THE TUNING BOARD™

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> *Personally, I understand posture as the dynamic balance of the parts of the body in space in relation to the force of gravity at any given moment and for any given position. In other words, posture at any given moment marks an equilibrium. This latter exists by virtue of the necessity with which the organism is faced with moving its body masses and adapting to the pull of the earth which can be regarded as a constant.* (Dynamic Process Integration, Ida P. Rolf, 1954)

Even though we may know better, we still have a tendency to think of posture as a fixed state. To the extent that it is an artificially frozen moment in time that we incorporate for analysis of alignment and such, it is. Drawings and photographs of bodies in action are extreme examples. But any given posture is a presently tangible reference for what position comes before and what position comes after. In other words, by orienting our perceptions to motion any given posture is a reference to continual movement. The experience of viewing and sensing posture in this way I refer to as *protean posture*.

Not only are our bodies in constant motion but we also live on a planet in constant motion and in a field of constant motion. The standing posture is always responding and adjusting to the body's internal and external environment. Physiologic processes are incessant. The Earth and her elements is a ceaselessly changing structure including floating tectonic plates with their relatively firm surfaces. We "ground" to a spherical fluid medium and orient to a flowing atmosphere that is always in motion. This idea, I am sure, is obvious and familiar to the reader. But I have found that even the most experienced bodyworkers, clients, yoga and movement teachers to be profoundly affected when actually attempting to feel this experience on a Tuning Board. Also, I am continually fascinated watching individuals managing the accelerated reality of attempting to stabilize on an unendingly moving surface.

The Tuning Board is a tool that accelerates constant motion and profoundly yet gently challenges human expression primarily in the standing posture. Resistances to constant motion, which we refer to as fixations, become very evident when placed on a continually moving surface. Even the densest elements of our structure are in continual motion and change for better or worse to some degree or other. The Tuning Board presents the opportunity to place the organism with its fixations and dilemmas of grounding and orienting into an accelerated experience of constant motion and flow.

It was my fascination with the belief that we are highly sensitive beings thoroughly invested with movement possibilities that drove me to invent the Tuning Board.
The idea for the Tuning Board originated as a result of working with "Swiss" Balls. These heavy plastic, inflated balls come in several different sizes. Marketed as exercise and physical therapy training tools, they are popular in health and fitness centers in order to develop coordination and physical fitness. I found the balls to be extremely interesting and useful when working with people who came to me for movement work and structural integration. When sitting on a ball,

almost without exception, my clients would begin bouncing. Then he or she would invariably begin some type of rocking or swaying motion. Their spontaneous movements would inevitably build in playfulness leading to a huge smile. However, what was even more interesting to me was seeing how the balls would quickly and profoundly facilitate deep and subtle awareness states that related to postural proprioception and vestibular reflexes within their nervous systems. By sitting on the ball with the eyes closed and having no fitness task, my clients often experienced a fluid motion spontaneously arising and permeating through the bioenergetic field.

The Swiss balls allow people to consciously experience these fine adjustments to the gravity within their own bodies. However, their postural experience of the fluid motion is largely limited to the sitting position. But, as Ida Rolf says, a human being's primary orientation to the world is in an upright posture. We are designed to be able to perceive continual fine movements while standing erect. The balls are excellent for when someone is sitting or lying but one cannot safely stand on a ball and reproduce the same subtlety and safety of movement exploration. When standing on the Tuning Board a person can get an immediate sense of intimate contact with a deep inner truth of movement about one's self and the world.

During the time I was observing clients on the Swiss balls, there were a couple of other balancing board devices in use. One of them was a small square board with a half of a spherical ball attached to the bottom's center. A person stands on the flat surface and rolls around trying to find a center point of balance. Because of the ball one could never get it to stay horizontal. One never felt that the device would be stable enough to find and feel a quiet moment of rest in the chaos of its motion. Going to or through the center of balance is like riding over a speed bump. It's a lot of work. That could be good for someone who needed to do some very active exercising of the feet and ankle joints. But it is too much movement for what I had in mind for a vertical posture balancing board.

