



ENERGY CONCEPTS

Introduction to the concepts of Zero Balancing

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Abstract This paper presents the theoretical basis for Zero Balancing, a bodywork modality that claims to balance energy and structure within the body. Energy is perceived as anything that is relatively mobile, whilst structure is that which is relatively stable. The relationship between these two is part of everyday life. The practice of Zero Balancing is also discussed. Focussing on the bone, and using a particular quality of touch, Zero Balancers create a special kind of held tension in the client's body called a fulcrum. Fulcrums make an environment in which unusual change is possible. The paper concludes by describing how fulcrums are put together in sequence during a Zero Balancing session.

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Introduction: energy and structure

Fritz Smith, the founder of Zero Balancing, says that when Ida Rolf was asked why she worked on the fascia, she replied that she worked there because that's what she could get her hands on (Smith, 1996)! Perhaps some degree of exasperation lay behind that answer. Any bodywork therapist of experience knows that the many ways in which people change or do not change are not adequately explained by a simple engineering approach to the body. The whole person is involved in every aspect of their physical being. Beliefs, memories, emotions, habits all affect a person's state of health. The question that tantalizes bodyworkers is how to access these intangible but important aspects of a person.

The physical reality of the body's structure is at least reliably there to be worked upon. What animates the structure is more uncertain. Many people over many years and cultures have asked what it is that brings life to the body. The Chinese called it 'qi' (or chi), the Indians 'prana' and, early

last century, Europeans named it 'vital force'. These days 'energy' is more commonly used to describe this directing, animating force, even though some people link the word pejoratively with the mystical and the esoteric. Recently, however, informed research, notably by James Oschman (Oschman, 2000), has helped to give scientific credibility to the word when used in the context of healing modalities.

Zero Balancing is a bodywork therapy that sees energy as something profound yet simple and ordinary. 'Energy' represents all that is relatively in motion; 'structure' is all that is relatively stable. Throughout this article, words such as 'tension', 'movement' or 'vibration' could be used equally well in place of 'energy'. 'Energy' also represents electromagnetic fields, heat, electrical impulses and the kinetic energy of movement that we know are constantly changing within the body.¹ The word covers the volatile emotions of a person too, and may be extended to include the spiritual and the transcendental. Very precise in its physical practice, Zero Balancing makes a virtue of keeping

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¹See, for example, the work of Robert Becker (The Body Electric, 1985), Valerie Hunt (Infinite Mind, 1989), and James Oschman (Energy Medicine, 2000).

a soft focus in its thinking about clients. A broadbased word such as energy fits this approach well.

Zero Balancing looks at energy and structure in the body in order to address the relationship between the two. The idea that such a relationship is at work in the body is not new. For instance, Claude Bernard, a father of modern physiology, wrote 'The genes create structures, but the genes do not control them; the vital force does not create structures, the vital force directs them' (Bernard, 1839). Despite recognizing a connection between energy and structure, most therapies still choose to work on one side of the equation. So therapies like acupuncture or homeopathy focus on energy whilst therapies such as Rolfing or chiropractic address a person's physical structure. Zero Balancing is unusual because it works consciously and simultaneously with both. The aim is to bring about the most harmonious relationship possible between the two. In the language of Zero Balancing, this is balancing energy and structure.

This balancing is a familiar part of ordinary life. We change energy when striking a light by varying our force according to whether it is a paper book match or a wooden match. We modify structure by pulling the sides of a skirt taut before zipping it up. Everyday activities constantly recognize that the relationship of energy to structure needs adjustment. A common analogy is with sailing a boat. Sailors know that it is the relationship between the energy of the wind and the structure of the sail that determines the ease of navigation and the direction of the voyage.

Balancing energy and structure within a person should bring about the best possible functioning (at all levels) for that person. Pathology may or may not actually change but the person's experience of living with that pathology can change radically. This emphasis on function means Zero Balancing is also a therapy for the well person. There is always potential for people to experience better functioning and an increased sense of well-being. Zero Balancers become fascinated by how much more well their clients can become!

Zero Balancing bridges the distance between structural and energetic healthcare workers. For the structural worker, it offers an understanding of energy rooted in the physiology of the body. For the energy worker, it offers a grounding in the palpable anatomical reality of the physical body. In addition, the training helps develop a more conscious touch, a skill which will benefit anyone who handles clients.

Zero Balancing teaches a specific vocabulary of touch which stands quite separately from any particular technique. Bringing your own energy

and structure into contact with the energy and structure of the client can be done in several distinct ways. These are identified as blending, streaming, channelling and interface, and bodyworkers can choose and change which connection they make with their clients. Understanding this can affect how you work with your hands, even if you do not practice Zero Balancing. Since touch reflects relationship, learning how to move through this vocabulary demands that you become aware of how you relate to your clients. Unconscious patterns in your relationships with clients may become illuminated as a result of this increased awareness and consequently open to change.

