

# **Somatic Enneagram**

## **Transformation Through Movement**

By Andrea Isaacs

In 1994, I developed EnneaMotion, a kinesthetic approach to learning more about the Enneagram types. It is an experiential process using movement to explore how our personalities are reflected in our bodies. Correlating different emotional and thinking states with movement offers deeper insights into feeling states and behavior patterns. The Somatic Enneagram<sup>SM</sup> is the result of blending the tenets of Somatics—a field which combines the body, mind, and spirit—into this movement study.

Understanding the fundamental structure of personality can be insightful and even transformative, but then what? Do we then strive to be the best type Two, Four, Six, or Eight, etc., that we can be? Though the Enneagram is an excellent diagnostic tool, it is not designed to successfully bring about desired changes in ourselves. We can be intimately familiar with our ruts and bad habits, but experience tells us that awareness alone does not automatically translate into "transcending" or "letting go" of those patterns.

All habitual patterns, even those based on the higher aspects of our personalities, have been choices. Regardless of when or why we adopted them, or whether the choices were good or bad, they have been over-used. Like a record stuck in a groove, we often refer to our favorite strategies even when circumstances change. A Perfectionist, for instance, whose strength is to be diligent and work in an organized manner, may get derailed and angry even if irrelevant rules aren't being followed. The same Perfectionist may have difficulty coping with someone who is doing a fine job, but works more spontaneously or is guided by emotional considerations.

Awareness itself does not enable us to change these patterns. We may live in frustration and awareness of one of them, and instead of dealing with it directly, we compensate for it elsewhere. It is true, however, that although we have the potential of all human qualities within us, they are at different stages of development and not equally accessible. We could say that all conflicts and challenges may have resolutions, but the best way to approach them may lie dormant within us. In addition to awareness, desire and will, we need a technique for accessing all the gifts, virtues, and the higher experiences we thought were reserved to the realm of other types. This would allow us the option of drawing from a wider spectrum of behavior patterns, and to respond to life's situations with more appropriate action.

How can we do this? The first step is to interrupt the habitual flow of responses, bringing us more into the present moment. This can be achieved by turning to the body channel and to somatic exercises. This would present a different picture of the situation and temporarily remove the lens through which we usually view the world, allowing a more neutral state of mind to emerge.

## **Somatics**

The term "Somatics," coined by Thomas Hanna in the 1970s, refers to something that embraces the wholeness (the body, mind, and spirit) of a person. Somatics believes the authentic wisdom of the body helps generate an expanded quality of life, and emphasizes that being fully present in the body is essential to being fully alive.

## **The Body/Mind Connection**

We all know that there is a relationship between how we think and feel, and our bodies—our posture, how we hold ourselves, how we gesture, and how we move through space. When we're excited and feeling uplifted, our energy is light and our movement more upward. When depressed or "down in the dumps," our energy is heavy, and we move as if drawn by a more downward pull.

The reverse is also true: the way we move does influence how we think and feel. As Roberto Assagioli, one of the masters of modern psychology, said in *The Act of Will*: "Attitudes, movements and actions tend to evoke corresponding images and ideas; these, in turn evoke or intensify corresponding emotions and feelings." And Alexander Lowen, M.D., in *Bioenergetics: The Revolutionary Therapy That Uses the Language of the Body to Heal the Problems of the Mind*, said: "...studies confirmed my strong feeling that one could influence mental attitudes by working with the body."

Working with these concepts over the years, I have noticed the following principles appear time and again:

1. There is a relationship between thoughts, feelings and the body.
2. Thinking, feeling and behavior patterns can be translated into pure movement concepts of space, time, and force.
3. Moving in a particular way will elicit corresponding thoughts and feeling.
4. We become whatever it is we do most. We literally are "creatures of habits".
5. Changing either thinking, feeling or moving will automatically and inevitably change the other two.

## **Space, Time, and Force**

In order to effectively compare movement styles to inner states, it is helpful to be familiar with the basics of "movement language." Here are basic movement terms and how they correlate with ways of being, moving and behaving:

"Space" is direct or indirect, large or small, confined or open. There are people who are very direct come right up to you, saying exactly what they think. Others are so indirect, that they are incapable of approaching and speaking up, even when they have something important to say.

"Time" can be either fast or slow, abundant or pressing, rhythmic or arhythmic. Compare someone who is wound up in hyper-drive exuding a sense of urgency, with someone who is slow and methodical, or even a slow-poke who just can't get going.

"Force" can be either light or firm, gentle or forceful. Consider someone making a suggestion-one person may try to force it down your throat as the only solution, and another may simply offer it, allowing for you to do with it as you like.