Another type of balance board that was around at the time was something called a "K" Board, or *kinesthetic board.* This is a fifteen inch square board about a half inch thick with a grid of grooves routed into the top surface. The grid serves to provide the user with right angle references for aligning the feet and orienting squarely front to back in space. Attached to the bottom was a narrow strip of wood about ½ inch tall that ran the width of the board. One places the small piece of wood on the ground which keeps the standing surface hovering about an inch off the floor. When orienting the small under piece at right angles to the direction the feet then the board would tilt forward and back. If the small piece of wood ran parallel between the feet, the board would tilt to the left or right side. A person standing on the board would quickly find that, unless his or her weight was perfectly centered the K Board would tip off of its balance and the edge of the surface would hit the floor. The task was to stand on the surface and keep the edges from hitting the floor. Unlike the board with the ball on the bottom, you could at least get a feeling of balancing at a central point while standing on the K Board. By remaining still you could actually stand there for quite a while. The narrower the small piece of wood the more difficult the task. This could be good to build a kind of postural tone and feel what a midline of balance felt like. But it did not allow the client the fine proprioceptive adjustments to gravity. Also, if one's posture swayed a bit too much, it would cause the board to tilt off of the narrow piece of wood underneath and the edge would strike the floor with a clunk. The resulting jolt sends a shock wave and a reactionary bracing deep through the entire nervous system. I did not like the clunk it made when the board's edge hit the ground. In working with traumatized people I surmised that this would be counterproductive to their recovery. In combination with a sense of failure, the clunking edge sent a jolt up through the person's postural adaptation systems, i.e., vestibular system, proprioceptors, fluids, and tissues. As trauma represents an inability to cope with forces to begin with, this continual shock was reminiscent of the shock they were struggling to heal.

I did not like this board. I thought the balance experience it represented was too unrealistic. Balance on this board represented an unmoving stillness by holding the body directly over the flat surface of the small piece of wood that contacted the floor. Balance is not a static and rigid mechanical event. Standing postures are not naturally stiff and unmoving no matter how perfectly they are aligned. There should always be subtle adjustments to gravity and motion. Keeping the K Board from tilting can be a very challenging task that tends to emphasize holding. It is challenging even for those who are not in states of traumatic bewilderment. In addition, failing to stay balanced can easily reinforce the already eroded sense of confidence and ability to self-regulate in traumatized individuals. Finally, the K board could only function in one plane at a time.

What I wanted in a standing board device was something that would replicate the gentle, playful, constant motion I had found when sitting on the Swiss balls. I wanted a board where someone could stand up and experience the synthesis of the buoyancy of the Swiss ball that allowed movement in any plane as well as the tilting other kinesthetic, balancing-type boards already used.

From my years of working with creative movement, I knew that I needed to include a design for spatial orientation on the board's surface. Being able to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in spatial perception is important to brain stimulation and development. This information can be used in aiding the communication of brain hemispheres vital to healing and creative processes. The straight line design on the surface is a simple "British Flag." It is a floor design used in dance and creative movement to distinguish the performer's orientation. It indicates the eight basic directions of a rectangular space when the performer positions herself in the center.

The center of the Tuning Board represents the vertical center line of gravity surrounded by a "core field." This is intended to help people visualize an effortless erect posture organized around a central vertical axis and core experience of motion through the center of their bodies. When extended vertically into the space the British Flag design helps to visualize the three cardinal planes of orientation, the saggital, frontal and horizontal. This further aids an individual in experiencing the three-dimensional geometry of space and his or her relationship to it while in a standing posture.

USE OF THE TUNING BOARD

The Tuning Board can be used in biomechanical and fitness training as an unstable moving surface during exercises. It can be used in the performance of strengthening yoga poses. It can be used in the healing of head injuries and balance issues due to trauma or disease. The Tuning Board can also be used to creatively transform deep psychological issues including individual, relationship and generational processes. Its primary use in any of those contexts is in promoting a conscious felt experience of the unity and integration of mind and body.

The Tuning Board is a simple tool yet in its fullest function, its purpose is to reconnect the user to the natural fluid motions of life. This movement then opens her to the depth of unconscious creative forces that emerge in the form of ideas, images, and movement expressions. The Tuning Board works by introducing a challenging physical task that stimulates polarities of stability and chaos, tension and release, discomfort and flow, all of which are characteristics of the creative process. By accelerating a simulation of the planet's reality of constant motion, the Tuning Board feeds fluid sensory experience into the field of the body-being. Because the Tuning Board will never be perfectly still, the individual is challenged at many levels to surrender his or her rigidity, fragmentation, and holding patterns to motion. As described earlier, she is gently challenged to find, and quietly attune, to a relative stability. One's deepest beliefs and emotions are asked to trust this mysterious and paradoxical coexistence of movement and stability.