This article gives a brief overall description of Zero Balancing and its origins. It will present the theoretical basis of Zero Balancing, looking particularly at the significance of bones and joints. The article also outlines the practicalities of how we actually do Zero Balancing, in terms of fulcrums, touch, and how these are combined within a protocol.

Origins

Zero Balancing was developed by Fritz Smith in the early 1970s. He is an American medical doctor and osteopath, whose practice became influenced by Eastern teachings about energy when he studied acupuncture. Reluctant to let go of the scientific ideas that had served him well for many years, he worked to integrate the differing truths of Eastern and Western models of healing into a unified system of bodywork. Embodying his unique insights, Zero Balancing is a therapy that attempts to bridge the two worlds. It is taught to healthcare professionals as an adjunct skill, though many come to practice it as a therapy in its own right (Fig. 1).



Figure 1 Fritz Smith, originator of Zero Balancing, demonstrating work on the lower ribs at a workshop in the UK.

Today Zero Balancing is taught internationally by a group of certified teachers, trained by Smith. He continues to teach Advanced workshops, sharing his latest thoughts on refining and developing Zero Balancing practice.

Description

The basic premise of Zero Balancing is that people have both an energy body and a physical body, and that these may be accessed together by a specific kind of touch. Holding energy and structure simultaneously and consciously in relationship during a Zero Balancing session can result in a more harmonious state of balance for the whole person. This balance is a dynamic state, reflecting and responding to life. Enhanced capacity to respond means that clients' own healing processes are activated. They can release old patterns of stress held within their bodies and better resist the development of disease. Balancing energy and structure also enables clients to experience themselves more fully at the psychological level: "It feels like you're giving me back to myself" one client said to the author.

The client remains fully clothed and lying on his or her back during a session. The practitioner evaluates and then balances the relationship between energy and structure by gently lifting, stretching, pressing into, or rotating specific parts of the body (Figs. 2–4).

The anatomical focus of Zero Balancing work is the bone, the underlying structure that holds us together and maintains correct spatial relationships within the body. Because bone is the densest living structure of the body, it is considered to carry a correspondingly powerful charge of energy. Specific



Figure 2 Lifting and balancing the lumbar area. Drawing by Gina Michaels.

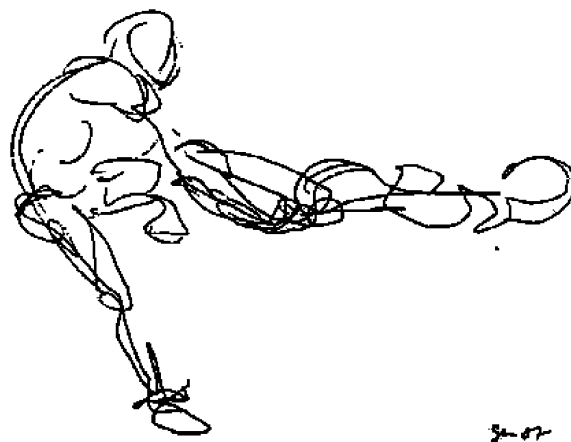


Figure 3 The hip is balanced with traction and a small degree of added medial rotation. Drawing by Gina Michaels.

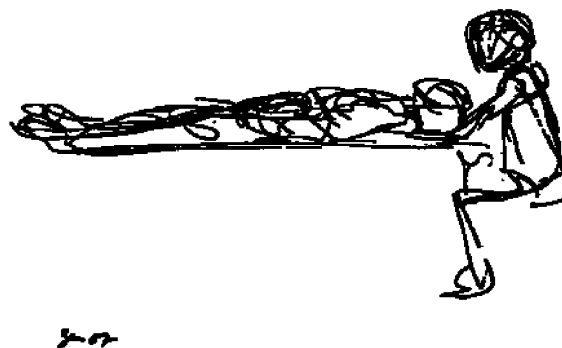


Figure 4 Lifting, stretching, pressing and rotating movements are all used to balance the client's upper body and neck. The Zero Balancer sits in order to offer fully grounded support. Drawing by Gina Michaels.

forces such as gravitational pull are, undoubtedly, carried and mediated by the skeleton. Energy flows through all the bones but can be accessed and influenced most readily in certain joints. These joints are known as foundation or semifoundation joints and they are defined by the characteristics, described later, that make them particularly suitable places to address in Zero Balancing work.

