

# Cultivating Body-Mindfulness: The heart of Structural Integration

Sol Petersen

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Cultivating Body-Mindfulness: an essential foundation to maximise efficacy in movement and manual therapies, to pursue excellence in physical performance and to promote a fully embodied expression of human potential.

*"If we do not know what we are actually enacting then we cannot possibly do what we want."<sup>1</sup>*

In my work in Structural Integration (SI), Movement Coaching, aquatic rehabilitation and teaching Tai Ji, I have observed consistently that students and clients who present with an accomplished sense of body-mindfulness understand and achieve movement tasks and rehabilitation opportunities more quickly than those with less body awareness. They seem able to adapt and develop self-care exercises at home to meet their own needs and are more motivated to maintain a daily practice for their own wellness. For individuals with an athletic or body-oriented practice, SI can offer a structural and coordinative foundation that will maximise their potential. For clients and students who would like to live a more fully embodied human experience, the exploration and cultivation of body-mindfulness is both the primary step and an ever-new ongoing process.

In recent years, Mindfulness practices, through the work of Jon Kabat-Zin and other Buddhist-oriented therapists, have been successfully used with stress disorders and applied to many other health-related areas through the proliferation of Cognitive Therapy. The authors of "Mindfulness in Psychotherapy"<sup>2</sup> give a concise definition of mindfulness as (1) awareness, (2) of present experience, and (3) with acceptance. Thus mindfulness is an open-hearted awareness of our perceptual and kinesthetic field. As Feldenkrais suggests in the

above quote, a refined body awareness must be considered a basic foundation for competence and success in all movement arts and in approaches such as Structural Integration that embrace therapeutic movement as both an aspect of the method and a factor in the client's ongoing wellness.

## **Body-Mindfulness Increases our Body-Wisdom**

This article is an exploration of awareness – an awareness of the two worlds we live in, one on either side of our skin. It postulates that cultivating, strengthening and applying body-mindfulness in daily life and in rehabilitative therapies helps us avoid injuries as well as heal more quickly from accidents or debilitating body situations. The art, elegance and power in top level dancers, athletes and martial artists could be seen as the expression and extension of a very precise and refined, trained and strengthened body-mindfulness. As fully expressive human beings, body-mindfulness can expand our pleasure and give us more of a sense of control as well as help us to age more gracefully. For SI practitioners, I see the cultivation of our personal body-mindfulness as an essential foundation for us to be able to "walk our talk" and induct clients and students into higher level functioning and experience. As we become more body-mindful and more aware of the personal energy field that radiates out from our physical body, this awareness can enhance not only our own well-being but all our living and working relationships.

I begin with a definition of Structural Integration, outlining influences on my perspective, then define Mindfulness and Body-Mindfulness in daily life and in an SI practice. I explore implications of a body-mindful

therapeutic approach or a Body-Mindful Practice (BMP). In this article I consider SI as a BMP and give examples of SI clients integrating a body-mindful orientation into their careers and daily life. I then look at how a body-mindful approach can assist and inform both the practice of Structural Integration as well as other learning and therapeutic environments.

I have been influenced and inspired by my particular path of study which includes a former position as senior faculty in the Hellerwork SI school, advanced SI training with Emmett Hutchins and Peter Melchior from GSI, and collaboration with numerous Rolwing® teachers and colleagues, most particularly Robert Schleip and Hubert Godard. My approach has been strongly influenced by body psychotherapy training with Ron Kurtz and the Hakomi school, and Aston Movement and Bodywork studies with Judith Aston. Tai Ji and meditation have had a profound effect on my SI practice. I acknowledge masters Huang Sheng Shyan and Mak Ying Po who gave me the direct experience of embodied elegance, and Vipassana teachers, Joseph Goldstein and Tarchin Hearn, for their guidance.

### What is Structural Integration?

SI is an innovative approach to well-being that recognizes a natural order inherent in the human being. The method, inspired and developed by Ida Rolf and her heirs, is based on a guiding principle that by rebalancing the human structure within gravity and freeing natural movement, an individual's innate wholeness is revealed. Early SI was sometimes associated with pain or a "grin and bear it" attitude. Judith Aston's early approach of "soft rolwing" was probably at the forefront of matching the person's needs with the evolving method. The mechanical vision of the body and the "gel to sol" fascial response concept certainly would have encouraged the notion that more force, and hence less body-mindfulness, might have been effective. Recent research in fascia<sup>3</sup> indicates that myofascial release is a more complex psycho-neuro-myofascial relationship, and both sensitivity in individuals and this insight

have prompted an integration into SI of many mindful influences such as visceral and cranio-sacral techniques, positional release, Feldenkrais, Trager, Hakomi etc. I see the essence of long-term success for clients as the cultivation of an awakened body awareness and a conscious choice to bring aliveness, alignment and fluidity to daily body movements.

Human structure and coordination patterns

evolve over many years. They are affected by injuries and disease and are embedded in our complex mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. Thus it is obviously unrealistic to attempt to change deeply ingrained body patterns in one or two treatments. That is why Rolf created her classical ten-series. Its foundation is a carefully designed program of ten treatments, rather like a comprehensive, whole body certificate of well-being. Each session lasts typically from one to one and a half hours,

involving a range of manual therapy experiences and movement awareness and education tasks that are sequenced individually to systematically release, realign and rebalance the entire musculo-skeletal system. Sessions focus on bringing mindfulness to particular body structures and functions, such as the ribcage and breathing, balance in the feet and leg muscle chain in standing, achieving a functional contra-laterality in walking or differentiating between spinal and hip flexion.

### Three Factors for a Solid Base in an Embodied Approach to Structural Integration

There are a number of important points for a successful SI treatment. First is the creation of a cooperative therapeutic alliance – a "learning team" between therapist and client,<sup>4</sup> where the therapist mindfully manages the therapeutic process from a person-centered rather than technique-centered perspective. Second is accomplishing a developed sequence of appropriate treatments (the individually crafted ten-series), that is designed and adjusted to assist each individual to achieve their embodied potential. The third, that must travel like a thread throughout this journey, is the cultivation in the client of a fine body awareness which I call body-mindfulness, and that should be seen as a



Fig. 1: Seated work requires more body-mindfulness

life-long process of refining both the state and the skill. I feel that integrating body-mindfulness into one's posture, movement and being is a key to accessing the inherent wisdom of the body.

