the person to fail and therefore takes the pressure off, making success more likely.

It is also important that using logically empty locutions avoids leading questions and reduces the likelihood of the construction of inauthentic images. It
allows the student to home in on whatever details have felt significance rather than being bound by the questioner's frame of reference.

Logically empty language is the foundation and the beginning of tracing. However, after (and only after) a student has experienced and identified some element, the facilitator can speak specifically of that element in continuing the tracing. Once some element has been identified by the student, then the facilitator can use that element in amplifying and extending the sensations the student is working with.

The second crucial languaging element in constructing questions is the use of atomistic language. Fundamentally, we don't perceive objects such as books. We see patterns of light and dark, we feel sensations of heat or cold, heanness or lightness, roughness or smoothness etc. These raw sensations are the “atoms” of experience, and we assemble “objects” by putting together these atoms and by interpreting the collections of atoms on the basis of our past experience. We build up the visual image of a “book” by combining visual elements, and we label it as book by remembering the experiences we have had with various books we have touched, seen or used.

In the perceptually and cognitively shattered state of the abuse experience and the sensory disturbance often utilized to survive it, complex concepts/constructs such as “book” or “hand” might well be unavailable. Rather than assuming the person in the imaging process can recognize and identify what they are experiencing, it is most efficient to focus on experiencing atoms of sensation and then build up the objects of their experience through accretion of sensory details.

I use atomistic sensory language because it helps the student's process of experiencing. Little steps are easier than big steps. Small details are easier to connect with experientially than big, complex events. By using atomistic language, I help the student move from one sensation to the next.

Speaking in atomistic sensory language also keeps me from jumping to conclusions about what object or event the student might be experiencing and describing. If I infer an object from the student's words and then speak about the object, I will be either correct or incorrect. If I am correct but in advance of the student's process of identification, that may shock the student and derail the experiencing process. If it doesn't do that, it may leave the student at the end wondering whether the image she experienced was really within her or a result of my suggesting an object. If I am incorrect, that will mislead the student and run the risk of confusing the experience for the student. Only after the student identifies for herself the built-up sensation construct as an object or event will I speak of it as such.

It is both very difficult and very important to speak in an atomistic sensory language. I have found in teaching this method of image experiencing that it is hard for facilitators to avoid high level conceptualization and logical leaps. We have such strong habits of thinking and speaking in terms of complex ideas and
objects that most facilitators find it hard to speak in sensory/conceptual “baby steps.”

TRACING DREAMS

Very often students come in for lessons with reports of strange, powerful or puzzling dreams, and they can be the foundation for very helpful tracing sessions. Note that I do not try to analyze the dreams in any way. They are full of images, but I don’t try to ascribe meaning to the images. I simply have the student tell me their dream and note the physical sensations that arise as they review the dream. Those physical sensations are the basis of the tracing. Very often, simply by delving into the physical sensations, the symbolic meaning of the dream contents becomes quite clear. Other times, even without the symbolism of the dream contents being elucidated, studying the physical sensations leads to awareness of important issues.

SOGGY CEILING DREAM: CASE STUDY

Virginia said she had a dream that she was with a number of people in her family, and the ceiling was wet and soggy and falling down. She was about ten years old in the dream, and no one would believe her warnings that they would all get killed when the ceiling fell.

I asked her to lie down on the table and close her eyes. Then, as a way of starting a tracing, I sprinkled water on a paper towel and put it on her face—which created the soggy ceiling. Virginia immediately got panicky. She felt that she couldn’t breathe. She also had the sense that she was on her stomach when something happened. I had her lie on her stomach, and as soon as she turned over, she could feel her father lying down on top of her. She was about seven years old, just little. His weight was pressing her into the mattress, and she realized she was in her bed. It was dark in the room, but the hall light was on. The weight hurt her low back severely. I asked her to ask her ears to listen, and her ears heard a slapping sound. It was slow, and I slapped on a table, asking Virginia to tell me when I matched the tempo she heard. She realized it was down on her bottom, so I slapped her there. She kept saying she wanted to sink into the mattress, or disappear into the cool blue wall, or melt into the crucifix, but I had her breathe and stay present. She kept praying not to feel, so I had her pray instead to feel more. She realized her father had his penis in her vagina. After he came, he got up, stood behind her staring at her, then left.

After the tracing, we went onto the mat and practiced the self-defense moves for escaping from a prone rape position. After that, Virginia said she wasn’t numb any more and she could feel her body again.

The process of tracing dreams is no different from the process of tracing any other interesting event, thought or feeling. Sometimes the dream image
winds up being almost a literal representation of something from the student’s real life, and other times the dream image winds up being a metaphor only symbolically related to the student’s life. However, the key is not to try to interpret the dream in a conceptual way but simply to stick with the physical sensations accompanying the dream. Almost always, this will lead to some understanding of emotional and spiritual significance to the student.

