

## Unwinding

There is an area of exercise that I have been exploring for some years which I am now ready to teach.

When practicing the joint rotations and the spinal manipulations there are different irregularities in everyone's body. Some are from natural formations since birth, some due to improper functioning or structure as they grow, and others due to injury.

When the body is injured, it has a natural biological response to tighten the muscles. This is an old response that keeps the body from becoming injured further. In the old days, if a bone was broken the muscles tighten around it to prevent the bone from fragmenting or pushing out of the body. This is known, in the bodywork field, as armoring for guarding.

Certain responses in life, such as fright, anger, tension or nervousness, can also result in muscles being in a constant state of tension and guarded. Common areas for this are the shoulders and neck. Certain life experiences can store emotional and physiological responses in the muscles themselves too, known as psychosomatic memories.

There is a natural arrangement of muscles throughout the body that works in antithesis to each other. Many people are aware of the bicep vs. the tricep or the rhomboids vs. the pack, but there are a lot more intricacies than just one side working against the other. Think of the suspension bridge where all the guide wires on the bridge are connecting. All of these wires, holding the bridge, are in constant interaction, subtly sharing more load and then less load.

A muscle does not have a true resting state as it always has some level of tension. At some point, the muscles carry a certain level of tension and there is an interplay between all of the muscles in the body. A subtle relaxing and tensing, a give and take, an ebb and flow throughout all of the body at any given time. So even when the body is completely at rest the bicep will tense a little more as the tricep relaxes and then eventually vice versa.

There is a healing principle that says that the body is always naturally trying to subtly "move" itself into a better healing position. There is a style of bodywork called Cranial Sacral Therapy where you, the practitioner, hold a limb or joint out of gravity and I remove it from the constraints of tension and gravity and assist the muscles, on a very subtle level, to begin moving in the way they want to move. This is called unwinding and has an incredibly subtle effect on the entire body.

So after years of this, I started applying it as a type exercise. For example, when doing a joint rotation in the neck, if you move extremely slowly and carefully and reach a point of slight discomfort, then you should stop. Then you begin to relax the tissues and muscles and focus on breathing deeply and allowing the muscles to go to full stretch. This not only releases the muscles guarding, but it also allows the muscles to stretch and exercise in ways that they are not used to, which sets up a new holding pattern in the body.

This type of exercise requires a deep level of concentration and relaxation in order to benefit from it fully. Taking care not to "overdo" it, alongside breathing exercises and visualization of relaxation, is very important. To continue with the example, slowly move the neck in a full circle while relaxing it completely, allowing the head to move forward and backward as much as possible. Slowly hold it in a position that is slightly uncomfortable, or needs work, gently release through this area. It's important to allow yourself to gain a level of comfort in this area so that the body can rewrite its internal central nervous system dialogue and say that it is "safe to be here". After 15 or 20 minutes of this type of exercise, as it moves down the spine, you can really change your back and begin to eliminate deep-seated problems.