### **Searching for a Meaningful Approach to Physical Education**

In 1973 I completed a teaching degree in Physical Education and Psychology. For the previous two years I had also been studying Tai Ji, Yoga, meditation, naturopathy and various forms of massage and bodywork. I found the "Eastern arts" added a longed-for holistic perspective to the whole human being that I could never quite find in my classical PE training. This was the beginning of my lifelong journey exploring the aliveness and the wisdom of the body.

In 1975 I received the Rolfing® Structural Integration ten-series. Although I appreciated the work and found it interesting, I was not drawn at that time to train. I found it to be a very effective deep tissue form of body therapy and I appreciated the theory that I read in Rolf's book. The client before me screamed regularly through his sessions and I found that a bit unsettling. Overall, the method as I experienced it did not engage me in dynamic movement as my Tai Ji, yoga and dance did, nor did it offer real tools on my internal mindful journey. I continued to study different approaches to the body from Shiatsu and Traditional Chinese Medicine, to myofascial therapy and positional release, and integrated these influences into my part-time practice.

### **Searching for a Mindful Approach to Structural Integration**

In the late '70's Rolf's work inspired a number of individuals to incorporate the then current "bodymind" wave into alternate schools of SI. In 1983, while teaching Tai Ji in Denmark, I encountered a different approach to SI through Structural Rebalancing, an eclectic method incorporating a bodymind and movement perspective into the ten-series. My experience drew me to train and then assist in a Danish training in 1984. An excitement about the potential in the SI method to teach a very real form of physical education was awakened in me. I decided to join the SI training with Joseph Heller in 1985. I found it inspiring and Heller's inclusive attitude to what would support the SI process refreshing.

Heller, aware of inherent limitations, introduced a bodymind theme to each of the ten SI sessions<sup>5</sup> as a way of bringing in the personal exploration part of the process for the client, and movement explorations that were largely influenced by Judith Aston. This introduction and my exercise and coaching background led me to study with Aston as well. Although I appreciated the Hellerwork SI focus on the person, as a trainer I found myself looking for an approach that integrated the psychological and energetic aspects in teaching SI.

### **A Mindful Approach to Psychotherapy Informs SI**

In 1987, I was introduced to somatic, body-mindful techniques from the Hakomi Method of Body Psychotherapy. I got that "coming home" feeling and went on to train.

Kurtz identified five principles for his work: organicity (the human as a self-healing, self-organising living system with inherent bodywisdom); mindfulness (a method of discovering and working with core material); non-forcing or going with the grain (appreciating the inherent wisdom); mindbody holism (appreciating the inseparability of body and mind and the inter-connected meanings); and unity (recognizing the parts and the wholeness within the individual and the universe)<sup>6</sup>. Kurtz emphasized what he called Loving Presence as the ground of success in the therapeutic relationship.

One of my tasks in studying the Hakomi method was to discover how I could be effective and feel confident in my SI practice working with the emotional and energetic responses of the individual. Another objective was how I could teach SI as a more person-centered rather than technique-centered approach, and how the training process could best support the personal growth of the students at the same time as accomplishing learning goals.

In the 1990's I was a trustee on a Hellerwork SI board that gave itself the challenge of identifying foundational principles of the "work." Here is what we came up with: (1) We recognize the existence of a greater field in which we live, interact and express. (2) Our purpose is to enhance the individual's awareness of and relationship to that field. (3) Within the context of a healing relationship, we work with structure, psyche and movement to improve function and well-being. (4) Our process follows

an ordered sequence, organizing the body along the lines of gravity to induce change towards a more functional pattern<sup>7</sup>. This visioning process was inspiring for all of us.

My Hakomi study didn't teach me how to apply the method in my SI practice, but it gave me the tools I needed to do so. The Hakomi practice involved a lot of creative body relationship and my SI practice became more and more a body-mindful, person-centered approach. (In the article "How Do I Listen"<sup>14</sup> I expanded on how I came to apply body psychotherapy principles in SI.)

#### **Hubert Godard and the Importance of Perception in SI**

In recent years the work of Hubert Godard, Roling teacher, dancer, researcher and pioneer in the field of integrative and rehabilitative movement, has had increasing influence in the SI world. According to Godard, there are four aspects of our being that both therapists and clients need to be mindful of and engage in fully during the therapeutic process of SI if we want to explore, teach or understand movement.

1. Structure: our swimming pool bag body with bones and organs, nerves and connective tissues.
2. Coordination: the set of patterns that we have learned in order to achieve movement tasks.
3. Perception: our interpretation of what we sense.
4. Meaning: the sense we have made of our perceptions.

The growing awareness of the need to integrate the perceptual and meaning areas has been supported by current research in neuro-physiology. Godard emphasizes that we will not change deeply ingrained patterns without addressing perceptual issues, and that perception is always connected to meaning. Body-mindfulness appears to be the perfect entry point for us to begin to explore this perceptual world.

To cultivate body-mindfulness is to swim in the sea of our sensations, for sensations are the language of body-mindfulness. Our sensations are a constant bodywisdom information stream, but often we don't notice them until they

entirely overwhelm us. Being aware of these sensations – perceiving them – is the key to regenerating our body wellness and body movement. In dealing with joint and back pain, we may think that we just have to do those back stabilization exercises or receive more effective soft tissue work. But Godard leads us back again to our self-perception: "How we orient to weight and space, how our body prepares to move while orienting and how we shift perception to change our pre-movement - these are key factors in making lasting improvements in back pain and all musculo-skeletal complaints."<sup>18</sup>

#### **Mindfulness – the Awareness of What Actually Happens**

*"Mindfulness is the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us at the successive moments of perception."<sup>19</sup>*

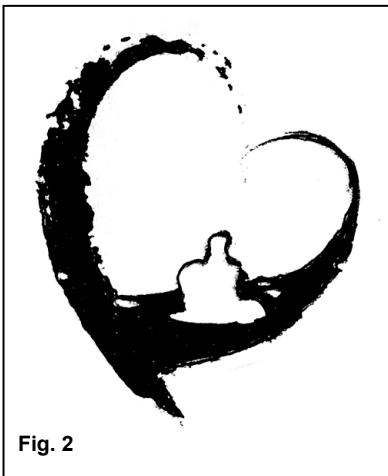
The power of our presence and attention, whether it is in our personal relationships, work, educational or therapeutic contexts, reflect our capacity to be clearly aware of the constant

stream of sensations, automatic responses and reactions. This practice of cultivating a quality of subtle listening is referred to in Buddhism as mindfulness. In Vipassana meditation it is a foundational practice that supports the experience of awakening.

