

## **Remembering-Accessing Somatic Wisdom**

### **By Ruby Gibson**

Where your hand supports my spine, the dance of subtle senses comes alive. I awaken from the inside out, I reveal to you what has lain dark and dormant for years, I speak to you of my tragedy and my mask of acceptance that traces back the years through each line and wrinkle. I evoke my fear for you in hopes that you will, at last, recognize me.

When we wish to peer into our collective history as a society, and examine how we evolved as a group, recognizing the events that brought us to this moment in time, we dig in the earth. It is a natural reaction as we choose to make sense of our existence. Digging is about remembering. The earth is our link to our history, the battleground for our evolution. The earth stores the symbols, the skeletons and the trails of our lives. The information the earth stores helps us to piece together our lineage and brings us the wisdom of the ancients, the fruits and folly of our forefathers, and it becomes our privilege to excavate this inheritance.

Within our bodies we have the same privilege. Our body, likened to our earth, is the keeper of our personal history. Wrapped up within the musculature, the tendons, ligaments, connective tissues, blood and bones are the deep psychological, emotional and spiritual experiences of our lives. Our bodies also contain the blueprint of our heritage, the imprint of our familial beliefs, and the memory of our ancestors. Just as the earth inherits destructive as well as constructive elements, our bodies inherit the unresolved issues of our ancestral counterparts, along with their joys, their personalities and their strengths.

Somatic information is layered in the body much in the same way it is layered in the earth – the most recent experiences are closest to the surface, while the older, more historical experiences are underground. Our history lines the thoroughfares of our heart and the crossroads of our neurology. Akin to a sponge, our bodies adopt the attitudes, impressions and dynamics of our families, communities and environment. All these elements shape us and define us, and our ego begins to associate with our experiences. We become what we've inherited, what others have told us we are, what our teachers have taught us.

There comes a time in life when the confines of our past begin to limit us. Our history, encoded in our body, dominates our physical health, our emotional freedom, our mental attitude and our spiritual creativity. We may experience this burden as chronic pain, depression, anxiety, conformity or an inability to change our life circumstances. Our body memory establishes a concept or belief about our reality, inhibiting our ability to experience life in a new or different way. We crave to change; to reclaim autonomy of our soul and to exhibit our true destiny, one that is not clouded by others expectations of us.

When we suppress or forget where we've come from, we cork up a very turbulent and explosive energy that ripples in many directions. This historical amnesia creates inner pressure and external conflict as your soul demands self-expression but your heritage demands compliance. This dynamic is the source of most suffering. For many times it is within our compliance that we receive love and acceptance, and within our unique expression that we threaten the mold. Most of the time, we will choose love and acceptance.

These internal struggles amplify into our external world. Recognizing that the macrocosm of our planet is simply a reflection of the microcosm of self, the key then to building our global society into a mutual articulation of harmonious and peaceful living is the healing of the individual – reconciling injustice, anointing wounds, recognizing power, becoming whole. Recovery of self = recovery of others = recovery of environment. Our hope to alleviate suffering, therefore, is in our ability to evolve, to step out of the mold – which is the actual physical form and posture of our body – our soma.

Since the body is the seat of our power and our memory, it is here that change is possible. Unearthing the source of our limitations gives us the opportunity to make a conscious choice about what we decide to carry – or not carry – forward. Energetically and somatically linked to our predecessors, we perpetuate

the healing of our species as we reconcile the past, bringing historical, unresolved challenges full circle to present time.

In order to remember, to reclaim the liberty of our soul's destiny, to expose our potential, to heal our origin, we must dig all the way into our inner selves. During this 'soma dig', we may look for pieces to bring our fragmented self back into wholeness, we may look for memories that we have suppressed, we may look for our power. It is more than just an intellectual understanding of what has transpired – words cannot heal the body. It is when we engage with our sensation, when we access our emotion, when we deepen our awareness, when we tell the truth and when we become accountable for our life's circumstance, that we reclaim our ability to co-create a joyful life, and advance past conflict and suffering.

The language of the body is unique – it communicates through sensation, breath, emotion, pain, images, sound and movement – quite unlike the English language. We must simply teach our minds and hearts to listen to our soma. Excavation of the soma is a delicate dance. When we come across some lost artifact that is covered with roots and clumps of earth, it may not look like anything significant. Then again, if we choose to honor it, to be curious about it and dust it off, it may reveal a hidden jewel that merely needed to be shined. Invariably, it may be these things that seem to hinder us, the things we wish to hide, that could bring the most joy to our lives.

We are in the process of remembering, collectively and, consequently, individually. There is really no way to avoid the great wave of change that, for better or for worse, is revolutionizing our planet and our life style. This situation does not mean that we have to adopt an apathetic viewpoint, or give up, throwing our hands in the air with helplessness. My belief, after 25 years of healing work, is that this movement is one to embrace. Although many people feel victimized by their bodies, it is the perfect time for progressive recovery.

All around the globe, in all cultures and in all facets of our lives, we are being confronted with our deepest fears and are being asked to be the crusaders of our own inner revolution. Under the proverbial microscope of self-reflection, we are acutely aware, now more than ever before, of the imbalance that has evolved through our species, and our individual contribution to this state of affairs. Consequently, we become cognizant of our heightened susceptibility to the backlash of our own actions. Repetitive and unconscious patterns have created an unfolding drama on our planet whose accountability comes in a hierarchal mirror of our spiritual prophecies

Not only are we in the middle of a global apocalypse, we are experiencing a personal "day of reckoning". The impending expectation of our death, our heightened susceptibility, the instinctual urge to change, the awareness of personal accountability to our cooperative dilemma – these are all the motivations to heal. Those who are attentive to their bodies, those who are willing to let themselves evolve – those who are willing to remember – will have the smoothest transition during this time of human rebirth. This is certainly not a time to be rigid in your beliefs. It is time to look your fear in the eyes and acknowledge it, let it rattle through your bones and shiver up your spine.

Our ancestors are crying out to "set things right". This is the work of all people. And it can be done through our bodies and through our hearts. For within each human vessel is the matrix of all creation. Somatic healing is a therapy whose time has come. If your body is communicating to you through chronic pain, constriction, disease, emotional turmoil or depression that you are unable to resolve, then there is something you are holding back, some experience that is repressed. Remember: for every physical symptom, there is an emotional and spiritual counterpart. Accessing somatic wisdom can assist you to decipher your symptoms and acknowledge your past in a graceful way.