During 25 years as a dancer, choreographer and artistic director of my own dance company, I choreographed many dances that were about feelings and relationships. I discovered that if I asked my dancers to move as if they were happy, sad, or angry, etc., they would mime the feelings, and their movements were superficial and not interesting. When, on the other hand, I translated the feelings that I wanted them to express into pure movement concepts of space, time and force, something genuine began to emerge.

### Space-Time-Energy

This chart is based on the work done around the turn of the century by the Hungarian Rudolf von Laban. He originally created systems designed to effect a higher level of efficiency in German factories, but later applied his findings to movement in general. He is best known for his work with movement in the field of dance. Laban juxtaposed space, time and energy with two polarities: space was direct or indirect, time was fast or slow, and energy was light or firm. Together with something he called "effort/shape," Laban developed a precise and elegant system of movement and dance notation, called Labanotation.

<b>Space</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>Energy</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>Action word</b>	<b>Corresponding emotion (emotional layer)</b>
direct	+	slow	+	light	=	glide, elevate, sink	elegant, responsible, engaged
direct	+	slow	+	firm	=	push, pull	confident, poised, forcing, intolerant
indirect	+	slow	+	light	=	float	relaxed, content, generous disoriented, indecisive
indirect	+	slow	+	firm	=	wring, squeeze	whine, self-tormenting, moody, self-absorbed
direct	+	fast	+	light	=	dab, splat, jerk, pop, pinch	intrude, fix, dismiss, sneering
direct	+	fast	+	firm	=	punch, dart, stab, grab	going for my dreams, threatening, competitive
indirect	+	fast	+	light	=	flitch, twitch, twinkle	flighty, proper, gushy, flattering
indirect	+	fast	+	firm	=	throw, slice, slash, strike	obsessively neat, abrasive

There are different combinations of space, time, and force, resulting in countless movement qualities or action words (see chart above). Each action word has its own corresponding internal feeling and thinking state. For example, moving in a "floating" way (with indirect, slow and light movement), produces a relaxed, peaceful state, in which one would behave gently, be less rigid (less likely to "stick to the rules?!") and which may even induce a little spaceyness. "Wringing" movement (indirect, slow and firm movement) might encourage your brow to contort in an accompanying awareness of angst. "Stabbing" or "punching" motions (direct, fast and firm movements) accompany an aggressive or angry internal state.

Working with dancers, I applied this process with satisfying results. If I wanted them to express anger, for instance, I saved a lot of time by asking them to move in a way that was direct (angular), fast and forceful. Their movements began to look angry, and in fact afterwards, they confirmed that moving as instructed not only brought up memories of being angry, but actually made them angry. The same kind of authentic results happened when translating joy, generosity, thoughtfulness, etc., into pure movement.

### **Emotional-Kinesthetic Processing**

When I first came across the descriptions of different Enneagram personalities, each with its own patterns of thinking, feeling and doing, I knew that each personality style would tend to express itself by using its own peculiar body language and gestures-and that each of these styles could be translated into movement.

For some of us, it's surprisingly difficult to know what it's like to be our own type. It's even more difficult to know what makes another type tick. We can never really know someone else's processes if we judge them by the parameters of our own lens. At best, we can observe their behaviors, and imagine what the motivation behind them might be. A powerful way to "get inside" and to get a taste of the thinking and feeling states of others, could be achieved if we approximate their behaviors by translating them into movement. Though this may not be an exact match of what others feel, it can provide a much closer picture than intellectual speculation alone.

This kind of processing develops a kinesthetic awareness of:

- \* our own patterns-including our strengths as well as our weaknesses;
- \* the patterns of others;
- \* how to develop strengths that don't come naturally to us.

This kind of kinesthetic awareness is acquired by establishing "neuron pathways" and developing "muscle memory" for the range of emotional states.

### **Neuron Pathways**

This theory is based on a complex yet straightforward information system in the body. The body is loaded with systems that carry messages and convey information. The systems are made up of nerves, neurons, neuron peptides, molecules, receptors, pherons,

membranes, muscles, and connective tissue, which together form what is called the system of "neuron pathways."

When you touch a hot stove, a message goes from your finger, to a nerve, to a muscle, to a neuron synapse which innervates or informs a muscle, to neuron peptides, another nerve, another muscle, to your brain, which interprets the sensation as "HOT." The brain then sends the message, "Remove your hand or you'll burn yourself" back in the reverse direction along the same neuron pathway, to nerves, neuron peptides, neuron synapses, innervating the muscles, which causes the hand to retract. All this happens so quickly that it seems instantaneous.