To truly listen to others may be the greatest art for it implies sensitivity in perception and attention to both oneself - the listening instrument - as well as to the objects of our attention. This quality and intention of our listening is also

at the very root of the understanding and meaning that we create in our life. If understanding and love are really the same thing as Forrest Carter says in *The Education of Little Tree*,<sup>10</sup> then perhaps true listening is really a kind of loving attention.

To practice mindfulness is to extend a caring intention to oneself. Here is an exercise I use to introduce body-mindfulness to clients and students. If possible, take turns reading this out loud to a partner or read it through and then sitting quietly go through the exercise as you remember it. Or, just notice how your awareness increases as you read. If you are not accustomed



**Fig. 2**

to this experience, don't be surprised if you find yourself quickly distracted by thoughts or other sensations. You may notice yourself making judgments. Simply notice and return to the awareness of sensations and breath.

*Exploring the Awareness of  
Sensation and Breath*

Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down. Begin by paying attention to the movement of the breath just as it is, without controlling it or trying to make the breathing happen in any particular way. Where in your body can you feel the breath happening? Notice the rising and falling of your chest and abdomen. You may even be aware of an expanding and relaxing of the bones of the skull or a more global feeling of the elastic nature of your skin's response as the whole body breathes.

Notice the delicate movements and sensations of tingling, warmth or coolness of the breath passing in and out through your nostrils.... or your mouth, if it is open. How easy or difficult is the breathing? Are you aware of a rhythm - such as full or light, ragged or restricted? Notice the quality of your breathing and the many responses within as you quietly give your attention to the movement of the breath. Are you aware of any discomfort or pain? There may be images, memories, emotions, thoughts, plans, awareness of sounds, temperature or smells. Notice the wide range of responses and welcome them but let the focus of your attention stay with your breath and body sensations.

Let your awareness extend now to the touch and pressure sensations in your body. If you are sitting down feel the contact of your back, buttocks or thighs with the chair, wall or cushion. If you are lying down notice all the places that your body touches the floor. Notice the positions of your arms and legs. Is the contact even or do you feel more sensation on one side than the other? Can you feel your breathing in these areas? Scan your body for other touch and pressure sensations. If you are sitting, does your upper arm or elbow touch your chest? Notice the sensations in your hands. Do you notice sensations in your feet or legs, upper lip resting on lower lip, hair touching your face, neck or shoulders? Are you aware of the movement of air around you and where it touches your skin with coolness or warmth?

Now return to the breathing, letting your attention rest gently on either the sensation of

rising and falling of your abdomen or the movement of breath at your nostrils. To help focus your attention as the breath comes in, use a whisper-like mental noting of "in" and as the breath goes out, "out."

Try this practice for five or ten minutes as feels comfortable. Often people find this practice very calming and the internal spaciousness may give rise to new insight. Hence this type of breath and sensation meditation may also be referred to as insight meditation.

**Body-Mindfulness is the  
Ground Floor on the Way to Body-Wisdom**

In a famous discourse, the Buddha said that it is the cultivation of mindfulness that is the sole way to freedom.<sup>11</sup> In the Buddhist approach to awakening, if mindfulness is the house that freedom grows in, then body-mindfulness is the ground floor. There are four dimensions to mindfulness in Buddhism:

1. *Mindfulness of the body*: this has been referred to as body-mindfulness in specific sutras and includes mindfulness of breath, sensations, movements and postures, and the sense of the body in space.
2. *Mindfulness of feeling*: this includes the qualities of desire, aversion and neutrality.
3. *Mindfulness of the knowing faculty*: this includes mental states such as fear, anger, lust etc.
4. *Mindfulness of the truth*: also known as the Dharma or the Dao.

It is impossible to have the latter three without the first - to separate out awareness, feeling or knowing faculties from our physical body. Physiotherapist Andrew Pike writes about how the "body as machine" concept in modern medicine and classical physiotherapy (which sees human experience as a theory of parts, and awareness as separate from the body), leads to mechanical-based treatments which are less effective than an integrative therapeutic approach.<sup>12</sup> Mindfulness, and specifically body-mindfulness, is the ground work for each of us to develop body-intuition, body-skills and body-wisdom, thus increasing the efficacy of our therapeutic methods. In his book, "Zen Mind, Beginners Mind," Suzuki underlines the importance of mindfulness in developing inner wisdom. "Our mind should be soft and open enough to see things as they are without effort and to understand things as they are. Wisdom is

not something to learn. Wisdom will come out of your mindfulness."<sup>13</sup>

Classical Mindfulness practices begin with applying this curious, open attention to sensory and kinesthetic awareness in life activities such as breathing, standing or walking. In sitting or non-moving positions, mindfulness can also be focused on thoughts, emotions and our range of sensory perceptions such as tingling, heat, cold, etc. A slow walking meditation practice is usually an exercise in mindfulness rather than an exercise in movement. But if you are a movement rehabilitation therapist, a walking exercise in a mindful state may be just what the recovering patient requires to anchor in a new experience of balanced structure in the foot.

### **Body-Mindfulness - a State and a Skill**

Body-mindfulness is a kind of self-remembering, a returning to yourself. In my therapeutic work I use the word body-mindfulness to refer to two aspects: (1) a state of open and interested body awareness in the present moment that is available to anyone; and (2) a level of refinement of body awareness in two areas: (A) activities of daily life – eg. walking, postural and sensory awareness in working, sitting, driving etc., and (B) peak performance activities and areas of mastery such as Zen archery, dance, acrobatics or professional sport.

#### ***1. Body-Mindfulness as a state of awareness.***

Body-Mindfulness has a calm, open, interested and friendly quality of present-time awareness of body experiences and responses, including a wide range of sensory stimulations such as pressure, touch, stretch, heat, cold, pain, tingling, physical movement and position in space, visual, auditory and olfactory impressions.

Tai Ji teacher, Patrick Kelly, refers to this fine body awareness as "self-sensing": "Self-sensing is a state of simultaneous true awareness of the sensations throughout the whole body. It begins with a sense of the body's spatial positioning and movement, pressure and warmth along with other sensations for which there are nerve sensors throughout the body, then expands to include the sense of the life energy of the body itself."<sup>14</sup>

#### ***Introducing Body-Mindfulness in an SI Session***

When a client begins the first session of an SI series, the practitioner may invite this body-mindful state with the client through questions, sensory and movement exploration, and by asking the client to be very present and

interactive when receiving touch work. This first experience could be quite unusual for someone not used to being "in their own body." For example, clients who are dance or meditation practitioners may feel at home with this mindful approach but for those not used to noticing internally this could be an unusual or even uncomfortable experience that requires patience, understanding and skill from the practitioner to guide the client. As one SI client reported, "After my first session I felt like an absentee landlord finally coming home to my own body."