As you release your historical burdens, you can then make room for the future. Many indigenous teachings speak of seven generational healing. Imagine that what you choose to reconcile, clear and release today, ripples out forward for seven generations and backward for seven generations. What a profound impact one courageous person can have! It seems as if the primary occupation of our generation is to be the bridge between yesterday and tomorrow – linking the seed of our truth with the demonstration of our integrity, so that we can step into our future unburdened.

It can be difficult to let go of where you have been until you know where you are going. Your power lies in the present. By bringing your past into this present moment, you expand into your timeline and energetically connect with any emotions, experiences, and traumas you have repressed or adopted. It is when you align properly, and accept yourself in totality and with objectivity, that you have the capacity to reconcile and to dream about who you are when you are free.

In order to let go of our historical experiences, we must have something to move toward. Even though we may not be comfortable who we are, with our many limitations, fears and physical ailments, it may be preferable because it is familiar. Letting go of a familiar way of operating requires that we are able to envision a new way of being in the world, in relationship, in our occupation, in our family, in our body, and in our power.

It is important to thaw frozen experiences, or to mend broken hearts, or to honor what we have lost, but no one wants to go backward. When we re-engage with our history remember that we only need to feel it long enough to release it. Movement, not indulgence, is the key. Movement occurs through deep breathing, through emotional expression, through physical exertion, through mental openness, through vocal expression, through remembering, and through spiritual awakening. Movement is essentially energy in motion. When we view the body as an energetic blueprint designed by our life experiences, we understand that we can alter that blueprint through shifts in energy.

We must allow the bones, muscles and tissues to have a voice, to speak their horror, to raise their objections, to plead for their freedom. The body needs to unwind the suffering and adapt to its newfound freedom. What if the body has become a foreign place? It may be difficult to understand what it needs. We may have become so out of touch that the thought of investigating it seems overwhelming. The body may be clumsy or awkward, frozen or fearful. Who can we trust? Where do we turn?

The response to these dynamics is in the exploration of body memory. One must become curious. One must travel inward. Feeling based sensations can, over time, invoke total recall of individual and generational predispositions. The body can lead us back to the core, or origin, of any pattern of behavior. This is not always available through cognitive memory. Our mind may remember fragments of a traumatic experience, dependent upon our age and the severity of experience, but will certainly not be privy to those imprints that are inherited. We can reveal those underground impressions for cognitive processing by bringing the stored information from the subconscious to the conscious as we access somatic memory.

Dissolving Personal History is a process of alleviating ourselves from the accumulated physical, emotional and psychic impressions of our ancestors. It is a lengthy healing strategy that begins with the first stage on the Unwinding Wheel of Suffering - waking up from the trance - and continues until we feel as if we have our spiritual freedom. It requires leaving behind all that was familiar and having the capacity to envision and create what we wish for our future. It is the process of aligning with our spiritual destiny.

We may each feel that we were brought here for a reason, some higher purpose that gives meaning to our existence, be it religious, humanitarian, individual or cosmic. As we free ourselves from oppressive history, we may catch glimpses of this purpose. The more and more we relieve ourselves of self-limiting impressions, the more able we are to define and embrace this purpose. Have you ever seen someone who you thought was doing exactly what they were supposed to be doing, who was right on track and seemed to be in their perfect element? Did you notice how their entire being was aligned and the air seemed to clear around them and they flowed easily and effortlessly? This is someone who has matured into their spiritual destiny. It is a beautiful sight and feeling, and is available for each of us. Some find it easily; some must fight for it. We must first remove the shroud of perception that has clouded our vision. We dissolve our history in order to imagine our future.

This is what I refer to as archaeology of the soul. When we address ourselves at this deep level, we transcend the therapy and forge into spiritual territory. During this "soul dig" we look for pieces to give meaning to our life's experiences, to justify our 'karma' so to speak. We may find that as we heal and develop objective awareness, that the problems we are dealing with may actually be recognized as our

mother's or our father's, our grandmother's or our grandfather's. It is as if we are doing recovery work for them that they could not do for themselves. This reflects the unseen spiritual and emotional exchange that connects all of us. We may even begin to feel collective pain. And not just as a concept; but rather actually feel the pain in our hearts and in our bodies as our own. As we've discussed, true healing extends far beyond the self.

When we have created enough space through our own healing process, we now embody the capacity to heal beyond our physical form. Our energy system has grown resilient and roomy. Our physical limitations dissolve and we recognize that all pain is everyone's pain; that there is commonality and oneness through all. Only our perception of ownership of pain keeps us thinking we are separate. On one hand, this may seem overwhelming. We may feel as if we have enough of a challenge working with our own issues. On the other hand, as others heal their wounds, it adds energy to our healing process. All healing is intertwined, like a rope that bounds our humanity. It is important for us to savor our healing, feel our strength and our freedom. For what we work through and unravel within ourselves lightens our children's load - or our brothers or our sisters - ancestrally and planetary. We consciously choose to leave behind a legacy of freedom, not pain.

We heal forward for seven generations and backward for seven generations. We also heal sideways, impacting those around us. This is an amazingly huge impact to have. I typically find that there is one person among a generation of siblings who is the 'carrier' of their family burdens. This person is usually the strong one, the person who has the most capacity and the best temperament for healing. If you are one of those people, rejoice. Know that it is a conscious choice to carry forward the family load in your body because you have the gifts of healing and the spiritual support to make it happen. Be strong for all and recognize your position. This will help you to feel empowered and to overcome resentment for your role.

Once we start excavating our spiritual legacy, we may have more compassion for our predecessors, which may lead to forgiveness. Forgiveness is an important, but very difficult aspect to the healing experience. What we can't forgive, we continue to hold in our bodies. What we hold in our bodies keeps us from moving into our future. The less identified we become with our suffering the easier it is to forgive those that have hurt us. We leave our victimization behind and recognize that all perpetrators were victims once themselves.

Disengaging from our trauma comes from the release of our secrets, and hence, our shame, our rage, our grief and our guilt. Secrets are somatically buried alongside our trauma - they remain coupled as long as they remain covert. The expulsion of personal and familial secrets opens our body to the truth. In truth there is power. It is important to excavate long existing barriers to healing, even if they are the things that we fear the most.