Zero Balancers do not look for pathology within the body. They balance energy and structure in these key joints, feeling for places that draw their attention. The method of balancing is for the practitioner to create in several planes a pleasurable degree of tension within the client's tissue that is then held still. This is a fulcrum. It offers an intense and neutral point of balance around which the client's energy and structure can become differently organized. Fulcrums will be discussed more fully later. The practitioner follows a protocol in moving through the client's body, evaluating,

balancing and reevaluating, with pauses for the client to integrate what has happened in response to the fulcrum. The hands-on part of a session takes from 20 to 40 minutes (Box 1).

Theory

Bone

Bone is a highly responsive tissue that is constantly being remodelled by the application of forces via the tendons and in relationship to gravity. It belongs properly to the connective tissue system of the body, arising as it does from the embryonic mesenchyme from which all other connective tissue components are formed. The live bit of bone is made up of bone cells. The rest of its matrix is made up of collagen and apatite. The relationship between these two is both highly ordered and directional. This has significance for Zero Balancing work. The very stuff of bone is made up of a

relationship between ordered 'structure' and directional force or 'energy'. In addition, the collagen and apatite make up complex geometric forms in the bone. They may be appropriately addressed therefore by a touch that echoes that shaping. The definition of a fulcrum in the USA students' Core Zero Balancing Study Guide (Smith, 2000) is 'a complicated geometric form which, when held stationary, becomes a point around which a person can reorient'.

Collagen is a major structural component of all connective tissues (bone, periosteum, tendons, ligaments, fascia) throughout the body. One of the properties of collagen is that electrical fields are generated when it is stretched or compressed. This property is one possible mechanism by which fulcrums to the skeletal structure affect a person. Pressure directly into the bone stimulates a piezoelectric response in its collagen. Since the bone is covered in periosteum, which is absolutely continuous with the muscle tendons attaching to the bone, this response is rapidly conducted through the tensegrous network of the whole body,

Box 1 Zero Balancing Case History 1

By Phil Greenfield—Zero Balancer and practitioner of the McTimoney Technique

Christine approached me 1 year ago for assistance with a shoulder problem of 15 years duration. She presented with acute and constant pain around the insertion of pectoralis major, aggravated by lifting light objects at a distance. She found it impossible to lie on the affected side. Her ability to abduct the arm was severely limited, and she could not reach behind her back.

Christine said that the shoulder pain and movement restrictions had developed "out of the blue", with no associated traumatic incident. I ascertained that the problem had commenced about 6 months after the sudden death of her husband in a tragic work accident.

Christine had received physiotherapy and cortisone shots from her GP, and had also attended chiropractic clinics, to no avail. I decided to work with her using Zero Balancing.

During the first Zero Balancing session, with Christine lying supine, my evaluations showed a significantly raised level of upper body tension, focused especially around the acromion and coracoid processes. The general elasticity of movement on lifting the scapula toward the ceiling with my fingers was much reduced, especially on the affected side. The posterior angles of ribs eight to ten, and the lower aspect of the sternum felt especially unyielding to my touch. I also noticed that Christine's breath was almost entirely located to the upper body, with little evidence of diaphragmatic inspiration.

During the session, the still, gentle fulcrums I offered to her posterior ribs engaged the curiosity of her attention, her breathing started to become more full, the chest relaxed and she started to cry very gently.

On returning 1 week later her pain had almost gone and her mobility had improved greatly. She had done much crying in the week, completing a grieving process that she had deliberately curtailed six months after her loss—a curtailment that had unfortunately set up a dysfunctional breathing pattern resulting in an overloading of the capacity of many of the muscles that should allow a freedom of scapular movement.

I instructed Christine in diaphragmatic breathing to help stabilize the release in the chest, and she is now pain free and has regained full mobility.

beneficially affecting its overall energy field (Oschman, 2000).

Passing a weak electrical current through the solution tropocollagen causes matted collagen fibres to form 'in rows perpendicular to the lines of force' (Becker and Seldon, 1985). It seems to follow that any piezoelectrical current produced through stretch or pressure could alter the body's structure in relationship to the direction of that current. In Zero Balancing theory, all fulcrums create a clearer stronger (i.e. more organized) field. The realignment of collagen fibres points to a physical mechanism by which this theoretical principle may be expressed in action. The directional force of fulcrums may accordingly release old patterning held in the bone, and help a person to discover new possibilities of body usage.