#### ***2. Body-Mindfulness as a Developed Skill in Two Areas, A and B:***

- (a) A refined capacity for awareness and attention to "body sensing" experiences.
- (b) A refined capacity for both subtle and powerful coordination and expressive physical movement.

##### **(a)**

A REFINED CAPACITY FOR AWARENESS AND ATTENTION TO "BODY SENSING" EXPERIENCES

The skill of body-sensing and postural and movement awareness is only refined and integrated through consistent practice over time. Two factors that help us develop the skill of body-mindfulness are concentration (the ability of the mind to stay steady on a task), and conscious repetition to the point of the activity becoming automatic or "natural." For example, if your unconscious slump is to slouch and roll back on your sit bones, even if it feels more comfortable to sit up straighter, until the motion training is "grooved in" (and this may take 10,000 repetitions), your system will always be pulled back towards the slump.

#### ***Developing Body-Mindful Skills through the SI process***

Throughout the experiences of the ten sessions (and even more importantly during the times between treatments), the client learns to refine and develop their body-sensing awareness. For example, during a first session there is a focus on the experience of the breathing process in relation to postural alignment, position, dimension, and to movement. Exploring this breathing awareness for the first time is very different from the practiced experience after travelling through the journey of the ten-series, when the initial uncertain awareness has developed into a grounded skill. In order to



facilitate this ever-new experience for a client or student, practitioners must themselves develop mindfulness as a state and skill; they must both cultivate a "beginner's mind" and immerse themselves in a mindful approach to embodiment.

*Body-mindfulness Is a Trainable  
Weather Report - a SI client's  
perspective*

When the SI experience becomes a part of your life, it is a body-mindful skill that informs every part of our life experience. Patrick Stewart, a longtime regular client, is a forest ecologist who spends a lot of time scrambling around in the bush, over streams and up the other side of the mountains. This is what he said when I asked him about SI and body-mindfulness:

"To understand weather – you check it every day - anything else is emotional subjectivity. Therefore, you must do things with and explore your body every day. Your daily body-mindful practice - whether it is stretching, rolling around on massage balls, doing yoga or tai ji, running, etc., is a mirror, it's your weather report. If I don't know how to mobilise my feet and stretch my back to re-boot myself all the treatments and massages in the world won't help me. When I am doing well in the bush I feel spacious, I see beauty, and I notice that I am humming as I skip across a ravine."

How well do you predict the weather of your body responses to the different experiences and activities of your life?

**(b)**

THE REFINED CAPACITY FOR BOTH  
SUBTLE AND POWERFUL COORDINATION, AND  
EXPRESSIVE PHYSICAL MOVEMENT

Professional dancers, athletes Yoga and Tai Ji masters display beauty, harmony, endurance, controlled power, fluidity and elegance. To achieve and maintain their grace beyond planned movement they rely on their motion training and their refined body awareness that enables them to respond without hesitation in a micro-second to any change. As Tai Ji master

Huang Sheng Shyan said, "If you are thinking it's too late."<sup>15</sup>

*Transforming Dance with SI as a  
Foundation*

Harumi Tribble is a dancer, choreographer and teacher. She speaks of how she was able to integrate her SI experience into becoming more mindful of her body in her art as well as creating a functional foundation for her career:

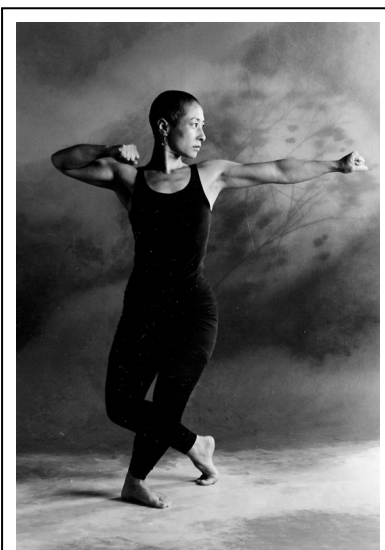
"Understanding the principles of Structural Integration and the dynamics of movement, awareness and transformation is initiated through all the layers of my body. I realize it is possible to perform with skill and ease at an age far beyond predicted retirement. When I begin to

feel strain in my body, I pause and re-track, re-program ankle-knee-hip-lower back, whole body connected.

"Correcting body alignment, tracking the joints that support me, understanding my core as a prerequisite to technical education will give me as athlete/dancer the edge. To feel what is going on, interpret the message, know how to self-heal the body stresses, and release negatively held patterns, these are essential to me. I am amazed in a complex landing when my body decides automatically to re-choreograph the movement to take care of my left ankle which had just 'glitched.' I can allow my mind to truly listen to my body."

**How Do We Develop Body-Mindfulness?**

Over the past thirty years in the health and fitness industry, I have observed practitioners, clients and students of most bodymind oriented methods such as SI, Alexander technique, Yoga, Pilates, dance etc., trying their best to be and appear "more aligned, more upright, or more balanced" and at times only presenting a very stiff and unnatural version of themselves. Developing a body-mindful practice needs a special attitude with softness, interest and care for the self. As Tarchin Hearn, author, meditation teacher and former Buddhist monk says about the appropriate use of mindfulness: "A practice for awakening is, first of all, a friendly enquiry into what is arising, with curiosity and



**Fig. 3:** SI enhances dance (Harumi Tribble).

engagement and then a calm relaxed awareness, observing with interest and presence. Following the breath or labeling perceptions is not a path to liberation unless it is flavored with the essence of friendly enquiry. It may be only a path of being a major controller."<sup>16</sup>

*We Can Override Body-Mindfulness  
or Use it to Extend Kindness to Ourselves*

Tarchin spent many years in India studying and practicing meditation. Much of this intense study happened sitting on a cushion on the floor, often for up to ten or more hours a day and for months or years at a time. For many it was an attempt to go beyond the body and the material world – to focus on deeper levels of awareness and consciousness rather than focusing on the body, this more mundane physical vehicle. Few of the Westerners who studied there for years didn't have chronic spinal, joint and body problems directly caused by long periods of strain, holding and forcing their bodies into seated postures that their physical body was simply not ready for. Years later they still carry the constant reminder of their lack of kindness to their own body. Tarchin still teaches a meditative way of life, but his approach now incorporates a strong base of movement meditations and body care.

*Structural Integration as a  
Path of Embodied Awareness*

I see body-mindfulness as both the

foundation and the key to the embodiment potential in the SI process. SI is unique as a modality because you cannot study it from the outside. In order to learn the method, you must immerse yourself in the experience of your own embodiment by experiencing the ten-series before acceptance as a student, and then again during the training process. As a practitioner facilitating and walking your talk, you are on an endless path of body discovery.