If we choose to be captain of our vessel and set our own course, we must be good diggers, we must get to know ourselves very well, so that the winds of fate do not blow us off course. We must believe in ourselves, tend well to our personal garden, nourish the movement toward our spiritual goals and be willing to invest in what we know to be true. Dissolving personal history unleashes our true desires and gives flight to our innermost dreams.

Maneuvering our way through somatic pathways of memory, it is an archaeological pre-requisite to tread lightly. As we uncover artifacts, we must handle them carefully, dust them off lovingly and become a witness for all that must have transpired here. We take fragments of our thought, experience and emotion, and attempt to rearrange them in some semblance of order, so that our kaleidoscope of self comes into focus.

As we come into relationship with a memory we can re-experience the original feelings that occurred. Like stepping back in time, we can enter into a somatic memory that duplicates the traumatic scenario. We may have similar sensation, thought, fear and neurological response, as well as experiencing the same smells, sounds and energetic dynamics that were occurring at that time. Handled unwisely, this type of excavation could retraumatize the psyche and the body - dredging up a painful experience with no

foreseeable positive outcome, potentially causing a cathartic release and reactivating the nervous system. Handled with foresight and understanding, uncovering this information is like receiving a sacred gift, for it offers the potential to release the traumatic imprint from the body by changing the outcome of the scenario through empowerment.

When we begin to experience the fear and panic of the trauma, our first impulse may be to freeze, to hold our breath, to shy away, to disconnect from our body. It is a natural response to danger. What if we are encouraged to experience that sensation of threat, yet remain breathing, moving and protective? How will that reorganize our belief about our self? By remaining passive, we perpetuate our somatic belief that we are a victim and hence we live in that manner. By becoming active (especially now that our ability to challenge a situation does not put us in further harm), by instigating a sense of control over the circumstances, by breathing and visualizing that we have the ability to protect ourselves, by voicing our opinion and demanding respect, by standing up to our perpetrator(s), by allowing ourselves to emote, by imagining that our needs were met, and all this if even for just one moment, breaks down the imprint of victimization and gives us a taste of empowerment. Now, if this cycle is repeated and each time we regain a little more control over the outcome, we eventually will change the configuration of the archaeological site, and traveling to it and exploring it will no longer carry the emotional charge that it once did.

Chaos precedes form. Chaos is a scattering of the energy system of the body. It is a dynamic coping mechanism for the times when our ability to feel our experiences would be entirely overwhelming. It keeps us from feeling our pain, but also keeps us from feeling our power. We experience chaos deep within our core, rumblings of history bulging through the jail cell bars of our sanity, demanding recognition, respect, and release. In the chaos we can only live in our past, not in our future. As we make sense of our chaos, we unveil information about ourselves, about our ancestral history, about the patterns we've established in our life and why, and this information teaches us and assists us in growing toward our future. We are able to see choice in areas we once thought were impermeable. We come into relationship with our history in a new way, one that is objective and impacts our ability to rationalize the series of events that led us to this moment and our healing. Chaos precedes healing and healing precedes wholeness. Our wholeness is an internal magnet of power that draws all of our energy into one area that we can now move from. This is our power. Wholeness. Unity. It is the path of our healing.

### **Mutual Healing**

All healing is collective. What we recover affects every other life form. Although we are separate in body, the life force that links our hearts and souls is interwoven through the web of life. What we do not choose to heal, personally and collectively, we leave behind for those generations that follow us, just as we were left with our inheritance. The earth is the reflection of our collective soul, our gifts, our challenges, our pain and our joy all mirrored by the simplicity of creation. The body is a reflection of our personal soul and if we can find a way to communicate with it and hear the language that is fluent to our bones, tissues and musculature, we will uncover a wealth of wisdom. What we release and reconcile will extend like ripples out into the greater ocean of humanity, healing us all.

The most important aspect of this journey is that its rewards are not for us alone to enjoy. The nature of true healing is that it is mutual. Our efforts, although presumably self-motivated, bear fruit that can nourish all of us. For what does healing really mean? How would one describe the qualities that signify that a healing has taken place? Would you describe them as a feeling safe in your body, experiencing happiness, being pain-free, a sense of peace and centered-ness, and establishing the ability to relate to others in a favorable way? These are certainly the outcome of our self-exploration, but underlying all of these healing attributes is a primary quality that is the foundation for all healing. That is a recovering of our self-respect. When we lose our esteem, our reverence, our regard, or our admiration for ourselves, we amplify our ability to relate to our self, our planet and others in a violent or injurious manner. We lose sight of our ability to love ourselves. This lack of self-respect is wide spread in our society and is portrayed in current dilemmas such as high crime rates, teenage suicide, drug, alcohol and food addictions, the plight of homeless people, wars and environmental pollution. These reflect to us our internal distress and our collective inability to have mutual respect.

Where does this distress begin? It originates in the body and the mind of a child who was not respected. It festers in the spirit of a child who is beaten, tortured, ridiculed, molested, neglected and abandoned. If respect is not modeled, it cannot be learned. Did you know that 90% of all inmates incarcerated in California prisons have a history of child abuse? The statistics speak for themselves. We have created our own nightmares. Disrespect is a generational disease that affects all of us. Remembering is essential for healing this disease – remembering our seeds of truth and unclinging our authentic nature gives us the capacity to not only experience our joy, but to regain our self-respect. Within our collective hands we hold the capacity for this healing metamorphosis.

I have learned to be a somatic archaeologist because I recognized its power. It has become my lifeline for personal growth. By studying and exploring the dynamic qualities of trauma and its psychosomatic implications, I have experienced both my suffering and my enlightenment. I have reached the core of my pain and hence found my joy. My prerequisite for writing this book is that I had to make the somatic journey myself.

Words cannot heal the body. Sensation is the only fluent language. Our future is dependent upon our ability to remember. Our body, our earth is dependent upon our ability to remember. Without the potential for healing there is no hope.

Prior to a somatic expedition, some groundwork must be done. Establishing a sense of safety in our daily lives, being able to have a home environment that is soothing and nurturing, removing ourselves from close proximity of a perpetrator(s) and the abusive dynamics are all primary factors. It is also essential to discontinue (or to be in the process of discontinuing) addictive or numbing activities that may hinder or block the unwinding process. These may include: addictions to alcohol, drugs, sex, food, gambling; risky or life-threatening activities that continue to traumatize the system by releasing additional adrenalin; or any re-enactment activity that creates sensations similar to that of the primary scenario.