The measure of balance with the Tuning Board is not how well one can hold perfectly and rigidly aligned in a vertical posture or around a certain idea. Rather, it is in how well one can relate to a state of stable yet constant motion and relative balance. This constant interplay of stability and motion is one expression of the paradoxical reality of living things. The intention of working with the Tuning Board is to make the relationship between the body-being and fluid experience as conscious as possible. Through continuous fluid motion the creative state is borne from moment to moment. Being present for one moment of relatively stable motion on the board can send currents of insight through an individual.

What happens when the motility of one joint relates to the motility of a second joint, or third or fourth, and so on? What is the standing posture like when the movement of felt experience of the accumulated motility thoroughly permeates a person's field? Put another way: What is the movement reality of a standing posture on a planet whose elements and forces are in constant motion?

In the protean posture our feet and ankles do most of the work in making fine adjustments in the gravity field. These movements involve subtle combinations of flexion, extension, inversion and eversion that initiate and transmit soft waves of motion up through the nervous system. In order for the soft waves of movement to travel upwards, the knees must be able to hover in a relatively straight position, neither stuck in hyperextension not bent even slightly forward in flexion. This hovering is not a static experience. There is a very subtle awareness of actual and potential motions as the adjustments of the feet and ankles send movement traveling up through the body.

As the individual more fully embodies this experience the shapes of fixated patterns become quite clear. In this model, fixated patterns are seen as movement expressions waiting to occur. The expanding field of motility is confronted by the fixations and conflict ensues. There is a deep need for the motility to continue expanding , for that is the nature of life, and for the fixation, as a response to stress and an adaptation for survival, to continue resisting. Good posture, in the words of Irmgard Bartenieff (*1980, Body Movement: Coping with the Environment. New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, p.21*), involves a "continuous subtle fluctuation between stability and mobility to maintain balance" and a crucial need for "concern with centering as the source of support." The dance is continual and centering for support, or grounding, is in motion. Balance is not a fixed state. Balance is relative to the interplay of stability and motion and support relative to continual find adjustments. My colleague, Dr. Anngwyn St. Just and I have called this, accordingly, *Relative Balance*.

The following description explains the average person's experience in working with a practitioner on the Tuning Board. The practitioner gives a brief description of the apparatus and then instructs the subject to become comfortable with the shape and design of the Tuning Board by gazing at it. When her ability to manage the experience has been assessed, she is ready to begin the basic exercise. The person then stands quietly, with eyes open at first, on the center of the board with feet equally and symmetrically aligned. The knees should be lined up just about under the nipples, *not* "shoulder width apart." The subject will immediately begin to feel the board swaying and will work to gain her balance. The visual perception is that the Tuning Board is a stable structure. Upon transferring the entire body weight onto the board the person suddenly realizes to move to a more unstable surface and becomes quickly disoriented. There is a perception that things are not what they seemed to be no matter how much previous explanation has been given as to how the board functions. The awareness of this information arrives from the feet and proprioception, from the vestibular system and less so from the visual system or cognition. It travels through the entire length of the organism, before it gets to the neocortex for cognitive interpretation.

The person becomes aroused and immediately begins a sort of coping/orienting response in an attempt to stabilize the motion of the board. In coping she initially tries to control the experience through extrinsic effort, trying make the board match her original perception of a surface not in motion. Many people discover that some degree of conscious, extrinsic control is possible. This is important when the board is to be used as a device to retrain biomechanical patterns and fitness capabilities. But the mastery of the board is not in extrinsic control.

The reality is that the Tuning Board will never be completely motionless. There will always be some motion. It is important to see how the person responds to that inevitability. The realization that the surface is in motion and will stay that way offers a cognitive challenge, which she must decide whether to accept. It is important to continue to monitor and assess the person's ability until she has reached a point of relative stability. Relative stability means that there is still motion but it does not take the user dangerously beyond the edges of relative balance and control. Once reached, the practitioner is faced with a decision. Does the person have the resources to explore a more challenging experience of motion and response?