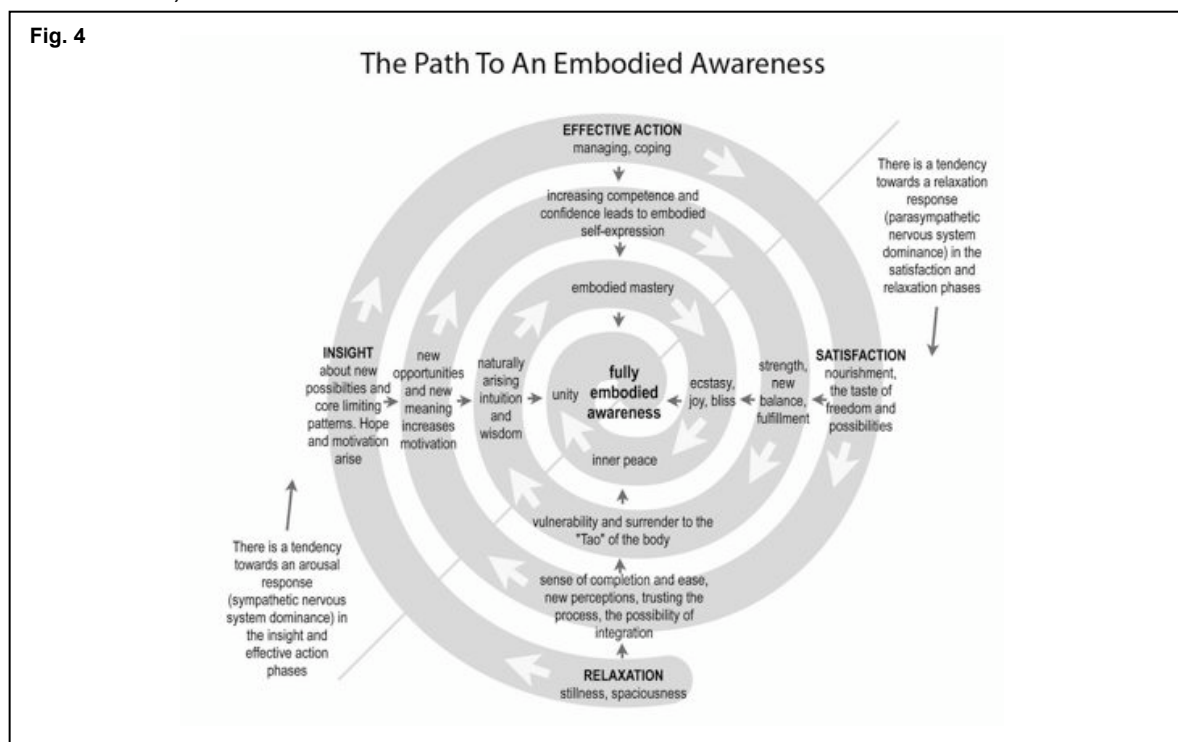
In the SI process we begin by inviting our clients into a process of a multi-level body awareness state. In this transformational journey exploring our form and function, we become more and more aware, gaining insight into body, movement, knowing and feeling faculties much like the first three levels of mindfulness in Buddhism. We ask questions like "How do I sense my relation to the earth, to up? How has my structure developed in relation to my life? Is there something that prevents me from taking a full breath? Do I sense a meaning in this all too familiar posture of mine?"

The fourth level of mindfulness in Buddhism is mindfulness of the dharma, or truth. In SI, the fourth level of mindfulness is our integration as embodied awareness.

**The Body-Mindfulness  
Path to Embodied Awareness**

Figure 4 shows the cycle of developing a sense of embodiment as a spiral of increasing

Fig. 4





personal effectiveness and awareness. From a place of stillness we are aroused by our insight to act. We have chronic pain and a sense of poor posture and body usage that we have avoided for years. A fear of losing health and capacity motivates us to act and visit the SI practitioner. This is beginning to manage the challenge. The therapist confirms your concerns and offers manual therapy, exercise and life style changes. This feels satisfying to act effectively and to have someone on your team. You begin to relax. That is one circle around the spiral. Now, to the next level of insight: exactly what will you actually do to maintain and achieve the results you are looking for? Will you commit to doing the whole ten-series? Yes.

The effective action is increasing your competence and self-expression through the experiences with your practitioner. Feeling better as a result of your sessions brings satisfaction, nourishment, a completion and a sense of fulfillment as you start to feel more "in your body."

The next level of clarity leads to intuition and wisdom. Higher levels of effective action lead to increased confidence and a sense of mastery in relation to your body. Perhaps you have cultivated a new stretching or yoga practice that feels really right for you. This new satisfaction in your body experience leads to fulfillment and joy which also affects all your relationships. Deeper levels of relaxation lead to a new sense of integration and inner peace. The entire spiral completes itself in a new embodied aliveness and awareness which, of course, is a never ending living process.

#### ***Core Restrictive Patterns -Barriers on Our Path***

Of course we are not always flowing gracefully around this spiral towards our embodied potential. We get stuck and cannot get clear insight; or we are clear about what we want but can't make it happen; or we act effectively but our nagging self-criticism doesn't let us enjoy our work and sends us back to just do something else; or we feel quite satisfied at one level but don't quite complete the task or get any sense of relaxation. Becoming aware of where we get caught on the cycle of effective and healthy action can help us to understand the core beliefs and body responses we experience in that state. Without this level of awareness we are likely to stay stuck in our particular "pet" barrier associated with a core belief. The awareness of core patterns and core restrictive patterns on all

levels of function and structure is the gold mine for practitioners assisting others to transform limitations.

### **Considerations in the World of Body-Mindfulness**

What are some important factors we must consider for a body-mindful approach?

#### ***Being Mindful of Our Field of Physical Potential***

Neuroscientists recognize the space around us and the refined spatial awareness of the Tai Ji masters. They call the space around the body peripersonal space. Recent brain mapping techniques have confirmed what the Tai Ji masters have been saying for centuries: "When you move the sword through space, feel the length of it, the tip as if it was part of your own body."<sup>17</sup> According to your brain, that is true. In "The Body Has a Mind of Its Own," the Blakeslees say: "Your self does not end where your flesh ends, but suffuses and blends with the world, including other beings. Thus, when you ride a horse with confidence and skill, your body maps and the horse's body maps are blended in shared space. When you make love, your body maps and your lover's body maps commingle in mutual passion."<sup>18</sup>

Top athletes, performers and martial artists not only sense the space around themselves but they know how to dance with both the space and the objects, elements or creatures that are part of that space. In Godard's language, they have achieved the balance in both their ground and space orientation.