Also, there must certainly be a willingness to establish new patterns. It is helpful to have a payoff, or bait at the end of the path, that is appetizing enough to encourage the traveler down a road that, although leading toward health, may temporarily increase one's awareness of the pain and heighten sensitivity. These baits may include: desire to be in healthy relationships, relief from physical pain, the need to end the cycle of trauma and not pass on the legacy of the abuse to loved ones, re-establishing power and control of one's life/destiny, spiritual awareness and harmony, among others. Finally, a firm support system that re-sources one in peer and familial relationships, and offers necessary psychotherapeutic support, is essential to properly integrate the healing process.

If this groundwork has not been met – if the trauma is recent and/or aspects of it are still ongoing or the individual has no support system – it can still be possible to weave these somatic skills into the recovery process. Somatic therapy can help one find their way to safety, as much as it can heal deep wounds. Just note that the protocol will be different and the process will be much slower. We live in a chaotic world to begin with; the predominant factor of safety will be quite relative and individual. What we have come to learn is that the body's energetic system has a built-in defense/coping mechanism that monitors the unwinding of somatic memory. Typically if the neurological and cognitive fields are overwhelmed, the energy system will refrain from adding further stress to mix. This is a healthy response and should be honored.

Once preparation is complete, it is important for a client to ally their self with a somatic therapist that can offer a sensory link between them and their body. Subconscious memories and feelings are stored within the watery tissues of the body, retaining sensations, aromas, visuals, and memories from the time of the injury, and/or the energetic code of the perpetrator. As a therapist, you should be able to offer a very present, mindful touch to release the sensations embedded in the tissues, supported by focused breath work and somatic imagery.

As previously mentioned, the type of touch is obviously an important consideration. If all touch released the content of our tissues, then even a casual handshake or a friendly hug or the brush of a passerby would instigate healing; but that is not the case. It is the intuitive ability of the somatic therapist to tune

into the body's energetic holding patterns, to track the nervous system response, to synchronize their breath with their clients', to hold the traumatized parts and gently direct awareness there, which more specifically allows the sensations and experiences to unravel and become conscious. This is what I refer to as infused touch.

Infused touch gives the container for the unwinding process which unravels the knot of the contracted energy, allowing all that is held within it to release, and then the client has the opportunity to fill the absence that is created. Formerly related behaviors or suppressed emotions vanish with the release and create more space for developing healthier aspects of our self. It is important to note that an explosive, cathartic release is not necessary to expel the negative energy of trauma. Tears and grieving do come with the exploration of sensation, yet the release must be contained properly so as not to punish the already activated nervous system. The system is wary already, and so for something new to replace the old, acceptance of integration must occur. The therapist's ability to titrate a release, or to slow down the process according to the client's capacity to hold new information, is vital to healthy integration.

One final consideration is the element of choice. The demonstration of control is a predominant aspect of an abusive touch scenario. Therefore, it is essential for the client to have total control over the touch they receive in any healing situation. To have the choice as to how and when they will be touched re-programs the somatic sensors to a new dynamic. It develops a safety net for the client to come into relationship with the one who is touching them in a new way. It gives the psyche and the body an opportunity to do what it would ideally have done at the time of the abusive touch or trauma. It gives them a chance to say "NO" and chance for them to experience someone respecting that choice. This re-coding fosters a fertile environment within their being to encourage ownership of their body, and thus the ability to respect it; to access emotional states that are responsive rather than reactive to current experiences and thus enhance relationships; to reduce hyper-vigilance so that the mind has more capacity for creative exploration; and to blossom seeds of love and compassion within the soul so that they have the ability to be receptive to collective inspiration and personal attunement. What a relief to finally free oneself from the underlying impressions and intentions of unhealthy touch!

### **Somatic Therapy vs. Psychotherapy**

As a member of the recovery team your role is to address what you know best - the body. Due to the fact that psychotherapy has been an accepted form of trauma recovery much longer than somatic therapy has, it may be the center of the therapeutic process. Each team will have its own therapeutic priorities. Be careful not to minimize the effect of your therapy. The dramatic and consistent results will speak for themselves over time. Stay with what you know - your innovative approach adds a missing piece to the client's healing. You may need to educate many people regarding your methodologies, since somatic therapy, as an accepted part of the recovery field, is a relatively new idea. Remember that you are on the cutting edge of your profession, blazing new paths for those that follow in your footsteps. Resonate confidence and pride, and be willing to learn new things. Share your ideas with authenticity, owning the power of your work. Learn how to communicate effectively and in a language that your peers can understand. Your level of professionalism is reflected in the relationships you develop and maintain.

There is a fine line at times between doing psycho-therapy and soma-therapy. The trick is to always stay with the body. You can have a verbal exchange with your client, hear their experiences, help them through an emotional release and share their tears. Being a somatic therapist doesn't necessarily mean that you can't talk to them about their history and how it has affected them. The distinction is that a psychotherapist will diagnose, confront, evaluate and examine the psychological elements of the client's situation. This approach is not conducive to somatic therapy. It keeps the client and the therapist in their heads and out of their bodies. Keep in mind the elemental theory.

Respect professional boundaries by staying with bodywork. The focus of a somatic therapist is to observe the client's body as they speak, feedback your observations to them and encourage them to stop talking for a while and explore what they are experiencing in their body. Dialogue can become a distraction - it is important to establish a working relationship, yet deters from the goal at hand. Your combined abilities to tune into the body's holding patterns and place your full attention there, gives them the opportunity to explore the ensuing sensations. By giving the sensations color, depth, shape, form, voice and movement,

we can expose the somatic adaptation to a trauma. This is essentially the work. Everything else is just preparation for the exploration. It requires that you allow yourselves to be with the body rather than do to the body. This slowing down and paying attention gives the energetic system a chance to reconcile and become conscious. As it becomes conscious, it releases. This release can take many forms and does not need to be addressed in a psychotherapeutic manner by you.

Recognize that the release is the movement of the trauma vortex. Honoring the release, witnessing its power and holding a safe space is all you need to do. It sounds simple, and essentially it is. The client's need to analyze any new information that was released assists in integration. This is where psychotherapy comes in. You have assisted to unleash the secrets. Let another team member make sense of them. You have helped to give the history in their body a voice so that the mind can access it and integrate it. Many times your role is to give valuable working material to the psychotherapy session. Clients will find it helpful to set up their psychotherapeutic appointment soon after their bodywork session.

