

What is Somatics

Soma is an ancient Greek word meaning body. Somatics is a practice in, with, and through the body. Somatics looks at the individual as one functioning unit which includes the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual bodies and how they impact and influence each other. The Soma, BodyMind, is the vehicle through which all our experience filters and flows. Somatics has become a broad field of work that includes the entire range of experience.

Being aware of the body in movement, in action, is the Somatic practice. There is not one instant, in one's living body, where there is no movement. Moshe Feldenkrais, and I quote, "Movement is life; without movement life is unthinkable." Somatics is about cultivating and deepening the awareness of that life force we call movement.

Movement is what we do and in movement we apply the practices of awareness, of mindfulness. Early practices of awareness in action originated in Asia. These original practices were anchored in paying attention and learning through movement. Yoga, Tai Qi, Qi Gong, Aikido and other more mindful Martial Art Practices, plus, for example, practices of the tea ceremony (Chado), flower arranging (Ikebana) calligraphy (Shodo or Shuji) were all activity based disciplines. They were meditations in action, in movement. The ultimate intention of these practices was to extend the awareness beyond the dojo, studio or mat and to bring more consciousness and awareness into our everyday lives. To our thoughts, words, actions, relationship to others, and our environment.

In developing the Somatic presence practice is the key. Through repetition, being more aware and mindful, the practice immerses into one's being, one becomes the practice. To quote the famous modern dancer Merce Cunningham "we become good at what we practice." I would add to that: how we practice is also an important part of the equation. What I practice and how I practice supports my "waking up." The practice becomes me and I become the practice leading to my embodiment.

Somatic's in the West

Thomas Hanna, a student of Moshe Feldenkrais, was the first to call conscious movement based on first person experience, Somatics. Consequently, developing western systems of consciousness, such as body work and breathing practices, martial arts, Yoga and the new possibilities in dance (dance that moved away from the traditional technique based models and instead focused on personal expression, therapeutic applications, and improvisation.) were all part of the pool of Somatic disciplines that evolved into being.

Some of the early pioneers of Somatics included Moshe Feldenkrais, Elsa Gindler, Gerda Alexander, Frederick Matthias Alexander, Margaret H'Doubler, Mabel Elsworth Todd, Anna Halprin, Ida Rolf, Rudolf von Laban,, Mary Wigman, Irmgard Bartenieff, Lulu Sweigard, Charlotte Selver, Andre Bernard, Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen, and the list goes on.

Presently Somatics is used in referring to various movement practices, healing modalities, therapies, and education. Additionally it is the basis of the "mindfulness" movement. Many of these new "Somatic disciplines" do not work inside the movement model. My reference, when I use the word Somatics, is movement.

I practice Tai Qi
Birds watch and then mirror me
Practicing Fly Qi

Why Movement?

We live in and through movement. The Body/Mind/Spirit lives, expresses, and creates through movement. Our movement plays a huge part in our evolution and development. It is an essential element in our being human. When our movement stops; there is no life.

Being attentive to our movement, to the adjustments we are making continuously on subtle and not so subtle levels brings awareness. Awareness to the movement of our thoughts, our emotions, and our feelings. This facilitates awareness to what we are doing and the possibility to make more conscious choices. It is the door, the metaphor, through which we study the self in action. It is a mirror to our unfoldment as human beings.

The focus on developing the kinesthetic sense lives in the idea that as we go deeper into our selves, as we contact a deeper layer of musculature, organs, soft tissue and different parts of the nervous system, it allows aspects of ourselves that reside below the conscious level, in the shadows and basements of the bodymind, to become available resources in our work.

All our life experiences and stories live and are held in the body. Our personal history shapes the body...and determines how we feel, think, move and act. Having a physical practice keeps us anchored in our sensations, feelings and experiences in the body in the moment. The BodyMind becomes our study, our Bible, Sutras or Koran.

Surrender she said
Surrender to what he replied
To what is you fool

Movement is indeed life. When movement with awareness and mindfulness is an essential practice in our lives it becomes a valuable resource and tool in our aliveness, happiness, healing and unfolding. Movement has been accepted as medicine for the body for a long time. Now it is clear that movement is good medicine for the mind, emotions and spirit as well.

As we move deeper and further into the Artificial Intelligence and technological movement. As our children, as well as many adults, become more and more addicted to our Smart Phones and computers, as we continue to become disembodied, I imagine practices like Somatic's and other movement arts that focus on the MindBodySpirit connection will become more and more important and acknowledged as the valuable asset that they are.

I like to mention what a blessing it is to have some kind of awareness in movement practice. It doesn't have to be complicated, just have a practice that allows us to touch a part of ourselves that quite easily can be forgotten in our busy everyday lives. And if you are so moved in the direction, then sharing that practice with others not only enriches them, but enriches you as well.

Three very short stories!

Knowing or Not Knowing

You think you know but you never really know. I don't remember where I first heard that or when...but as I get older it makes more and more sense. I maybe know one thing for sure and that is the older I get the less I know. My son once told me as he gets older I get smarter!

Ridiculous

The idea of the word is what the word is...ridiculous. I mean if you stop and think about it for a minute it is the absolute best word for how things are, ridiculous! And how ridiculous it is we believe everything we see, experience and hear as anything but ridiculous. If you get it then you will burst out laughing!

Waking Up

Sometimes I get a glimpse of waking up. I feel something, see something or get an insight. Problem is, or isn't, is that it doesn't hang around very long.

Becoming Empty

After 75 years I know so little
Each day I realise I know less and less
If I am lucky in 15 years I will be empty
Then what comes will be of no consequence!