On the other hand, many of us move through life as if walking in an invisible vertical tube, rarely extending our joints or limbs or sensing the space around us. The habits of our movement and postural patterns become the limits of our physical potential. Where you stand right now is the centrepoint of your Field of Physical Potential (FPP). It is the point from where you can reach up, down or out from your body with your arms, legs or head to its outer limit. In every posture and action we have a new FPP.

#### ***Mindfulness of Three Planes of Movement in our FPP***

As someone once said, "There is no such thing as a single muscle movement." In other words, any body movement is part of a great chain of muscle, fascial and fluid responses.

Body movement is usually seen as occurring within three planes when the body is in the anatomical position. Simplistically, we can say

that flexion and extension happen in the sagittal plane, lateral flexion in the frontal plane and rotation in the transverse plane. To access our full FPP we must move through all planes.

The body can also be seen as three functional myofascial chains, intersecting at the dan tien ( the belly center, also known as the hara):

1. the spinal chain: from sacrum to skull
2. the arm chain: from fingertips to dan tien
3. the leg chain: from tip of the toes to dan tien

The unimpeded body is capable of full range of movement (ROM) of the three main body sections – head, thorax and pelvis - and all primary movements such as squatting, sitting on the floor, optimal breathing etc. Dancers and movement explorers are very aware of these three planes and the dynamic movement connected to the centre, but for a new SI client the introduction to a new spatial awareness and movement through the centre may be a big awakening out of a habitual flexion pattern slump.

#### *Mindfulness of Your FPP – an exercise*

To explore your FPP, stand with your knees softly bent and without moving your feet, stretch your arms, spine and head, and reach as far as you can in every direction - in front, to the sides, above, below and behind as you rotate, side-bend, stretch way up or behind, bend down and touch the floor.

Now shift all of your weight onto one leg and softly bend the knee, if necessary stabilizing yourself with a hand on a wall or table. With your balance point as the centre of the circle, reach out with your foot and leg in all directions. See how high or far around your FPP you can reach or kick. Now try that on the other leg. See if you started automatically on your most stable leg. Usually our body is not waiting for our brain to make important movement decisions and so when required to stand on one leg we automatically choose the leg that we will feel most stable on. As we pay closer attention we become more aware of both our uprightness( or lack of it) and of the spaces that we move through..

#### ***Awareness of the Language of the Body - Movement***

We are hard-wired to move for survival, pleasure, creative self-expression and optimal function. The body has an inherent vocabulary of coordinated movements that develops naturally and concurrently with brain development. I refer to these as primary movements and primary postures. In cultures where people squat, sit cross legged on the floor as a matter of course and walk barefoot at least sometimes, they cultivate their internal support, strength and flexibility which lasts until old age. On the other hand, many Westerners, even in their teens and certainly as they get older, struggle to squat flat-footed and sit with ease on the floor. This is a loss of primary postures, movements and functions.

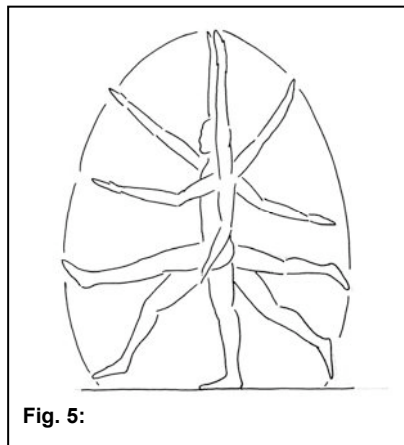
Some of our primary movements are: half squat and full flat-footed squat; sitting on floor cross-legged, on heels, variations; hip hinge seated and standing; flexible spinal movements in three planes; lunge and genuflexion; balancing on one leg; standing; undulation; dancing; spontaneous movement; full breath; power expressed through the four hinges of the leg chain in walking; contra-laterality in walking, running, sprinting, crawling; hanging from the arms; bending over; touch, caress, striking with hand; push, pull, striking with arms; sexual function; healing self touch; micro-movements; contracting, relaxing and stretching to discharge

stress. One of the goals of SI is to awaken mindfulness in primary movements and strengthen a new resilience.

#### ***The Spring Force, "The Line" and Awareness of Internal Forces***

Clinicians call the force that matches gravity and keeps things in one place ground reaction force.<sup>19</sup> There is another upward spring force within us that is part of the gravity dance. We see this most obviously in vibrant plants and the springy, alive energy of

youths and animals. Chinese Medicine suggests we have upward surging Qi energy as a child, that it decreases as we age, and by the time we are in our thirties it is much lower. Tai Ji masters cultivate Qi energy and this spring force by learning to direct awareness, intention and power through conscious movement and by



**Fig. 5:**

visualizing energy meditations that circulate the flow of internal energies.

This practice increases the space between the vertebrae, promoting health and pushing negative energy out. This spring force can also be accessed and developed through conscious movement in SI. When we experience an elastic balance between our ground force connection and our spatial orientation expansion, we feel the spring force moving through us. Perhaps this "internal spring force" is what Ida Rolf was referring to as "the line."

#### ***Our Bodies Are Shaped by Our Lives – Stress Responsive Systems***

Each of us is systematically shaped by the movements and experiences of our lives. Our connective tissue system is relatively pliable but gets stuck in postures that we hold it in. Shock and stress embeds itself in the tissues and failure to discharge energetic responses to stressful situations can seriously damage health on all levels. Body-mindfulness and therapeutic movement are the keys to being responsible for healthy structure.

#### ***Healing Our Body and Adjusting Our Cultural Cling Film through Spontaneous Movement***

Our movement is also the impression of our culture and our family. By the time we are adults our energetic body is wrapped up in a cultural cling film that controls how we move, shapes our perceptions, is full of meaning and is extremely challenging for us to adjust. Our FPP becomes limited and, unlike animals (who tend to respond immediately to inner sensation by scratching, rolling, etc.), we may rarely listen inside and explore any spontaneous movement. Tai Ji and Qi Gong teachers see spontaneous movement as a self-healing function of the body that unravels the cultural cling film, and as a way of releasing built up negative energy.