Bone and gravity are seen to be intimately connected. The force of gravity stimulates the bone to activity and growth. The loss of bone-mass experienced by astronauts shows this dramatically. On earth, our skeletal structure is constantly and responsively reshaping as we move through our lives under the influence of the gravitational field. Bone's strength and rigidity enable us to engage actively with gravity. Chronic tension results when the musculature is used to resist gravity instead of conducting it through the skeletal structure. When our bones are correctly aligned, we can actually experience a paradoxical feeling of lift as we stand up and allow ourselves to drop into the force of gravity. The sense of weight is our normal proprioceptive response to gravity (Chen and Ingber, 1999; Ingber, 1998). Fulcrums create a very precise degree of stretch in weight-bearing joints. Whether lifting or stretching, Zero Balancers find the exact place where clients can 'lean' into the experience of contact (see 'donkey connection' below) and they stop at that place to hold the fulcrum. Thus, a fulcrum mimics gravity when clients experience themselves supported in stillness and, as they relax into this support, they often feel the same paradoxical sense of lift and weight. To create this experience, a Zero Balancer has to be well grounded and positioned, that is, in good relationship with gravity. The client's own weight then does the work. This is one of the reasons why Zero Balancing is such a safe therapy to practice for both client and practitioner.

One of Smith's insights that comes from evaluating both Western and Eastern models is that the traditional locations for the chakras appear to correspond exactly to the curves of the skeleton. If we postulate a flow of energy down the spine, it is easy to see how vortices could form at these curves, like the small whirls at the bends of fast

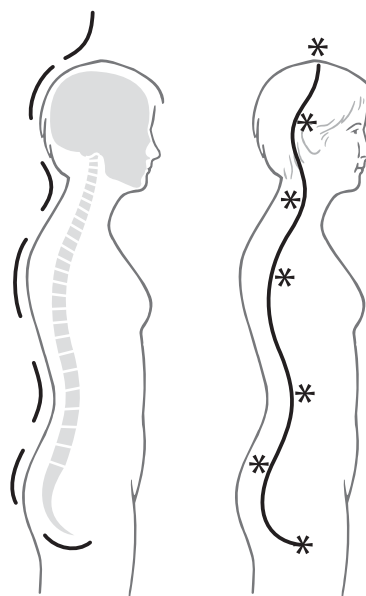


Figure 5 The curves of the spine are shown to correspond with the sites of the proposed energy centres known as chakras.

running streams. Smith's training in acupuncture led him to view this vertical flow through the skeleton from the perspective of Chinese tradition in which the Tao divides into Heaven and Earth, and humanity (and all of life) is formed from their consequent interaction (Fig. 5).

This metaphorical view of the skeleton's significance is echoed in common speech. Bones are at the core of the body, beneath our conscious awareness and control. We say: "I knew it in my bones" to express a subjective sense of ultimate truth. The skeletal system is in this way considered to be 'the repository for the deepest sense of being' (Lauterstein, 1994).

Zero Balancing also addresses the movement of energy through the skeleton that is created as we walk. Forces are transmitted in the shape of a series of figure eight patterns as the body receives the impact of first one foot, then the other, whilst resisting gravity. Walking may be instinctive but we learn our idiosyncratic ways of walking and responding to gravity, and we can change them. Unsurprisingly, Zero Balancing theory considers this figure of eight pattern to be the energy flow that makes each person a unique and autonomous individual (Fig. 6).

Zero Balancing sees the accidents of personal history and the essence of a person that transcends those events as residing in the bone. Working with bone, therefore, is seen as a way to reach both the particular and the universal within a person.

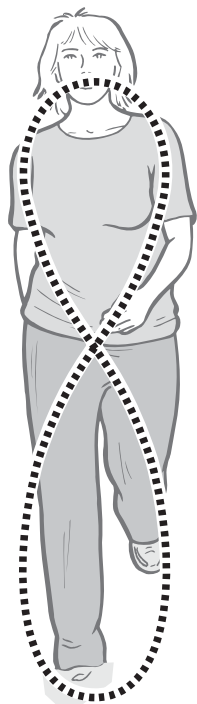


Figure 6 Forces generated by walking form a series of figure eight patterns through the skeletal system.

Joints

Forces travelling through the skeletal structure are most readily accessible at the joints. Whilst some of the force 'jumps' the gap between one bone and the next, travelling directly through the joint fluid, much of it travels through the ligaments and/or tendons that span the joint. Whatever the route, the force must become dispersed and consequently less organized in order to travel from one bone to another. This more chaotic or disordered space offers a correspondingly greater opportunity for difference in the configuration of forces as they reunite on the other side of the joint (Fig. 7).

There are joints, key to Zero Balancing, whose primary function is to transmit forces through the body rather than to produce mobility per se. Freely moveable joints, such as the elbow, clearly exist primarily to move one part of the body in relation to another and they are not the focus of Zero Balancing work. Instead, Zero Balancing addresses a series of joints, called 'foundation' and 'semi-foundation' joints, that are defined by their common characteristics. These are that they have little or no intrinsic musculature, that they have a very small range of movement, and that they 'deal with the transmission and balance of mechanical and energetic forces in the body rather than with the movement and locomotive components of the musculoskeletal system' (Smith, 1986). An example