The process of following the body allows people to get in touch with feelings and actions that they had been doing all along but outside of conscious awareness. When simple awareness and empowerment exercises seem to be ineffective in helping a student overcome some problematic behavior, often it is because there is some unfinished feeling or action being acted out. By following the body and discovering what is contained in the problematic behavior, more specific and effective empowerment exercises can be designed.
CHAPTER 13
HEALING THE WORLD

This is the end of the book, but it is the beginning of the rest of your life and your practice of awareness, embodiment, empowerment, and love.

The topic of this book is the application of Being In Movement somatic education to abuse recovery. Sexual abuse itself is just one form of trauma that affects people’s lives. And trauma is just one of the painful challenges people face.

There is one fundamental human problem that shows up in any difficulties in any area of life: walls. We erect rigid barriers in our muscles, breathing, posture, and movement. We erect those walls to protect ourselves from feeling less than. It doesn’t matter whether the arena of our inadequacy is professional athletics or public speaking or abuse recovery, the response to feeling helpless is to constrict the body. So the tools of Being In Movement mindbody training are not specifically about abuse, and the method described in this book is not specifically a method of healing abuse. It is a method of becoming human. As such, the tools and the process apply to every area of life. Every area of human activity offers the opportunity to practice becoming whole. And that wholeness will be the lever with which to change the course of our entire civilization.

Working with sexual abuse survivors means coming in contact with and attempting to alleviate the raw pain and spiritual torment that is hidden and widespread in our society. How many children have been physically or sexually abused? How many children have been verbally abused or neglected but not sexually abused? A terrifying number of our children have been and are being hurt. They grow up numb, afraid, and angry.

And consider the plight of the perpetrators of violence against children. Imagine what it would be like to live inside the skin of someone whose way of relating to others is by hurting children. Imagine the pain they are in and what circumstances in their lives resulted in their ways of behaving and living. Imagine the damage perpetrators inflict on themselves by hurting others. If so many children in our society are being hurt, there must be a vast number of adults who are in terrible pain.

Fear, anger, powerlessness and numbness are, I believe, root causes of child abuse in particular and violence in general. People who feel afraid, angry and unsafe will lash out to destroy what they perceive as the external cause of their feelings. They will mistake violence for true power and try to reduce their fear and feelings of powerlessness by hurting others. They will also numb themselves to handle the unbearable fear of their lives. People who are afraid and angry and
numb will be insensitive even to their own bodies and will therefore lack empathy with the feelings and existence of the people around them.

I suspect that the problem of war is really rooted in fear, pain and body numbness that is widespread enough to pull large groups of people into mass abuse. Through the centuries of natural disasters, plagues, famines, war, torture and cruelty, we have built up a vast reservoir of trauma, body numbness and dissociation. And all the weight of that past violence operates in our present world to create more violence. All you have to do is look at the ethnic violence that surges back and forth between various pairs of enemies to see how past trauma spawns present trauma which engenders future trauma.

Beyond violence towards other human beings, violence towards the planet is an even larger problem. People who cannot feel themselves, people who feel alienated from themselves and their own kind, will have so little empathy for other living creatures and the earth itself that they will unthinkingly and unfeelingly despoil the soil, water and air and kill off the fellow beings with whom we share the world. If human beings in our trauma destroy the air, water and soil, we will destroy ourselves as well, and take every other being with us to destruction.

However, fear, anger and numbness are internal body processes and as such can be replaced by the body state of power and love. Creating the body state of power and love is a way of replacing destructive feelings with life-affirming feelings. This is a state of embodied integrity. In the state of integrity, people will live and act strongly and lovingly. A person acting from the state of integrity will feel and take account of the existence of the world around him or her and act in ways that are peaceful, ethical and constructive. Greater sensitivity to, empathy with, and compassion for oneself includes being sensitive to the condition and needs and feelings of the people around you, the animals and plants around you, and the soil, water and air as well. It means feeling oneself as part of the web of life rather than separate from it.

All of the work in this book proceeds from the perspective that the human body is designed to live and function in love. That isn’t philosophy, just a shorthand statement of how the muscles and joints function most efficiently. Our bodies are built for life, for creation. Abuse is worship of death and destruction. This work is about the physiological underpinnings of ethics and morality. It is about reclaiming the body for life.

Many people are working with different facets of what may in fact be one connected process. There are people focusing on teaching critical thinking, emotional intelligence, preventive health methods, environmentalism, organic farming, peacemaking, violence prevention, and so on. The methods and tools that these people have developed are really different branches on the same tree of awareness, power and love. Wouldn’t it be nice if the body were included as a foundation for the work of growth and if all the different approaches to healing the world would come together as one?

I’ve wondered whether a great part of our civilization’s indifference to human suffering and environmental damage is really rooted in the fear, anger, al-
ienation and deadness of feeling that stem from child abuse of one form or another. Helping people contact their power and love is necessary in achieving any solution to the problems we all face. Helping people contact and experience themselves as living bodies on the living earth is crucial in saving our planet. It may be that working with people who were wounded as children will be the key to saving everyone. It may be that finding your body will offer the key to saving the world.

If you are working on healing your own abuse, you are really working on saving the whole world. If you are helping others on their path of healing, you are really working on saving not just the people you work with but the entire world. It’s worth doing.
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.

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