

Natural Kinesthetic Awareness

Dan Amato explains how Bowen practitioners can reconnect clients with their Natural Kinesthetic Awareness so they can achieve optimal results and improve the Body's response to Bowenwork.

I guess the best place to start is to ask, what is kinesthetic awareness? Kinesthetic Awareness (KA) is a person's sensory awareness of their body and its movement. It is also the person's awareness of the operation of different parts of the body in relationship to the rest of the body. An example would be, if you close your eyes and raise your arm you will know which direction and by how much you lift it. You will know this without having to see it.

Thomas Hanna understood that the body could lose awareness of itself. He coined the term Sensory Motor Amnesia to describe it. In his book Somatics, he has clients put their attention on these areas as they move them to help them gain back awareness and hence control of these areas.

The body responds so well to Bowenwork. We see it all the time. So why should we worry about kinesthetic awareness? Most of the time we don't have to worry, but occasionally we do a session on a client whose response seems stifled in some way. Some of the time this can be because the client is just a slow healer. Other times it is because the client's energy is so low that it takes a while to accomplish the same healing. Some of the time though it will be from a compromised sense of KA. These are the clients who get off your table and their posture etc. is very different than before the session, but when you ask them what they notice they say there is no change. These clients sometimes claim to have never been injured, but I believe they

have shut off their KA probably in order to continue functioning in spite of pain. Perhaps because they distract themselves from the injury by continuing to work, it is never registered in long-term memory. Luckily the body does remember.

Kinesthetic awareness is important to Bowenwork practitioners because a diminished KA can decrease the effectiveness of a Bowenwork session, which can decrease the quality and quantity of the feedback the body receives. Conversely, the better the client's KA the better the quality and quantity of the feedback, so the better the client's results can be. The body's ability to continually accommodate to whatever is going on is of great benefit to Bowenwork practitioners. This is because accommodation is one way that the body gains better function after a session. We simply release the restrictions in the body and the body accommodates through KA and proprioception to a place of more ease. Practitioners release the body where it is stuck and the body does the rest. Because the body does this so well, many clients will not need to have their KA enhanced to get good results, though all clients will benefit from it.

I think when a person shuts off their KA, it generally happens out of their desire to avoid feeling something uncomfortable going on in the body. Pharmaceutical companies try hard to convince us that when we are in pain, what our body needs is a drug. This works on people because they do not

understand that the best pharmacy on the planet exists within their own body.

Our body is capable of alleviating our pain and without the side effects.

Pharmaceutical companies research what these substances are then mimic them chemically and sell them back to us. They have to alter them because they are not allowed to patent naturally occurring substances, hence the side effects. This view of needing something outside the body is what causes people to misunderstand what the pain signal means. The idea of no pain no gain also contributes to this way of thinking. Generally, when the body initiates a pain signal it is giving us information. It either telling us that we are overdoing it, injured or that the body is stuck, and needs help to release whatever is keeping it from returning to a more normal function. **

When people are in pain they seem to do everything they can to avoid it instead of doing something to help the body to resolve the pain. A construction worker who hurts himself continues to work ignoring the pain because he cannot afford to take time off. Over time the construction worker's KA is dampened, which can also create higher vulnerability to injury.

It doesn't help that our elite athletes brag about playing while they are injured. Their example makes us believe that we should just tough it out. A soccer mum who hurts herself continues to get her children to school and all their

events in addition to all her other duties because there is no one else to do it. She learns to shut off her KA so she can do all she has to do. These are some examples of how clients can shut off their KA and these are the people **who will need us to help them to consciously reconnect with their KA, so they can receive optimum results with each session.**

When I first heard these clients say they were never injured, I assumed their problems would resolve easily, but I was mistaken. What I realized after a time is that they probably had multiple injuries, but the injuries they experienced only registered in their body not in their memory. I would ask these clients what they were feeling in their body after a session, they would look at me strangely and say, "Nothing." I realized the reason they looked at me strangely was that they had no idea what I was talking about because it had been so long since they had any conscious awareness of what their body was feeling. This is where enhancing kinesthetic awareness is helpful. This type of client tends to be very unaware of their bodies. They just tough it out, so they learn to ignore pain. This is not a good thing because it diminishes the body's kinesthetic feedback mechanism.

In order to help these clients, practitioners must help them reawaken their KA.

With most clients the move in and of itself enhances the kinesthetic awareness and is one of the many reasons why Bowenwork is so effective. Other clients just need to be re-educated. We can ask this type of client if the area we are working on is tender or tight. They may not be able to tell us, but their attention will be on the

area we are working on, which will help them reconnect with their KA. When we have them stand, rather than ask these clients what they are noticing, to which they will almost always tell you they are not noticing anything. Just have them put their attention on different parts of their body as they walk. Over time they will begin to notice things. I think that everyone benefits from this kind of feedback.