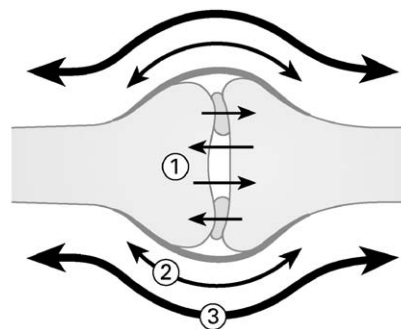


Figure 7 How forces are transmitted through joints. Energy can theoretically move through joints in three ways: (1) directly from bone to bone, including any cartilage that may be there; (2) through the ligaments that support the joint and limit its movement; (3) through any surrounding soft tissue (muscles, ligaments, fascia, skin, etc.).

is the sacroiliac joint whose 'primary role... is that of shock absorption' (Travell and Simons, 1992) (Box 2).

These characteristics make such joints particularly suitable places for influencing the flow of energy. Because they have no intrinsic musculature, or none that may be voluntarily exercised, we have no conscious control over the functioning of these joints. They are affected by external pressures or events but have no way to free themselves of any resultant restriction in their already limited range of movement. Instead the body must adjust around the restriction, leading to a potentially widespread pattern of compromise. However, precisely because there is little or no muscle to absorb or respond to the stretch, creating a small degree of tension in these joints appears to send a particularly strong bioelectrical signal throughout the body.

Many of these joints are too deep in the body to touch directly and so fulcrums are applied to bones that have a referred effect on the joint. Fulcrums introduced at key places along the body of the rib, for example, can affect the functioning of the three semifoundation costovertebral joints where the rib head articulates with the vertebrae. Since foundation and semifoundation joints function to transmit forces, working with individual joints has both a local and a more widespread effect.

At the edge of our voluntary range of motion we may be said to be at the edge of our known self, or at our 'growing edge'. Foundation and semifoundation joints have no voluntary range of movement. Consequently, work directed there is frequently experienced by clients as giving them new information about themselves. Even though these joints are outside the consciousness that comes with

Box 2 Foundation and semifoundation joints

These joints are thought to serve as bridges between our physical self and our subtle anatomy. They are defined by their characteristics.

Foundation joints

Characteristics:

1. Extremely small range of movement
2. No intrinsic musculature
3. Deal with the transmission of force rather than locomotion

Some examples of foundation joints:

Pubic symphysis
 Carpal joints
 Manubriosternal joint
 Sacroiliac joints
 Tarsal joints

The sacroiliac and tarsal joints are key places for fulcrums in Basic Zero Balancing

Semi-foundation joints

Characteristics:

1. Very small range of movement
2. Some intrinsic musculature but all involuntary
3. Deal with the transmission of force rather than locomotion

Some examples of semifoundation joints:

Costosternal joints
 Tibiofibular articulation
 Intervertebral joints
 Costovertebral joints

Basic Zero Balancing primarily addresses the intervertebral and costovertebral joints

voluntary control, their state of being still contributes to the current sense of self. Restrictions here may be 'silent' but people will frequently feel the restriction retrospectively, as they experience how much more fluid and grounded they feel after a Zero Balancing session. Both physically and psychologically, unconscious boundaries within the self seem to have been extended, offering potential for change in ways that may previously have been difficult for that individual to consider possible.

Practice**Fulcrums**

Fulcrums are the tool by which a Zero Balancer balances energy and structure. They create a

clearer stronger field in the body, and offer a point of stillness around which the person can reorganize. They are focussed predominantly on the skeletal system. They vary in form but they are always built in the same way.

To create a fulcrum, a Zero Balancer introduces a degree of tension into the tissues of the client's body in order to take out looseness. This is like being on the edge of someone's awareness: they know you are there but indistinctly. Then more tension is added until there is a sense of being in connection with the whole person. This is known as taking up the slack. At this point the client is fully engaged and any further movement is translated directly into his or her experience. Taking up the slack is considered to be the way into the energy body. This may be felt easily if two people hold a scarf between them. One person holds the scarf firmly whilst the other adds tension in clear stages

to the scarf in the way described. Once the slack has been taken up, further movements are experienced by the person passively holding the scarf as qualitatively different—as a movement that happens inside his or her own body.

Once the slack is taken up, a small movement in two or more planes is created which is held still. This is a fulcrum. Imagine pushing a child on a swing. Let yourself feel the thrust as you push. If you then imagine you have caught and held the swing as it comes back towards you, you will feel in your hands the momentum that is still held in the caught unmoving swing. This dynamic stillness is what you feel when you hold a fulcrum in the body (Box 3, Fig. 8).

