

Biotensegrity through touch and movement to awaken the glands and balance the chakras



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In the book *Dynamic Embodiment of the Sun Salutation*, Martha Eddy and Shakti Smith use life stories, metaphors and anatomical realities to help readers, movers and touch practitioners to feel positive spatial tensions throughout the body. In this article, the authors outline how understanding biotensegrity Body-Mind Centring, Dynamic Embodiment and Laban Movement Analysis can assist your treatments.

There are different types of spatial tensions or pulls – those that are mobilising – when a pull overcomes your stability and causes you to move or even fall. Others are called counter-tensions or counter-pulls which seek to equalise forces and therefore are stabilising. Embodying these pulls is helpful in the practice of yoga and for body mechanics for the massage and bodywork practitioner. This movement and/or touch ‘re-patterning process’ can activate three-dimensional (3-D) spatial pulls to improve posture, movement capacity, and overall health.

For example, when you find the balanced equal counter pulls in the body you can stay in a yoga pose (asana) or standing or seated while doing touch work for a long time and minimise the muscular effort in doing so. When you help stimulate equal counter-tensions in someone else’s tissues through the use of touch you enhance joint health and postural tone. What is particularly fascinating about finding space in the body by using clear ‘spatial intent’ in movement through space is how it also opens up ‘energy flow’. The anatomy, physiology and developmental stages that support this energy flow is related to vibration and in turn to posture and movement. These are then further correlated with the neuro-endocrine system, and its myriad hormonal functions.

The neuro-endocrine system as an integrative construct took quite a few decades to come into mainstream biological education. It has been moved along by the writing of Candice Pert – *Molecules of Emotion*. Another concept may be more familiar – especially if you are working with connective tissue – the concept of BioTensegrity. In Dynamic Embodiment (DE), postural balance of the muscles, fascia and even the nerves of the body is considered a form of ‘biotensegrity’, a term created by Steven Levin, which is based on Buckminster Fuller’s experiences in building geodesic domes. Similar to buildings that use tensile forces as a primary infrastructure, these suspensions as well as compressions are forces of support for the human body. People can activate internal support by finding the polarities from one end of the body through the body centre to another opposite area (e.g. hand through torso to the opposite leg and foot) and equalising the forces between them.

Practitioners can support this exploration by stabilising forces with pressure, elongating tissue with traction, or any combination of these. The focus may be across a joint, at the attachments of a muscle, or along an entire kinetic chain. In the DE approach, attention is also given to how organs and glands impact these chains or flows in the body.

Bartenieff Fundamentals of Movement use ‘spatial intent’ as a starting point for opening up flows or ‘connectivity’. This involves deciding where you want to go and keeping track of that intention while moving. This is most important at the onset of movement. Hands-on support for effective engagement with these exercises fosters bodily symmetry and balance. Early childhood developmental patterns call on similar ideas.

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen has developed an exquisite sequence that simulates a baby’s motor development. She teaches that infants move through space pushing into the body (compression) and then reaching and pulling outward into the environment (lengthening). The specific phases of development are described in this book so that the actions in the Sun Salutation can be seen in relationship to these root movements from childhood. We know that developmental movements look much like animal movement, which influences the names used in yoga – like the Downward Dog. From a Body-Mind Centring (BMC) and DE perspective, glandular energy is activated from these processes and resonates out from each gland to specific joints. These inter-relationships are a gold-mine for touch and movement exploration.

Understanding biotensegrity

For practitioners using touch or re-patterning, learning to shape one’s hands to find balance around a joint and apply pressure to tissues to support compression or lengthening takes understanding biotensegrity. Adding in an awareness of the gland that is ‘governing’ that region brings in potent support that makes movement easier and often more grounded or lighter.

The regions around the glands and nerve plexus or ‘neuro-endocrine’ locations are considered by BMC and DE practitioners to provide the biological support for the physiological aspect of chakral energy – energy

flow. In DE, one BMC method ‘taking out the slack,’ is postulated to awaken glands as it fosters biotensegrity.

In order to better feel the three-dimensional anatomy of the body DE classes find it is fun to learn basic ‘Space Harmony’. Space Harmony is a term for the intentional practice of movements with equalised forces, patterned in a sequence that reveals an invisible house around the body, while maintaining a rhythm. Space Harmony is a component of one of the world’s most rigorous systems for describing, exploring and enhancing human movement efficiency and expression, Laban Movement Analysis (LMA). The developer of the curriculum for LMA was a genius physiotherapist named Irmgard Bartenieff, who also trained in connective tissue massage. A true Renaissance woman she was one of seven founders of the field of dance therapy and an early dance anthropologist. She developed her own system replete with a series of sensible and sensitive body organisation movements referred to earlier – ‘Bartenieff Fundamentals (BF)’

The Dynamic Embodiment approach to exploring the chakras and neuroendocrine system uses this knowledge of Space Harmony. While practicing the Sun Salutation, both compression and suspension are applied by being precise about the location of the endocrine glands. The activation process can be pictured as creating a soft, elastic, crystalline form with the body. Space Harmony and BF exercises can be further enhanced with the use of hands-on movement facilitation. The counter-tensions needed to open up interior spaces in the body can be moved by oneself, together with a teacher/therapist, or by a practitioner. The involvement of a somatic educator or therapist often expedites ones awakening to the subtle sensations of the body. These sensations may lead to awareness of the emotional body, which also can be quite healing.

Conclusion

To review, using the Laban/Bartenieff system for spatial specificity and the BMC system for anatomical specificity, DE combines the awareness of the anatomical placement of the glands and the sensations of its existence within the fascial system. The use of spatial



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tensions that occur when creating biotensegrity through counter-pulls between the two ends of a muscle or on the fascia become a natural inroad to stimulating the glands – activating or calming the energy needed for hormone balancing. The stimulation of the glands can be further elucidated through Space Harmony practices from LMA; however, it is simpler and more traditional to engage in the practice of yoga, in this case with the Sun Salutation.

You can learn more history of different glands throughout Shakti and Martha's first-person narratives and in-depth descriptions of each gland and chakra in their book *Dynamic Embodiment of the Sun Salutation*. The authors provide chapters on the history and cultural import of the Sun Salutation and how it can be a great ritual to incorporate into one's life for fostering glandular balancing, aligning joints, and experiencing a more internalised and embodied sense of space and time.

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If you enjoyed this article, the *Dynamic Embodiment of the Sun Salutation* by Martha and Shakti has guided experiences, exercises, over 150 images and charts. Available now in all leading bookstores.