I asked Susan Harper, co-founder of Continuum Movement about spontaneous movement and our FPP. She said, "Spontaneous movement seems largely lost in most of us. What

is the spontaneity of an ocean or a cell? When I invite people to move spontaneously they tend to automatically move along the patterns of their cultural norm, paying attention to the same things in the same way over and over again. The essence of movement is not about learning how to do movement; it's about opening and listening to the deep inherent movement that is always occurring inside a healthy organism and inside the greater energetic field."<sup>20</sup>

#### ***Developing Body-mindfulness in Our Postural and Movement Patterns***

Cross your arms in front of your chest. Now try to do it the other way. There are few of us who can shift smoothly between the two. Most of our posture and movement patterns are automatic and not very well known to us. You may notice yourself slipping into automatic slumping postures – *your* unique slumping postures, in fact. If it feels bad enough or if someone keeps pointing our "poor" posture out to us, we may start to become more aware. In SI we become very interested in automatic postures and coordination patterns, especially restrictive patterns. During the ten-series, as we develop more body-mindfulness, we may observe this cycle of postural awareness:

1. *unconscious slumping tendency*: a postural slump happens automatically and before we are aware of it,

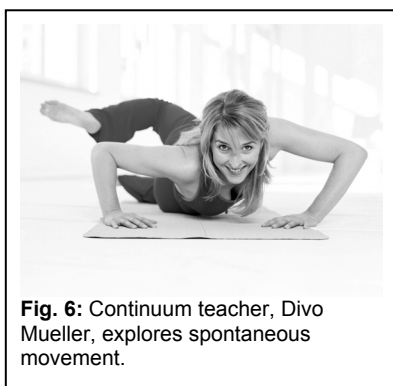
2. *conscious of slumping*: we feel the slump, may experience restriction, pain, the weight of gravity, desire for a better posture...we may use effort to try to find "up,"

3. *conscious lift*: exploration and practice of internal spring force and alignment.

This takes consciousness and energy to find balance; perceptual cues and bodywork help, but the old pattern pulls you back and the tendency remains to fall back into slumping, especially when under stress,

4. *natural lift as an internal process*: after much practice, motion training, and release of core patterns a posture with dimension, space, alignment and powerful coordination becomes natural and easy...slumping only feels ok for a short period. Each person discovers the internal spring force different ways. Visualizations and memories help.

In "Moving Beyond Posture," Judith Aston refers to postural and movement patterns that



**Fig. 6:** Continuum teacher, Divo Mueller, explores spontaneous movement.

embed themselves in our structure and in our coordination as "holding patterns." She suggests "functional" holding patterns "can more easily be let go of" and as patterns build in their control they become "structural" holding patterns and are more deeply "ingrained in the tissue and expression of who we are."<sup>21</sup> It is quite difficult to release structural patterns without myofascial soft tissue work.

When we are body-mindful and have a good understanding of core restrictive patterns we can make realistic treatment choices.

#### **Functional Patterns**

With functional patterns, myofascial tissue is fluid, relatively elastic, with close to full or full ROM. The posture is held by a habit that relates to coordination, perception, or emotion. There is no particular physical soft tissue restriction in movement or function. This multi-level habit may be resolved by motion, coordination, perceptual and psychological training. Myofascial release work will help the process.

#### **Structural Patterns**

With structural patterns, myofascial tissue is tough, leathery; stiff, often dehydrated and may have loss of sensation. There may be pain with functional restriction. The causes will relate to repetitive movement, injuries, psychosocial issues etc. The client may be incapable of moving out of the restricted movement or posture. It is difficult to achieve release of structural patterns without soft tissue work, motion training and attitude work.

#### **Applying Body-Mindfulness in the Ten Series**

"When the shoe fits, the foot is forgotten."<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the SI practitioner may feel so comfortable in their body that they forget to be mindful. Developing body-mindfulness is one of the first step towards building the "learning team" approach. A masterful SI practitioner guides clients towards the fullness of their experience in their structure, coordination, perception and meaning.

#### **The Dedicated Therapist**

As manager of the "learning team", the practitioner must understand the vision,

principles and methods of their work. The next task when working with therapeutic movement is to understand the process of embodiment and develop it in oneself.

A therapist's lack of understanding of the

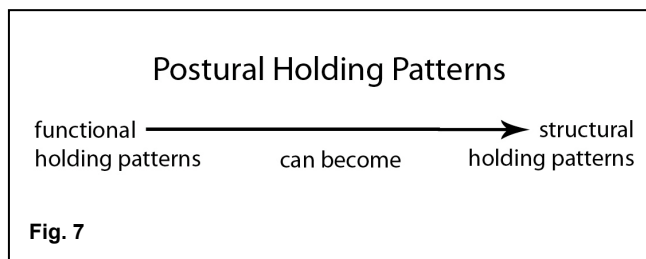
potential and complexities of bodymind change will become a barrier in the client's process. A common challenge for the therapist is the ubiquitous "Magical Rescuer" attitude – in the client and in

themselves. The practitioner's holding of the cooperative approach is the invitation for the client to discover their own internal learning team.

Throughout each session, continually evoking the awareness of the client's sensation and experience is a teaching and learning theatre for both members of the team. Engaging the client in active movement during the manual therapy aspect of SI helps to keep the client present. If the client can clearly experience body-mindful experiences during the session, then he can consciously work with this at home. Successful therapy and education has most to do with client and client/therapist factors rather than technique, therefore the successful therapist must become a powerful motivator. The practitioner who understands and practices body-mindfulness will effortlessly express an alive and elastic energy field that will spontaneously infect others with a new awareness.

#### **The Motivated Client**

Readiness, motivation, and supportive people in the home environment are key factors in client success. The client's hope and belief in the method and the practitioner is important in itself, as well as increasing the placebo affect. Understanding the rationale for SI, the shape-ability of the body and the impact of habit can be motivating especially when it is coupled with a strong Aha! body-sensory experience. Understanding the cycles on the path of embodied awareness and particularly the barriers has proved useful for many of my clients. If SI sessions are rich, sensory, educational body-mindful experiences that we link to activities in the client's daily life – such as sitting, standing around, driving, working activities etc., then the client will carry on their body learning in all of



**Fig. 7**

these activities.

### ***A Learning Team Case-study***

Ed Langevin is a 60 year old teacher. Twenty three years ago he experienced the terrifying paralysis of Guillain Barre Syndrome, an auto-immune disease that attacks the peripheral nervous system. During the first 6 months he could not feed himself and it took years of rehab to get to where he is now. He is still considerably compromised and wears walking support braces in his shoes. This is how Ed describes his rehabilitation process with me:

"During the past 5 years, I lost the ability to be a full participant in my own recovery. Now I have learned that losing ability doesn't equate to losing function.