Once the subject demonstrates relative skill and stability with the eyes open the next step is to have her slowly close her eyes. At this point, loss of visual reference sets into motion another cycle of orientation. Much more movement occurs (usually swaying and spiraling), as the shift to a more internally oriented response to the disorientation occurs. The cognitive experience becomes somatic. It is important to be nearby to aid her if she cannot control the swaying. The client is encouraged to stay with the process until she begins to demonstrate control. The practitioner will see swaying motion rippling through her body like a wave. As she continues to stay present with the sensations, relative stability can eventually be reached with the eyes closed. The practitioner then reaches a second decision point: does the subject have the resources to continue?

To review:

1- Disorientation to relative stability with eyes open.
2- Assessment.
3- Disorientation to relative stability with eyes closed.
4- Assessment.

The difference between the two decision points is qualitatively different. The first is an observation characterized by the extrinsic muscular effort and cognitive will of the client, i.e., "I can control this. I can make this board be still by controlling my body." The second is more of an intrinsic somatic experience that pertains to deeper inner relationships to the self and the world. The continual motion of the board will unceasingly ask the body to move and not be extrinsically controlled with rigidity. The very same movement of the board will reveal the stiff efforts of the will as well as other fixations in the body-being. As the person continues to receive and respond to stimuli from the foot, ankle and lower leg fixated patterns of body, thought, and emotion begin to emerge. These fixations hold potential creative movements.

This second stage of the Tuning Board experience contains much deeper movement associations. While standing, the client will hopefully begin to exhibit a wave-like motion. Here the subject is challenged to surrender to the motion which pushes her to trust in something she senses is very significant but which she does not understand. It is about trusting in a bond of movement and flow, a living, moving bond, with our bodies and our relationship to the planet. Issues of relating to a more fluid tonicity of thought, emotion, and body arise very quickly. Reconnecting with this deeply moving aspect of self is a powerful experience which can serve as an important beginning in the process of healing the "broken connection" to the constant motion of life.

I have identified *five challenges of surrender* in regards to working with the Tuning Board. By surrender I do not mean a helpless giving up of the self. Nor do I refer to a passive and powerless void of "do-nothingness." I mean, rather, an act of opening and clearing the mind – getting out of the way of the movement of our own creative imagination and creative power and relating to it in a co-creative manner. The five challenges are:

1. *Challenge of perception*: the client realizes that the board is not a fixed surface as his or her mental and visual perceptions had established.

2. *Challenge of efforting*: the client exerts extrinsic effort. Continued use asks the client to move toward a more intrinsic, inner activity to maintain balance. As extrinsics are de-emphasized the intrinsic action of kinesthetic and vestibular function emerge. The client, if highly conditioned toward extrinsic control, may struggle to resist the shift to intrinsic activity. The client may stay rigid and hypervigilant resorting to muscling and willing the board to stop moving. The posture will be non-reflexive with little or no subtle motion patterns. The extrinsic efforting will become tiring.

3. *Challenge of visual reliance*: with the eyes closed there is typically a noticeable increase in wobbling and disorientation. The client needs to be assured that the practitioner is taking care that she won't fall. The client will resort back to extrinsic efforting by trying to gain control. The client is being challenged to trust intrinsic postural responses, kinesthetic awareness and the vestibular system.

4. *Challenge of other motions*: rhythms and motions from viscera, fluids and the bioenergetic field emerge out of this state. Can the subject surrender to a flow of motion that is mysterious and sensed as much larger than one's self?

5. *Challenge of expression*: fixations will attempt to grind the movement to a halt but the constant motion of the board will continually feed movement through the body-being. A deeper meditative state is evident and archetypal shapes emerge, cognitions are confronted and emotions are stirred. Other states of consciousness may be encountered.

Rolfers who participated in research on the Tuning Board several years back reported that clients they had worked with on the boards:

1- became more flexible or resilient with regards to a specific issue or in general.
2- exhibited some kind of non-volitional or spontaneous unconscious movements.
3- experienced a positive affect on the imagination.
4- were better able to cope with stress with specific issues or in general.
5- were better able to cope with uncertainty.
6- improved their abilities to self calm when anxious.
7- helped improve their sensory awareness.
8- experienced improved sense of confidence.

I hope this article has been useful and inspires thought and movement in your being.