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The Functioning of the Eyes and the Rest of Yourself

Paul came to me for lessons complaining of pain in his lower back. What I noticed early on is that in standing and sitting he held himself in a very asymmetrical way with his right shoulder slumped and pulled forward. Paul had told me that he had been a baseball pitcher in high school and college and I assumed, too quickly as it turned out, that this activity was responsible for Paul's pattern which I also assumed was connected to his experiencing the pain he complained about. Paul also told me that from early childhood he had trouble focusing his eyes together and for distance seeing, he suppressed the vision of his left eye to avoid seeing double images. He could not see in depth as a result. Since I was not very familiar with working with the eyes, I didn't pay much attention to this part of what he told me.

We did about six lessons in which I had Paul lie in different positions as I tried to help him let go of the tension in his lower right ribs and back and upper left shoulder. He experienced little improvement and I noticed little difference in his pattern, in spite of the lessons privately and those he experienced in my *Awareness Through Movement®* class. I did not know what to do next. So now I asked him to experience where he put his weight when standing, on the right side or the left. Paul looked at me at this point, sensing my puzzlement, and said, “**I won't be able to get the two sides of my body together until I get my eyes to work together.**” This was an eye opener for me. I had ignored what was most important for Paul.

I remembered a lesson that was very effective in getting me to relax my eyes. I had to think now where to start with Paul.

Moshe Feldenkrais had impressed on us that when one side is strong and the other side in trouble, the important thing is to support the strong side of the person to help it function better. I chose to have Paul experience the right eye, which he used for seeing.

I sat on one chair with Paul sitting opposite facing me. I asked Paul to look at my face, then close his eyes and keep the image of my face in front of himself. I had him turn his head slowly right and left and keep his eyes toward me while watching my image and feeling his eyes relative to his head movements. Then I asked him to move his head up and down. Both of his eyes softened and his seeing was easier. I now asked him to watch my face with only his right eye. I explained that now I would move him with my hands, turning him so that his body and head moved to the left, and that each time he would shift his gaze from the one side of my face to the other. We tried once with eyes open so that he would get the idea and then with eyes closed. The effect was very quickly apparent. While I was moving him in this way, with each of my movements his left shoulder dropped a little more and his right side lengthened and came even with the left. At the end of the lesson he opened his eyes and was now sitting without his habitual distortion. He looked around and with surprise he said, “**I am seeing with both eyes. I can see with depth.**”

This experience changed my thinking and way of doing. *Functional Integration®* lessons. I have since explored the function of the eyes, with myself and many clients, always fascinated with the connection to the rest of ourselves.

—by Carl Ginsburg, Ph.D, CFT,
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Why Strain to See?

I had been seeing Elizabeth for about a year. She had had a history of eye maladies—iritis (inflammation), cataract, and astigmatism. After getting a second opinion on her cataract, she opted for surgery. She was feeling very anxious about the surgery and this only added to the strain that she was already feeling in her neck, jaw, shoulders, and eyes.

One of the most valuable sessions for Elizabeth was just after her surgery. At this point she was still very stressed (now, about the outcome of her surgery). We began by working with her shoulders, ribs, spine and pelvis to help her feel herself lying more comfortably and to enable her to breathe more fully, thus reducing some of the stress. Once she was feeling more settled we began to review some of the eye work we had done previous to her surgery.

We proceeded with some convergence/divergence or moving from tight focus to a wide-angle gaze. An example which always comes to mind is from the film “Once Upon a Time in the West,” where director Sergio Leone closed in on the cheek of one cowboy’s face to show a fly sitting near his eye (convergence) then zoomed out to reveal the cowboy in his long duster standing on the platform of the train station in a deserted Midwest town (divergence).

Our eyes, when healthy, are like a very sophisticated camera refocusing instantaneously in response to our intentions. Elizabeth was also dealing with an astigmatism (a blind spot that moved around) and she had been straining to see around it. When straining to see, we can become “stuck” in a tight focus type of gaze. This can be very tiring and the strain can spread to other parts of ourselves. By becoming aware of how she was using her eyes she could choose how she wanted to use them, rather than being stuck in a habitual way of seeing that would cause more strain and fatigue.

Once Elizabeth felt her eyes settling back in her head, she also felt the tightness in her neck, jaw and shoulders decrease. **This was a great relief to her and she continued this practice,** as well as a few other movements, on her own while she was recuperating. Looking back, Elizabeth felt our work together helped speed her recovery because her stress and strain was greatly reduced.

She was thrilled with the discovery that changing how she used her eyes could reduce the strain not only in her eyes, but could also have a profound effect in her neck, jaw and shoulders. She was now free to go through her daily tasks without becoming fatigued by the strain.

—by Kathy Yates, GCFP,
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All of You Participates in How You Look at the World

"You are more than eyes." This was my response to a potential client who asked if his eyesight could be improved. Tom was born with cataracts on both eyes. These were removed in a series of operations between the age of three and six. This skewed the way he saw his environment and guided himself, as he learned to move. Thick glasses enabled Tom to go to school and to play catch with his father.

Tom, now in his early 20s, wanted to get out into the world. His vision was 20/80 and he knew his left eye looked out to the side. He had heard that there were various alternative methods for improving sight and he was eager to start working. I told him, "**All of you participates in how you look at the world. If you come to me for lessons, your eyes will only be one part of a whole you.**"

Tom agreed and we met for his first lesson. When Tom walked, he did it fast, with his head kept down and his shoulders hunched forward. He looked as if he were determined to plow through any obstacle. Standing, he looked like a bow just before the arrow was let loose. He kept both feet firmly on the ground, and like a toddler, stretched the back of his knees and arched his back. His left eye and foot pointed towards the left, his head faced the floor and towards the right. He increased the arch of his back, craned his head forward and clenched his fists in determination to look at the eye chart. I felt the quality of Tom's life would improve if he learned not to put so much effort into everything he did, and his eyesight would tag along with the rest of him.

Eventually Tom noticed that his peripheral vision was better and he could make out the numbers on nearby license plates. **The Feldenkrais Method® allows people to learn at their own speed** and Tom is changing habits developed at an early age. This progress has occurred over a few years but Tom has been patient because he is enjoying the process. Tom is ready to start altering the way his posture affects his movement. He sees that his "bow and arrow" stance restricts his field of vision.

Try this yourself. First, stand solidly on both feet with arched legs and back. Turn to look around yourself and notice where you stop and what you can see. Return to your starting position, and then shift your weight over one foot. The other foot can stay on the floor but let it be light. Take your whole upper body; arms and shoulders, head and neck, and look around yourself. Try turning a few times towards your standing leg, then try it towards the other leg. Notice where you can see now and where you stop rotating.

Do this a few times shifting your weight as you rotate each time to see if **you can invite more of you to join the rotation.** Notice how much farther around you can see. This may seem like an easy movement, but many of the clients I have don't know how to do this and— they haven't grown up with limited sight like Tom.

I have been helping Tom learn this movement of shifting his weight and twisting to look behind himself. Tom had never done this before and was surprised that he could look almost directly behind himself. I had Tom was doing this faster and faster at the end of a recent lesson and he laughed with delight as he swung around from side to side, looking behind himself. The best thing though, was when he stopped and realized that his face was forward and his head was raised.

Tom had never looked at anyone face to face but now he can. He is delighted. Oh, by the way, his last eye exam showed his vision to be 20/60.

—by Katherine Rogers, GCFP,
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“...the mind feeling its way as though blind, walks along with its eyes on the ground.”
—Marianne Moore

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