### **Stalking Somatic Wisdom**

Here are five tools to assist you in understanding how to access somatic wisdom.

#### **1) Being VS Doing**

We have begun the somatic expedition. We have been busy making plans, charting our course, developing a context for the trip, developing relationship with our traveling companions and becoming curious about the foreign land; but now the busyness is done. We are on the road. We can change our pace and settle into a new rhythm-the rhythm of the heartbeat. Shift gears. Slow way down. Take a deep breath, feel the body's pulse and align with the gentle harmonious flow of in and out. Support the client in letting go of their thoughts and their day to day dilemmas. Leave the outside world behind and come to rest in the cradle of the being.

This is what I call Somatic Meditation. As you quiet yourselves and open to the body, notice what distracts you and/or your client. Acknowledge those distractions and then bring yourselves back to the body. Let go of the need to talk. Allow your breath patterns to synchronize. Now, just hang out. Be with the body. How does it feel to be in this land? Notice and breath - we are in no hurry. We are simply experiencing. This is the richness of the journey - the sweet flow of the river of life. Honor it; worship it; drink it up. Wade in it and feel its coolness or its heat. Give yourselves permission to wallow; for in your non-doing much is being accomplished.

Firstly, you are adopting the rhythm of the soma. You are bringing yourself into relationship by meeting the energetic flow of the body (earth). Remember, we do not want to overpower the body, or to convince it, or force it to change - we want to acknowledge its current state of affairs and befriend it. The body will be relieved to find that you just want to converse with it, appreciate it and love it. If we go into healing with a big agenda that 'we are going to change this and we are going to change that', we will be defeated. We will lose our direction. Take a back seat and let the body take you for a ride. Allow the body to have the power and the control. You may have to wait; the soma may not be used to having this opportunity. Give up your doing and just be. In your 'being', the body can more easily accept your curiosity and reveal its treasures - and not because you have forced it to, but because you have aligned with it.

Secondly, you may be bringing the client into relationship with their body in a new way. Your ability to take a back seat and cruise, gives the client permission to let go of the mental steering wheel for a while as well. This is not as easy as it sounds. It may take your client quite a few sessions to feel safe enough to let go and be receptive to the concept. There is no hurry; embrace the opportunity to explore the dynamic between the two approaches - letting go and holding on.

For the sake of our pioneering abilities, let us call this territory where we come together and wallow, the meeting place. This is where we establish common ground and develop equality. In the meeting place there is no color, no prejudice, no judgment, no superiority; there is acceptance, commonality and there is intimacy. This place expands our ability to see each other in truth, and therefore we become vulnerable-vulnerable to ourselves. When we have the capacity to come to the meeting place and just be with each

other with no expectations, healing will follow. The body meets us there and that is when the real ride begins.

## 2) Following the Body

Once in the meeting place we become quiet and receptive and attentive. We meet for the purpose of listening - listening to the body. A foot twitches, an eye blinks, a stomach grumbles, a jaw tightens; and we notice everything. We follow the body as it leads us through its unwinding. The 'being' and the recognition alone are enough to encourage healing. We do not have to manipulate anything at this point. We watch and we follow. There is a shooting pain in the leg. Stay with it. Breathe into it. Expand your breath around it. Make room for it. The pain has localized in the ankle, explore it. Is it a sharp, dull or aching pain? What color is it? What does the ankle want to do with it? Does it seek movement? Is there fear? If it had a voice, what would it say? The client describes it and responds to its need. The leg begins to shift, the toes to curl; the client expresses the need to kick. You encourage the action, protecting the ankle from further harm by padding its surroundings. The kicking starts out slow and becomes more active and furious, building intensity. The breath quickens, and release comes with any accompanying sounds or movement. It may continue for 30 seconds or for 15 minutes. Let the leg kick until the impulse is gone. Both client and therapist breathe with it, move with it, and yell with it, if necessary.

Then, when all the energy feels expressed, the body surrenders a little; the movement softens and shifts into a quiver. The client stretches their arms, arches their back, may laugh or speak, the breath normalizes and the foot drops, exhausted. You sigh together and come back to the meeting place. What do you notice now? The client expresses that they feel a rush of energy down their leg, they feel a little dizzy, but the pain is gone. You both breathe into that. Then suddenly, the client feels overwhelmed with sadness and tears begin to fall. The body shudders, the breath heaves as the client allows the completion of the release. You hold space and offer supportive words, encouraging them to let go of what no longer serves them. It is gentle and it is spontaneous.

The water propels the last of the trapped emotional content and signals the final stage of today's unwinding process. You breathe together recognizing that there is now fluidity where there once was rigidity; the withheld pain or trauma has taken flight through movement, sound, breath and tears. Take a few moments to fill the space created with an image of beauty or a feeling that represents the quality of freedom. This assists to anchor a new paradigm into the soma, and gives the soul fertilizer for seeds of truth.

## 3) Stalking Skills

A therapist's awareness of the body's movement and nervous system response is what is referred to as stalking. In the above scenario, the client and therapist have come to the meeting place, listened to the body and became aware that the body was speaking to them through this pain in the leg. Just like any good stalker, they became curious. They put their ear to the soma (earth) and heard the sound, identifying direction. They move toward it. They hear a rustle, see a movement in the bushes; they know they are on to something. They track the signs; follow the clues diligently until they find what they are in search of - the memory. They may get lost or distracted at times, but their tenacity wins out. They find that the more they practice tracking, the better they get. They are able to recognize clues much easier, able to sniff out the best direction, to recognize hazards and to work together.

Signals and clues that you will be tracking may include: subtle or overt breath changes, muscular twitches, shifting or moving of the body, energetic shifts, temperature changes, the release of sound, eye movement, tightness in the chest, throat or belly, the need to talk, swallowing, jaw clenching, fist clenching, yawning, nervous habits, dissociation or any other alteration in the body or psyche. These signals are the means in which the body communicates. It is just as if you were conversing with a friend; you follow where the conversation is leading, you question when curious, laugh when appropriate, nod when in agreement, raise your eyebrows when unsure and feel compassion when concerned.