The first time I noticed this lack of KA was with a client who came in for a session bent forward. He complained about soreness in his lower back. He had injured himself several years before and was treated medically and while the pain decreased it never left. After a Bowenwork session, he stood up and I asked him if he noticed any difference. He said, "No difference." This really surprised me since now he was standing up straight. I asked him to walk back and forth and to place his awareness on different parts of his body.

For each thirty-second period I would have this client place his attention on a different part of his body. After a few minutes of moving his awareness from place to place he said, "This is going to sound weird, but I think I may be standing up straighter." I confirmed that he did seem to be standing up straighter, but it seemed absurd to me that he had not noticed immediately. I believe this is a consequence of dampening the KA. Fortunately for us, kinesthetic awareness can be reawakened.

When there are restrictions in the body, the body finds the best way to accommodate to the restrictions while maintaining the highest functionality possible.

It continually accommodates as the need arises. The body does its job so well that it can do a substantial amount of accommodating without the client even being aware of it. Even though the client may not be aware of all the accommodation the body



is doing, there is still a price that the client pays. That price is in the form of more tension and stress in the body, which creates more vulnerability to injury.

We can see how effective the body is at accommodating simply by watching people moving about in the world. They can be lopsided in structure or uneven in gait, but **over a short period of time people's KA allows them to feel normal despite their structure or gait being noticeably off when we assess them.**

Other hints that the client's body is doing a significant amount of accommodating is when a client tells you that they injured their neck because they slept on it wrong or they injured themselves raking the yard.

While these examples may result in aching or soreness, the likelihood of injury in either of these cases is small.

While clients can certainly overdo it, it is more likely that pattern of tensions in the tensegrity are being aggravated by the added stress of posture or repetitive motion. The strain to the body's tensegrity may be such that many restrictions are pulling on the same area from different places resulting in overwhelming the one or two specific areas that are weakest thereby straining them.

Adding Kinesthetic Awareness to Your Practice

It is easy to utilize KA in your own practice to enhance the results of your Bowenwork sessions. Basically, it is a matter of having the client move an area that is not moving as freely as it could while their whole attention is on that area.

If you have the client move without having their attention on that area the feedback will remain minimal.

Thomas Hanna had clients put their hands on some areas when they moved them, so that they

could get extra feedback through their fingers until they reclaimed awareness of that area. I will list a couple of examples of what I do in my practice to enhance KA in my practice, but all you really need to do is have the client move an area with their whole attention on it. The body will do the rest.

Be aware that movement should never be to a place of pain and should always stop short of pain.

One of the reasons we have clients walk after a session is to integrate what happens on the table. The body does this through feedback. If you watch clients when they get off the table the first few steps will seem almost unbalanced (more noticeable when we do procedures like the pelvic), but with each step the movement becomes smoother. The reason for this is that we have released many different areas of the body so as the client walks, many of the proprioceptors are engaged simultaneously and the body begins adjusting muscle tension in a more dynamic way than happens on the table. This is why it is important to have the client walk for a little while after a session rather than once across the room and back.

A client's KA allows the body to find a better balance so more time walking can create better results (usually a few minutes). Consciously using KA after a session allows the client's body to make changes in habitual patterns of movement.

An example would be, after you do the pelvic procedure the client tells you the pain is gone, but you notice that when the client walks, the pelvis is still held rigid. One of the things I have clients with low KA do after the pelvic procedure after they have walked a bit is to

have them do a slow march with all their attention on their hips. I believe this helps the body more quickly find the best orientation for the pelvis to support the upper body. Then I have them walk again. If the pelvis does not have a natural sway after a session, I will have the client put their finger pads on their hips and take a half step. When the weight is transferred to that leg, I have them exaggerate the hip movement toward that side without bending to the side. The body is then able to decide how much of that natural sway in can add back to their walk. Of course, all their attention must be on the hips as they do this movement. When I have the client walk again some and occasionally all of the sway will return to their gait.

You can use KA anywhere in the body. Whatever area is stuck, have them move that part of the body in a slightly exaggerated way with their whole attention on it. Be aware that movement should never be to a place of pain and should always stop short of pain. Kinesthetic Awareness can help the body find more freedom of movement quicker. When that happens the body is using less energy to hold the new pattern structurally. This can help a Bowenwork session go further.

**Dan Amato,
Marlborough, NH, USA**

*** Pain can also be telling us that there is a disease process going on in the body, which means that we need to send the client to see a physician because it is beyond our scope of practice.*

Dan has recently resigned as an Instructor. Bowtech and our Instructors sincerely thank Dan for his many years of dedicated service to the Academy.