The attention of the practitioner makes a difference. She needs to pay attention to both structure and energy simultaneously. An analogy would be standing in a small boat on a choppy sea. You might choose to ignore or blend with the sensation of the water moving and focus on the feel of the boat's structure, the roughness of the wooden planks and the raised points where the nails are. Or you might choose to blend with the boat and focus on the feel of the water, the uneven rhythm of the waves and the sense of depth beneath your feet. If, however, you sink into yourself and hold interface with both the movement of water and structure of boat simultaneously, it is possible to feel both at once and to have a sense of the relationship between the two.

The fulcrum is seen as an opportunity offered to the client in which the Zero Balancer creates the conditions for change. The client alone makes the change and this is an actual body felt experience.

One client expressed it like this: "It's peculiar. I know that you're doing it, but it feels from inside as if I'm doing it myself". Receiving Zero Balancing, people can feel themselves responding to the stillness of a fulcrum with involuntary inward shifts. It is apparent that the practitioner is no longer moving, and yet the receiver feels movement, expansion, changes in sensation or emotion, and sometimes a drop into a deeper awareness akin to the meditative state. Clients literally discover how it feels to be able to change. In addition, as has been observed in another field of therapy, 'the process of actually changing feels good' (Gendlin, 1981).

Touch—donkeys and interface

Zero Balancing emphasizes the quality of touch. The first aspect of touch is seen as an essential

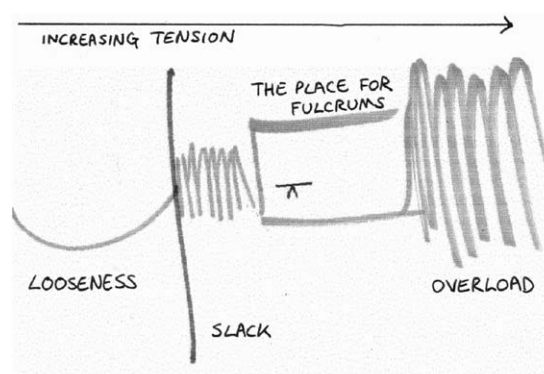


Figure 8 Different degrees of tension affect your engagement with the client. (Sketch by Fritz Smith.)

Box 3 Exercise: looseness and slack

Your partner holds a scarf firmly in his hand, stabilizing himself so that his contact remains constant. Take the other end of the loose scarf and draw it towards yourself until you feel connected to the place where he is holding the scarf. You have taken out looseness. Pause and notice how this feels in your hands. Add a little more straight traction until you feel yourself connected, through the scarf, to your partner as a whole. Notice how this feels: you have taken up the slack and are in contact with the energy body. You are now at the place represented by a box in Fig. 8. You can check this by adding another small plane of movement to the scarf with your other hand: a lift or curve. Does your partner experience the movement happening within his body? If you add too much traction, your partner will have to work too hard to maintain his constancy of contact and will be reacting against your touch rather than responding to it. This is overload.

Try this exercise again with scarves of various materials. Each scarf, like each client, has a different structure and so you will need to add differing degrees of traction (or energy) to take up the slack. With practice you can learn to identify from the feeling in your hands the precise degree of traction you need for each individual instance. This exercise illustrates how to engage reliably with the movement or energy within different bodies.

precursor to any work. Practitioners are taught to establish a particular relationship expressed in touch, known as a 'donkey' connection. The name comes from the way donkeys are known to lean, trusting their weight to each other, as they climb mountain paths. Inviting that trusting, instinctive

'lean' response from a client is part of a Zero Balancer's skill. The connection cannot be made unless the practitioner recognizes the uniqueness of each client's response, and continues to stay sensitive to it throughout the session. This is generally made explicit; clients are told at the

Box 4 Exercise: donkey connection

Back to back, with your upper body in contact with your partner's, carefully both move your feet slightly forward away from the midline until you are leaning against each other. Find the degree of lean that means you are relying on each other's support to stay upright, but which feels comfortable and easy to both of you. This may take several small adjustments of weight and position. Once you have both agreed you are there, stay in position for a short while and notice how this feels. When your physical body is still, you will probably experience a process of relaxation continuing at subtle levels, including a developing sense of trust.

Repeat the exercise but now you are taking the role of practitioner and actively offering your partner your back to lean on. The physical movement will be almost exactly the same. Once your partner feels supported and you are also comfortable, hold the position for a while and notice how this feels to you. When you take responsibility for making the donkey connection, it should have the same sense of physical comfort and ease as when you mutually offer support but your centre of gravity feels lower and your feet are more active in grounding. You will have a clear sense of your vertical line. You will find you feel more alert and your eyes are likely to be open with a soft gaze. You will need to make minute adjustments in order to keep your support credible as your partner relaxes into the position and so you will have to be more conscious of the boundary of your back through which you are receiving information. You are working, but the 'work' is primarily your attention (Fig. 9).