You will be tracking your own body responses as well as the clients. Using the feedback loop, you will track how your body is reacting to the client's exploration. If you are sensitive, you may feel something moments before the client expresses it. You may be able to anticipate a release, sensing energetic changes and possibly feeling something building. As you track yourself, your body will reflect to you information that can offer guidance and direction. Tracking is primarily being exquisitely aware of every

little thing; it is the ability to hone in and become sensitive to all clues - visually, orally, auditory, spiritually, psychically and energetically.

It is valuable to feedback to each other what you are experiencing. It is important to recognize that you are having an impact on your client and that your client is having an impact on you. As you share with your client what you may be noticing or tracking in their body, it increases their awareness of their body. This enhances the client's ability to honor the somatic communication, to increase their ability to feel sensation and to examine their limitations. It also gives them skills that they can use independently. Be careful not to do all the tracking. Your client needs to know that they can use this skill them self, when they are on their own, to increase somatic awareness. It is much more empowering for a client to find an archaeological site, then for you to discover it for them.

#### 4) Breath and Movement™

Tracking skills also can give you clues that potential retraumatization may be near. A significant holding of breath may reflect that the client is experiencing fear or keeping an emotion at bay. In this case, deeper breathing may assist in releasing the trapped emotion. Or the opposite, a rapid increase in breath patterns, usually signals a rise in emotional content. Wind and water are very closely related in our natural environment - they are the movers. Refer to the elemental theory. Be attentive to the clues. How significant is the air change? The more extreme the breath alteration, the more forceful the emotional release. If you sense that something is coming on too fast, you must become pro-active as a therapist. By encouraging your client to normalize their breath, they can slow down the rise of emotions. Many times the force will be so strong and so ripe to move that a client will not be able to hold back or slow down a release. In that case, use your breath and body to give them support and safety. Encourage your client to continue breathing which will keep them in their body, and let them know that you will stay with them for the duration.

Educate your client regarding the effectiveness of breathing as a healing technique. If your client has difficulty breathing, you could encourage them to explore their fear of emotion. Unless a client can effectively use their breath, healing will be restricted. I will generally begin all somatic sessions with an assessment of the breath. Firstly, determine the client's awareness of their breath. Do they breathe consciously or automatically? Do they pay attention to their breath patterns? Does their breath seem to flow or is it controlled?

Secondly, as they breathe, can they determine where in their body there breath is or is not going? Does it seem to stop at their throat or does it come all the way down into their lungs? How noticeable is the movement of their diaphragm? Does it barely rise, or only rise in certain areas? Thirdly, determine if your client can breathe into their belly. This would mean that they breathe down through their diaphragm and extend their abdomen out with each breath. This is an important skill that both the client and the therapist need to have in order to be effective. Fourthly, can your client consciously direct their breath to different areas of their body? It is helpful to have the ability to bring their breath say, into the foot, or the knee, or the arm, to assist in removing blockages and to alter pain. This is primarily done through the imagination and the will. Once recognizing an area of distress, healing and awareness of the area can be accelerated by breathing through, or by breathing out, the tension, pain or somatic holding.

If you or your client have difficulty breathing or have ineffective breath patterns, begin by practicing. If your client feels safe, have them lie down on their back and begin to breathe normally. Encourage them to bring their breath down into their belly. If this is difficult, give them a reference point by either having them place their hand, or with permission, placing your hand, over their navel. As they inhale through their nostrils, encourage your client to push the hand up, witnessing the rise of the abdomen. As they exhale, allow the belly to drop gently, breathing out through the mouth. Have them exhale as if they are fogging up a mirror - through a wide, open mouth - and be sure that they have a full exhalation.

Practice this a few times together until they feel confident that they can attempt it on their own. Establishing new breath patterns is a learned behavior and can take time. It is something that they could incorporate into their daily schedule, developing awareness of breath patterns and changes throughout

the day. Once having developed competence with the belly breath, practice directing the breath as described above into different areas of the body.

Rigidity of breath patterns mirrors a fear of emotion (water). Fluidity of breath patterns signals emotional freedom. Altering our breath patterns always brings change. It is the simplest, most effective way to create healing. Our breath is our inspiration and reflects the willingness to allow aliveness into our being. It represents the commonality of our shared space, and signifies the delicate balance of life. By aligning ourselves with the rhythmic in and out of our breath, we enhance our spiritual attunement, exhibit our trust in the universe and open to our intuition.

#### 5) Intuition

Intuition is our sixth sense. It is a feminine, receptive quality that works closely with our instinctual nature. It is a sensing or a knowing that offers insight. Use of our other five senses is more commonplace and accepted in our culture. They are observable, tactile and distinguishable. The effectiveness of our intuition is based on trust. It is also most effective when we can get to know our self well enough to tell the difference between when something is imagined, and when it is intuited.

Intuition can be a very dynamic tool in Somatic Archaeology™. While in the meeting place, or for that matter anywhere on the path, we may receive impressions due to our receptive stance. These impressions may give us a warning or may offer a clue. Usually, there is no significant reason why the thought or concern should arise. It may just be a gut feeling, or a hunch. Trusting and encouraging these gut feelings almost always results in giving texture to an otherwise flat session or creating movement where there was a stalemate. This is what I call cognitive intuition.

There is also somatic intuition. These impressions are received on a physical level. Our hands may feel suddenly drawn to a certain area of the body; our body may feel as if it needs to take a step closer, or further away; we may feel a heaviness or pressure in a certain area; we may begin to cry for no obvious reason; our facial features may take on a look or expression that seems unrelated. Honoring these types of physical impressions encourage a new communication style. It is the body's way of telling us something our minds cannot necessarily understand. This physical knowing must be acknowledged as an important aspect of somatic communication and, when utilized, can bring dramatic results.

As our body and mind become receptive to this type of intuitive non-verbal, unseen exchange, we may suddenly know exactly what the client is experiencing. This type of spiritual or telepathic communication is extremely valuable. It is important to always check out your impressions with the client first, before acting on them. This maintains safety. By modeling your willingness to trust your gut feelings, you encourage the client to trust their own intuitive hits. It supports them in believing that they can know what their body needs and is a skill that goes beyond the therapy into daily life. It promotes connection with the instinctual self and is a great empowerment tool.

This operating procedure gives a step-by-step process of creating somatic unwinding. It is helpful to follow this flow for significant movement to occur. Many times clients will jump from noticing what is happening in their body to interpreting it. This is simply analyzing a symptom before experiencing it and shortcuts the process with little result. It is necessary to sense and feel before interpreting.