"During my therapy with Sol he really listened to what I wanted. He then put himself anatomically and physiologically in my position and problem-solved how I could do something like get down onto the floor and back up. Most therapists tried to show me 'how to do it' as an able-bodied person. He showed me how to do it as an un-able-bodied person. Rather than having a pre-conceived idea, he waited to see what was normal for me and then we found the answer together. This is what he calls the Learning Team. I have found my body awareness and created my own internal learning team.

"When I arrived I couldn't walk on a padded floor for 15 minutes but now I can work on an unpadded floor for two hours. I spend a lot of my time exploring movements without my braces and that enhances everything. Using small, refined micro-movements and massage balls has been very helpful. I also benefited from doing movements in the pool that I wasn't capable of doing on land, such as running, jumping and standing on one foot. I am clearer about getting flexibility and range of movement rather than strength so I don't tire myself. I am much more aware of my FPP and I now use my hands and arms to touch walls and furniture to help me with my balance. This helps me to be more relaxed internally.

"Realistically, I haven't changed the fundamental nature of my paralysis and deficits but I am more mindful of my body and have improved that functioning to significantly enhance my activities, in effect turning back the clock ten years. I leave with a repertoire of practices that are totally doable but I appreciate that we all need 'tune ups' to keep up the momentum."

### **When is Structural Integration a Body-Mindful Practice?**

"The aware bodyworker is touching the aware client. The body is guiding the work."<sup>23</sup>

I asked several practitioners about body-mindfulness in their own work.

Dr. Robert Schleip, Roling teacher and fascia researcher, describes his process:

"A good body-mindful session and therapeutic relationship serves as an 'initiation' and an inspiration for a more embodied lifestyle, guiding the client to find curiosity and pleasure by feeling the body from the inside including both proprioception and interoception.

"In my practice I cultivate what I call Kinesthetic Empathy (KE). Rather than distancing myself from the client or, more commonly, to forget one's own needs and merge in an empathic receptive way with the client's bodyfield, I try to strengthen both perceptual fields simultaneously: to feel my own body as well as that of the client. Such practices of 'self sensing' are often emphasized by experienced practitioners and teachers, yet in the practice of KE, I apply this in a very precise way. Before I put my hand on my client's body, I ask myself, 1) am I present at this place in my own body? and 2) can I get in touch with that area, imagining a beneficial change for myself similar to what I hope my client will experience? Only when I answer these questions positively do I 'allow' myself to touch my client. If I want to treat the right shoulder of my client, I need to be present in my own right shoulder, if I want to touch her left foot, then I must first notice the experience and needs of my own left foot.

"Like any other mental/physical skill this takes training, but it may only take a perceptual split second if one is centered in one's own body before the touch. Working like this, at the end of a session or session day, I never feel heavy or drained but more present, wakeful and interested."<sup>24</sup>

Bibiana Badenes, a Rolfer and physiotherapist in Spain who specializes in working with rheumatic patients, speculates on how body-mindfulness may change our attitude about approaches and contra-indications in therapy:

"Body awareness may be the most important area of focus for rheumatic patients who have often lost proprioception and interoception. They deal with changes in tissue, deformities, instability and fixations. They may lose

orientation to space and the ground. Most have problems with feet, neck and general balance, so the whole perceptual system is constantly adjusting and compensating. They want to move as the physiotherapist shows them or as they remember, but they struggle to find awareness and feeling.

"If a rheumatic patient does exercises from the Physiotherapy mechanical repetition point of view, because they are moving from the cortical level and their bodies still need to adapt to the new condition, there will be compensations and perhaps injuries. If a rheumatic patient is unstable in some joints, stretching may be contraindicated. Usually this is out of fear that stretching may be applied without awareness. On the other hand, if the patient, becoming more body-mindful learns fine movements with awareness, she can create a 'right-for-her' precise active stretch that can help relieve rigidity. Many of us are unaware of how we perform basic movements in our daily life. When my patients regain their body awareness, suddenly new movements and new possibilities are available."<sup>25</sup>

Stanley Rosenberg, an SI practitioner in Denmark, spoke about inner awareness for client and practitioner:

"I believe that my work is to put my attention at the exact point in the client's body where it needs to release. I can sense when the client meets me there. In this way, I train his mindfulness onto the places where he has issues. Then, the client and I both disappear into other spaces. In the old days, I used to wait for the client to come back and release the knot in their own body. For many years, I have worked with bringing my own awareness to my own body – and that pulls the client back. When I feel comfortable in myself and feel my feet, then I know I can take my hands off.

"I believe that this is a coaching for the client to go through the cycles again and again of placing their attention in their own body, drifting away and then remembering themselves."<sup>26</sup>

From my perspective, a sincere, awake practice of SI naturally evokes the development of mindfulness and body-mindfulness in the practitioner.

### **Where is this current interest in Mindfulness heading?**

Mindfulness is becoming well documented in psychotherapy and prompting more evidence-based research. As Germer says, "We are likely to see more research that identifies mindfulness as a key element in treatment protocols, as a crucial ingredient in the therapy relationship, and as a technology for psychotherapists to cultivate personal therapeutic qualities and general well-being."<sup>27</sup>

As mindfulness-based therapeutic approaches to chronic pain, stress, arthritis, PTSD etc., increasingly involve physical therapists as part of the team, practitioners of SI may find an increasing need for a basic awareness of mindfulness and its application.

### **Body-Mindfulness – the Heart of Structural Integration**

Contemporary culture and the media exert a tremendous pressure on us to orient ourselves around how we are seen rather than feeling how we are, and on externally driven performance standards rather than those that have grown out of our own values. In a time of virtual pets and virtual worlds, cultivating body-mindfulness is simply a much needed returning to your self.

The fruits of mindfulness in Buddhism are joy, compassion and a life well lived. In Daoism, mindfulness is the basis for cultivating healing energy. I see the fruits of body-mindfulness for SI clients as a new aliveness, an enthusiastic resilient energy and a generous self-care attitude.

Body-mindfulness need not be a serious task. It involves bringing new creativity to simple everyday activities like standing on one leg to brush your teeth, sitting on a Swiss ball to watch TV, running barefoot or using your less dominant hand with the computer mouse.

In conclusion, the cultivation of the state of body-mindfulness in SI is an essential foundation to educate perception and to teach movement skills and a self-care attitude. For SI clients who are performers and athletes, body-mindfulness can offer an enhanced quality and a refined responsiveness within their art. A body-mindful attitude for both therapist and client will make the Ten Step journey an ideal method to support each other on their paths of embodiment.

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