This is how to make a donkey connection. In order to practice Zero Balancing, you will need to be able to do this with your hands. Sit at the head of your partner when he is lying prone on a massage couch or bed. Bring your open hands, palm up, under his upper ribs and make enough upward contact to feel the weight of his upper body in your hands without lifting him from the couch. You need to come from your feet so that your whole body is behind you. When you are comfortable and can feel his weight, add a tiny extra degree of lift so that he 'leans' on you. Can you recreate in yourself and in your hands the same feeling you had when offering your back for him to lean on?

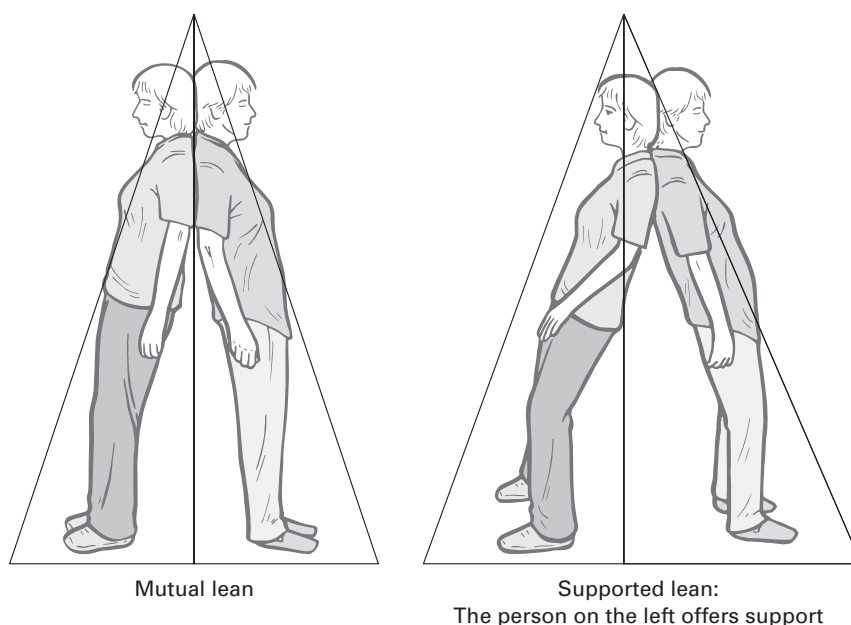


Figure 9 The difference between receiving and creating a donkey connection.

start that everything should feel good or hurt good and are encouraged to say if that is not so. Zero Balancers then calibrate their touch to each individual so that it continually feels safe, pleasurable and respectful for that person to receive. Whatever the practitioner's clinical skills, she accepts as paramount the client's own experience (Box 4, Fig. 9).

To be touched in a way that overtly honours their subjective experience of pleasure or pain is itself reparative for many people. It helps them to own that experience, and that may start to release the tensions that arise from internal conflict around their physical issues. Working on bone readily evokes the 'hurts good' response. The client feels the Zero Balancer's touch coming close to the point of pain but stopping just at that point where it still feels actively good though tender. This unusual sensation offers the client a way of paying attention to the experience of tension within a context of safety and ease. This in itself generates the possibility of change.

Because Zero Balancing is non-diagnostic and does not look for pathology, the touch reflects nothing more than an earnest desire to see what is there. Most people recognize that this touch is different from other therapeutic interventions even if they cannot identify what that difference is. Zero Balancing touch always invites rather than demands. Being touched attentively without any intention to change is, for some clients, a novel experience of being accepted as they are. That very experience of acceptance can enable clients to find their own ways of changing at the emotional and mental level.

Since the clearer stronger field created by a fulcrum also simply offers an opportunity for change, Zero Balancing gives control to the client. Both practitioner and client pay attention to their experience in the moment. 'When you give attention to something without demanding that it be different, that very attentiveness has a profound transforming effect' (Kittisaro, 1989). Here the Venerable Kittisaro is speaking of meditation but he could as well be talking about the process of Zero Balancing. Speaking at Mickleton House, Gloucestershire in 1995, during a workshop, Fritz Smith expressed the same idea: "If you can balance something to neutral without judgement or comparison by holding it in its own space, it will naturally move to its highest possible potential".

The second aspect of Zero Balancing touch is the use of interface. In *Inner Bridges*, Smith identifies four ways in which a person may use touch to connect with another person's energy. These are

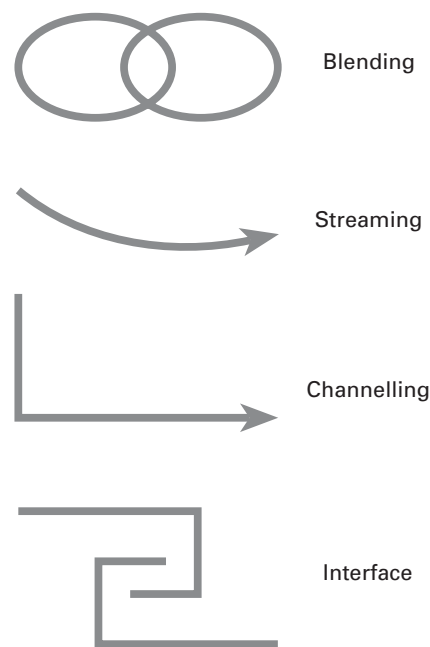


Figure 10 The four kinds of touch that may be used to work with energy.

blending, streaming, channelling, and interface (Fig. 10).