The body is brilliant and has learned and memorized thousands, perhaps millions or even billions, of neuron pathways. Every act you've ever done, every emotion you've ever felt, every thought you've ever had, has sparked along a neuron pathway-sometimes a well-established one, sometimes creating a brand new one. As is true for all forms of training, the frequently used pathways are much more developed than those that are not.

Take the neuron pathways for grasping a cup and drinking from it. This pathway wasn't well-developed when we were infants, and we had to go through much spilled milk before mastering it. But now, we can reach for a cup, drink without spilling, read the newspaper and have a conversation at the same time!

Repetition is the key to how well we perform a task. The same concept applies to our thinking and feeling states. Anything we call a "habit" is by definition something we do often and have had lots of practice with. Our mental and emotional habits fall into the same category. If you're prone to angry outbursts, it means that you feel anger often-that anger is readily accessible, on the surface, and can be expressed with ease.

Likewise, a behavior pattern we don't engage in, will not have a developed pathway-e.g., someone without self-confidence in all likelihood lacks the direct pathway for its expression.

We must keep in mind that messages travel along neuron pathways in both directions-from the inside out (e.g., having a certain thought or feeling will cause you to move in a certain way)-and from the outside in (e.g., moving in a certain way will cause you to feel or think a certain way).

This principle can be observed with someone under hypnosis-if the subject's hand is closed into a fist, the other hand will close also, and he may even strike out. His jaw will clench, his body tighten, and he may begin to remember a time when he was angry, or even wake up real feelings of anger.

Combining this principle with the intelligence of the body, we know that we can train and develop all sorts of new neuron pathways-and train ourselves in any area, including how to access internal feeling and thinking states, even those that have been elusive. Armed with this knowledge and ability, we don't have to stay locked to our habitual responses, but can make our actions appropriate to each situation.

## **Good and Bad Habits**

As mentioned before, the seeds of all virtues and vices are contained in each of us. We have the potential to be either a criminal or a saint. Who we become is a question of development, values, choices, will and desire.

For example, if you want to develop self-confidence, you could first generate the experience of it by moving the way a confident person does: stand with your feet planted firmly on the ground, feel a solid connection from your feet into your hip sockets, engage your deep abdominal muscles, feel your arms firmly connected into your back and shoulders, and fill your lungs completely with each breath. Maintaining that physicality, move in a deliberate, calm way. This exercise may feel awkward at first, but with repetition, as you pave that neuron pathway, it becomes easier, and eventually even familiar. After that, when you need to recall the feeling of self-confidence, you'll be able to position your body in the appropriate way, the neuron pathway will be activated, the inner state will arise, and you will in fact feel more self-confident.

## **Points to Remember**

1. There is a relationship between thoughts, feelings and the body.
2. Thinking, feeling and behavior patterns can be translated into pure movement concepts of space, time, and force.
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## **Working with Enneagram Type-Specific Issues**

### **Motivation and Will**

It's equally important to explore not just healthy or virtuous patterns of each type, but the fixated or pathological ones as well. There are several reasons for this. We often don't know when we're engaging in fixated behaviors, nor what it does to us emotionally or energetically when we get stuck there. Also, we may not be aware of how others react to us when we're there. Spending conscious and kinesthetic time exploring the darker states can give us a more objective experience, and help us to avoid them in the future.

Also, there is truth to the proverb that you appreciate light more once you've also known the dark. It could be difficult to understand courage if you don't know fear, true nurturing if you don't know smothering, joy if you don't know sorrow, etc.

There are EnneaMotion exercises based on assuming stances representing the strengths of each type. This enables us to both gain a better understanding of the internal experiences of others, as well as training ourselves to access these qualities when needed.

This is part of "training a good habit." When we want to make change in ourselves or in our lives, we can exert will and take action so as to change our habitual and sometimes undesirable responses. There is a way; it comes down to motivation and will.

### **Closing Note**

The journey of personal development is a multi-faceted process of body, mind, and spirit. Understanding personality and mental makeup are important. But the body must not be forgotten, as it too is a primary tool for transformation. Developing the ability to "hear" the body is just as important as developing the ability to quiet the mind. A final thought from Assagioli's *Act of Will*:

I have a body, but I am not my body.  
I have feelings, but I am not my feelings.  
I have thoughts, but I am not my thoughts.

Then who am I?

I am consciousness and awareness.  
I am able to observe, direct and balance  
my psychological processes and  
my actions.

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