I notice – tune into the overall state of the body, scanning for particular areas of holding or congestion  
I sense – drop into a sensory perception of the area, and describe sensations  
I feel – feel the emotions that are associated with the area and express them  
I interpret – allow the dynamics of the sensations and emotions to reveal the context to the mind

With your touch I find myself now. Under the rubble of yesterday surfaces the memory of eloquence, the uncertain hum of holiness, and the exquisite space that knows no bounds. I recover my capacity and remember my gifts, recognizing as a long lost friend the grace of my soul.

Unwinding somatic impressions is the impetus behind Somatic Archaeology™. It is the instigator for movement and change. It unleashes within the body, those beliefs, ideas and impressions that limit

freedom of activity and discourage our full engagement with life. Exploring the pain trapped inside the soma requires boldness and determination. It also requires a great deal of trust; at times, trusting the very thing that may have betrayed us - our body. Cultivating a new relationship with our body is the key. It necessitates that we get to know our bumps, ripples and crevices, finding fertile canyons and arid plateaus. The exploration consists of attuning our self to our body's rhythms, synchronizing our self with the body's needs and accepting what it has to express. We must become observant and responsive, and acquiesce to the fact that our vessel is in need of repair, and that the damage, our fault or not, becomes our responsibility. It is the ultimate challenge to encourage authenticity and honesty in our self-relationship. Somatic Archaeology™ requires that the client find their warrior spirit, for there are times we must fight to reclaim our joy and our aliveness. By developing ownership, we come to the root of our troubles and relieve our self of the misappropriated power.

Once you have all of your preparations in place - you have developed a rapport, established a context for the expedition, assessed the client's goals, made agreements and begun to chart the course - you are ready to begin the somatic uncovering. At this point, both you and your client may still be wary, unsure of where the therapy will take you. Caution is a healthy sign - it encourages the delineation of personal boundaries. Our fears, rational or not, are an integral part of the unwinding. Fear can immobilize us, keeping us from moving forward. It is important to allow you and your client to experience fear and continue to do the work. Fear cannot dominate therapy. It is useful to feel our fear to the fullest, smile at it, thank it, and then walk right through it; for we have important places to go. Your fear can become an ally through its ability to give you information that danger may be near. Recognize fear's role in the healing process. It's okay to be afraid of the journey; but that does not mean we will not go.

So, who's healing is this anyway? The answer - If it is true healing, it belongs to all of us. It is the healing of the relationship; the meeting place where we all share our humanness. When we meet in our vulnerable places, we become seen, and this can be a difficult thing. As a whole, we are programmed to protect, to cover, to create facades, to wear masks. How difficult is it to be seen in our fragile places, our shadow places, beautiful or not? Especially as a therapist. What is your role? To lead, to direct, to educate? You are supposed to be a professional, to have it together, to be flawless, to be emotionally controlled, and to be honest. If you have to hold yourself together and be stoic, how far can you take your client? There are places on a somatic excursion where you just can't wear a suit and tie. You must leave behind your starched white shirts and jump into the muck. Don't hold back. Relationship is intimacy. The healing gift is to meet in the darkness with our eyes wide open and to recognize that we cry for the same loss - we mourn for our divinity and our pride. We weep for our joy and the loss of our passion. Adding your tears to the river of another's pain gives it strength and power. Let the waters sweep them away and cleanse your hearts. Let your client indulge in their release.

Being a somatic therapist is a challenge. It will alter the way you touch everything - your family, your friends, your earth, yourself. It will wake you up to the devastation of the soul and the possibilities created within it. It is well worth the time it takes to travel. Find your own reasons. Any therapeutic apprehensions that you may be experiencing right now as a therapist can be quenched by the recognition of three simple things that you must be sure to take with you: 1) bring your astute and honest communication skills, 2) bring your compassion and hope, and 3) bring a deliberate intention on your part to have good self-care.

Don't underestimate the amount of work and the importance of a strong commitment on the part of both client and therapist to seeing the somatic excavation through to completion. Beyond the rough waters ahead lies a safe harbor; keep the objective in mind and remember to breathe at all times!

### **Development of a Treatment Plan**

Somatic Archaeology™ cannot be done in one session. It requires time, patience, diligence and most importantly, continuity. Trauma takes time to be imbedded and takes time to be unearthed. The length of time is dependent upon 1) the severity of the trauma, 2) the length of time that has passed since the traumatic event happened, 3) the age at which the trauma occurred, 4) the support and resources available at the time, or alternatively, the isolation imposed, 5) subsequent events that have layered over the traumatic event, 6) spiritual and ancestral imprints/predispositions, 7) the amount of recovery/healing

previously done by the client, 8) the depth of healing desired by the client, 9) their current lifestyle, and 10) the willingness of the client and the therapist to engage.

An ideal starting point would be to anticipate an initial seven sessions. This insures continuity of treatment and requires commitment. This time frame allows the client to develop trust, which may be as much for trusting themselves as trusting your abilities; realization of goals (or part of goals); and development of somatic skills . This number is variable, depending on the severity of the situation and the complexity of the physical symptoms, so increase or decrease as necessary. I have done singular sessions that were profound and sufficient, and as well have worked with clients for years.

A treatment plan is all based on goals. A therapeutic goal can be as varied as needed. Goals could range from a need to receive nurturing touch to finding integration for psychological disorders to healing cancer. Let's review some possible goals. A client may want to:

- increase sensation – create the ability to feel more aliveness
- decrease chronic pain symptoms or numbing sensations
- heal disease processes – cancer, arthritis, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, etc.
- explore emotional states; get in touch with shame, anger, guilt, and grief
- work through depression or trapped anxiety
- overcome fear and rejection
- address and change self-defeating belief systems
- develop a sense of well being and self awareness
- learn how to accept healthy touch and nurturing
- lessen addictive behaviors; support the discontinuation of substance abuse
- establish personal responsibility in their healing process
- address sexual issues and enhance personal relationships
- address eating disorders and body image concerns
- improvement of sleep patterns
- address coping mechanisms and reduce medications
- deepen connection to the wisdom in their body
- increase feelings of self worth, self love, and self acceptance
- enhance their ability to integrate experiences/memories
- develop boundaries and establish a renewed sense of trust/safety
- recover the ability to actualize their dreams and potential
- development of personal power
- embodiment of joy and passion

### How to Begin

It is advantageous to begin all sessions by bringing your full self to the present moment. Take some time to take a few deep breaths, let go of your thoughts about the day and find your center. Many meditative techniques and practices will help you with this. You can center before or after the client arrives. If your client is willing, it may be a good model to practice this centering together; it aligns your focus and quiets other distractions.

