

## CHAPTER 2:

# A Compassionate Sense of Our Bodies

## Body Voice

*See me  
in all my beauty and imperfection  
to reshape and free you*

*Hear me  
as I yawn, sigh  
and shake you with belly laughs*

*Touch me  
my toned, soft flesh  
and the flower of my skin*

*Feel me  
relaxing, contracting  
and filling you with ease*

*Hold me  
at the center  
where we move as one*

**K**ENTRO BODY BALANCE guidelines foster the idea that *we are gifted with postural expression that is naturally joyous and resilient*. Merging this paradigm with our movements frees us into welcoming, noticing, and feeling our bodies, which can then reshape our tissues with ease. This process of deliberately choosing to bring fluidity into our daily activities begins to generate a compassionate image of our bodies. We focus on what feels right and relaxed to us.

In the *Endorphin Effect*, William Bloom mentions that we are “more like waves and currents than we are like solid bricks.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, many of us hold a mechanistic mindset of our body and struggle to “fix” and “maintain” our posture as we would a solid object, such as a car. Hardening our flesh into a specific shape is stressful and goes against the grain of our pliable physicality. Most of the time we feel disconnected from our repetitive physical motions. We are used to straining our bodies; it feels normal. With our tissues tight, it is more difficult to sense our movements.



*Discomfort. Tucking the pelvis and carrying groceries from the shoulder muscles weakens the abdomen and upper back.*



*Discomfort. Bending with a tucked pelvis tightens the buttocks, rounds the back, and shifts the weight of the grocery bag toward the front of the body.*



*Comfort. With centering, balancing movements, the weight of the grocery bag shifts toward the thigh and sacrum; the hips can stay level, the back straight, and the shoulders relaxed.*



*Comfort. The back remains straight (notice the even groove in the back); the buttocks, upper back, and upper arm muscles contract to carry the groceries.*



*Comfort. Bending from the hips with a flexible pelvis stretches and strengthens the back and buttocks; the weight of the groceries is transferred to the sacral area, hips, and thighs.*

During my years of studying exercises, yoga, and balance, I tried to “do it right” and, for a while I imitated certain people who were “in balance”. When I followed these notions, my movements remained strained and were accompanied by self-defeating thoughts such as: “I still have poor posture.”

Alternatively, whenever I began with a more loving attitude toward my body, listening to what it was telling me, I witnessed a small yet dramatic shift in my perceptions and movements. I stopped struggling to control my posture during a stretch or exercise. I was receptive to my senses and feelings. Instead of dwelling on the recommended outer body-shape goal, I forgot about *doing* or *achieving* anything. I found a source within that gradually became more familiar, a place of warmth that imbued my gestures with restfulness. I practiced moving without effort, at my own pace and rhythm.

Before I started teaching the KENTRO method, I could hardly sit back due to sharp pain in my upper back. After centering and balancing my movements, I became aware of a definite shift in the quality of my feelings. Once, while sobbing, I felt at ease as I was sitting back in the chair. My sobs did not overwhelm me. I noticed that instead of my back slouching forward, it remained straight yet comfortable, and my shoulders were not taut. The draining feelings receded soon, softly. Despite my vulnerability, I felt strengthened, soothed and protected by my body. Tension flowed out of me and I was physically tranquil.

Prior to practicing a gentle, receptive approach to my movements, I used to have to force myself to sit upright during meditation. Bending to lift groceries was a chore. By integrating KENTRO movements with my activities, all this exertion and back pain gradually dissolved. Now I can sit in airplanes for ten hours at a time, my back limber the entire flight. It is no longer tiring to write at my desk for hours without interruption because I take brief breaks to turn my pelvis, stretch my legs, rotate my arms and bend forward with KENTRO movements. Bending now feels like a dance movement. And I look forward to lifting groceries because I feel this action strengthening my back, arms, and pelvis.

Students of the KENTRO program report similar experiences of feeling more confidence and pleasure in ordinary activities as they become more limber.

Our bodies thrive on gentle care.

*We can remain comfortable and limber while we travel. Placing a flat wedge in the upper back allows the shoulders to relax and the back to straighten without effort (see Chapter 9, #7, The Art of Wedge-Making).*



It is refreshingly easy and requires no skills to incorporate centering and balancing our gestures with a lighthearted sense of our bearing, compared to the hard work of “correcting” our posture. In a playful manner, we can:

- *Acknowledge* our body — saying “hello” to it while we image ourself as supple and cheerful (as a child, or, the last time we danced); remembering such a situation will immediately energize us because it distances us from a depleting view of ourselves.
- *Allow* our body to let go of strain, and allow our mind to forget about *changing* our posture; this non-doing clears the way for our movements to reshape us into plasticity that extends beyond bodily shifts.
- *Appreciate* our spirited body for having continuously and faithfully adapted in a remarkable fashion to our overtaxing it, or not exercising it. Instead of being stressed over what is wrong with our posture, we can spontaneously tell our body how gorgeous it is, or admire our stronger back; such endearments create endorphins (enhancing feelings) and increase physical well-being.
- *Affectionately* pamper and treat our body with gentleness and tender thoughts as if it were a very young child who responds best to cuddles and compliments. Instead of venting dislike, denial, or impatience onto our body, we are now actively participating in its renewal.

As we embody these four “A’s” while we practice KENTRO movements, we will be able to discern strain from flexibility, and perceive which movements feel appropriate and vitalizing for us.

When we add an affectionate attitude toward comfortable balance of our movements, we can move into expansive expression of ourselves. Only through leisurely movements and affinity with our bodies do we experience the suppleness and relaxation that extends beyond physical change. As we move through the day, we appreciate how our bodies feel, and we find pleasure in our appearance, gestures, and activities.

Posture no longer represents a problem that we must “fix.” Posture becomes flowing movement.

A compassionate approach to KENTRO practice is our most powerful resource for an abundance of benefits. A happy kinesthetic memory, willingness to be transformed, feeling gratitude and kindness all merge to free our body into smooth action. With practice, we can savor delightful feelings that move us while we walk or cook a meal, like a sweet secret that reveals itself slowly, progressively, in our everyday lives.

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