The next step should be asking the client to bring themselves into their body by taking a few deep breaths and to check in. What does their body have to say today? What does it need right now? What areas are demanding the most attention? Allow the client to come into relationship with their body and give direction to the session first of all. Your input can be added later. Never assume that you know what they need or that you should be directing the session. It is important for you, as a therapist, not to have a big agenda. Use the information gathered in the development of the treatment plan to give a broad scope to the session, while allowing the specific needs of the moment to be the primary focus.

Some clients can tune into their bodies easily and relay information; i.e., "I feel very congested in my throat area, I am having difficulty taking a full breath and I am anxious about being here." This let's you know that, 1) they have awareness of sensation, 2) they can recognize their breath patterns, and 3) they have the ability to be honest about what they are experiencing. Other clients will not be able to relate even this much information to you. Then again, there will be clients who have very specific goals and

somatic sensations that they would like to work with. Using the information that you have gathered, you could then give the client a menu of therapeutic modalities you think would be valuable in addressing their problem. To determine together what the best approach would be, you would first want to reconsider the following:

- 1) Their level of perceived safety
- 2) How they feel about lying on the massage table
- 3) How stable they feel today
- 4) What their fears are about addressing an area
- 5) Your observations of their body
- 6) The manner in which they breathe
- 7) Your therapeutic priorities regarding safety and establishing trust
- 8) Their specific intent for the session

As a final note, it is vital to repeat that it is difficult to let go of where we have been unless we know where we are going. We may have forgotten what it feels like to be free, or to be in joy, or to truly love our creative potential. Dreaming our way into our future, envisioning who we are when we are liberated from the past, establishes parameters for movement. Invite your client to develop a mental construct about them self which is free from limitation. This aids in aligning the ego to a different framework or operating system. Our mind is simply operating according to the information that has been inputted; if we do not change our thoughts, we cannot change our beliefs, we cannot change our bodies and we cannot change our actions.

Seating Joy Into the Body - is my favorite part of somatic healing. After many difficult sessions of exploring the suffering in our body and warbling into the future, it is important to offer balance by finding our joy. Just as negative experiences have taken residence in our tissues, so does our body has a memory of pleasurable encounters. By focusing our attention on these areas, we encourage and expand our ability to feel joy and happiness.

Seek out these areas by continuing to use somatic exploration, but now tuning into a general feeling that one associates with pleasure. There may be a pervasive sense of joy throughout the body, or it may be isolated in one specific area, or there may be several areas that experience different levels of contentment. There may be a sense of sadness if the client can find no joy whatsoever in their body. You can support this by exploring unusual areas such as the wiggling of the toes or the batting of the eyelashes that possibly bring pleasure or good feelings. Help clients to explore all possibilities. Joy may have been subdued for a long time, but that doesn't mean it can't be unearthed. Search for pleasant memories or experiences that have taken root in the body. Focus on "what is right".

It can also be valuable to find new areas to establish joy. Say, for instance, a client has had difficulty speaking or communicating something and they finally break through a barrier and find the courage to sing or verbally express them self. While releasing the historical energy blocks and fear, they have created space - a space that can now be filled with joy. Re-seating joy into these areas leaves the client feeling less vacant and gives the ego some new meaning to identify with. You can support this process by having the client dream about an image that holds all the qualities of pleasure or joy – such as a nature scene or a harmonious image. Once they have envisioned it, have them imagine that they fill the newly available space with the qualities of their image. Have them feel it anchor in their body. Then the next time that they feel overwhelmed or insecure, they can access their joyful memory, breath into it and use it to give them hope and courage. Flooding the system with vibrant colors, feelings and sensations can enhance joy as well, offering perspective to break up a series of difficult sessions. It is also fun!

Authentic Self – is the bona fide essence of our self free from fear. It does not operate within the duality of male and female roles. It is neither light nor dark, truth or lie, enlightened or suffering. The authentic self is the awakened soul which exhibits the genuine qualities of balance and wholeness. It is the sweetness of who we are when we are on purpose, when we are creating, when we are inspired and when we are communing with mother earth. Although it may be cloaked by the drama of our ego, many authentic

selves are being awakened by the apocalyptic events that are shaking our world by the roots. Many of us are yearning to reveal and remember our sacred nature.

This trend resembles a natural maturation process – taken to the next level. When we are young, we model ourselves after our parents; we mimic their diet, behavior, language, and religious beliefs. We look to our parents as the archetypal representations of masculine and feminine energy. We embody these archetypes of our caretakers, internalize them and then act them out. The relationships we choose will be reflective of this internalized dynamic – reflecting our model whether it was congruent or in conflict. If we imagine that nirvana is experienced when the anima and animas of the psyche feel harmonious, it becomes imperative to address the imperfection of the mortal examples of masculine and feminine energy. Our parents were not perfect, nor were there parents, nor are we. When we stay engaged with attempting to “fix our parents” through our adult relationships in order to set things straight, to remedy the imperfection, or to get the love we always wanted, we get frustrated. It is not possible. It is the road of the lower self. The road of suffering.

The road to the higher self, or the authentic self, is taken when we come into relationship with the exemplary, divine representations of masculine and feminine – Mother Earth/Father Sky, Mary/Jesus, Shiva/Buddha, Goddess/God, Yin/Yang – defined by your religious persuasion. Advancing our awareness to images that embody perfection, compassion and flawlessness allows us to step out of the drudgery of fixing something that can't be fixed and into the grace of our authentic nature. By transferring your humanized concepts to the divine model and mirroring the possibility of harmony, you release yourself from personal purgatory.

Free from division and separation, you can bloom the seed of your truth. Life does not have to be about suffering and sacrifice anymore. The old adage of having to “learn your lessons” is a karmic choice, not a requirement. Remembering is simply recognizing that you can easily slip out of bondage into bliss by creating awareness of where the bonds still hold you. This awareness is the gift of Somatic Archaeology™.