Blending is where both people merge at the point of contact so that part of them becomes a whole that is neither one nor the other but both. This naturally tends to happen if contact is prolonged. In streaming, the energy of one person flows into the other. In channelling, a person acts as a conduit for energy that comes from outside. Interface touch is a contact that consciously maintains awareness the boundaries between the two people so that they remain very sensitively 'in touch' and yet distinctly separate. Using interface touch is a key part of Zero Balancing practice.

Different therapeutic approaches use different touch. Some cranio-sacral therapists, for example, deliberately use a blended touch to work with what they perceive to be the rhythms of the cerebrospinal fluid. Other kinds of body workers and healers may use the whole vocabulary of touch, moving through blending, streaming and channelling as well as working at interface. Good work may be done anywhere within that range.

However, many skilled therapists are not conscious of whether they are blending, streaming, channelling or at interface. This can make it hard for them to be clear, consistent and energetically precise in the kind of connection they make with their clients. Zero Balancing teaches a practitioner how to distinguish between these different ways of touching and, consequently, between different

Box 5 Zero Balancing Case History 2**By Zanna Heighton—Zero Balancer and acupuncturist**

John, a self-employed builder aged 54, sustained a blow to his knee a year ago. A few days later he had a pulmonary embolism. He thought he was going to die but made a fair recovery, though he has been unable to work since. When he came for Zero Balancing, he was depressed and in pain. The depression stemmed from his belief that he would never again be able to work as a builder. He also believed this was the end of the line for him because his father had died from a heart condition in his mid-50s. He had pain around his chest where the embolism had been and was experiencing palpitations during the night which worried him considerably, despite reassurance from his GP. He felt tired all the time and by 3 pm would have to rest for the remainder of the day.

When he sat, his head was extended forward, giving him a pronounced lordosis which badly compromised the mobility of his shoulders. The muscles of his upper thoracic spine were tightly bunched on the left and his whole body was held in tension. Lying on the couch, he needed two pillows to stop his head tilting back.

When he lay down, it was with the experience and anticipation of pain. I spent a few minutes talking to him as I comfortably held his ankles, in order to let this disturbance settle. Taking him into the extension of the first half-moon fulcrum seemed to bring him immediate relief, evidenced by an easing of his breath. His sacrum was pressing hard down on the couch and he had little movement in the SI joints. In all the fulcrums I used during the session, I took care to let each bone get comfortable in my hands and pause momentarily. There was so little available movement in his body that I wanted to encourage every possible bit of voluntary tension to drop before I added any extra planes of movement. This allowed me to engage more deeply with his energy before offering further possibilities. Repeating the experience of being held in this way had the cumulative effect of turning his anticipation of pain into the anticipation of release and comfort. Extreme tightness in the muscles to the left of his lumbar spine became relaxed as I worked. Both hips were tight on inward and outward rotation, but the range and ease of movement increased with the fulcrums used here.

His shoulder girdle was fixed, and all movements of his neck were restricted, although none were absent altogether. I felt his ribs had stuck in full extension, as if held in the position of his first gasp of pain. I encouraged his rib cage to drop into my open hands, and very gently brought my hands up to meet him, taking up his weight so that he could let go of it and bringing my energy into a deep still contact with his. He responded by exhaling tentatively, then again with more assurance. After two similar fulcrums his breath became fuller and organized itself around the rhythm of the work.

He said he was feeling more relaxed than he had done since his illness. His ribcage had been sensitive to touch, especially on the left, but as the muscles softened around the protected area of his heart he was happy for me to work deeper into the available movement of his thoracic spine, and said it felt good. His arms felt thick and heavy, and I worked with them and with his hands, which had been clenched when he lay down. Fulcrums to his carpal bones brought a smile to his face, and he asked if I would repeat them. I could see his attention turn inwards as I extended his arm slightly to allow the free flow of movement from his hand through to his body. He told me afterwards that his hands had been feeling like claws and, as they opened, it seemed to him that his chest had opened too, so that "my heart can breathe".

On reevaluation, all but one of his neck movements had improved, and his shoulder girdle had let go of much of its tension so that it was now more easily mobile.

I saw John weekly for 4 weeks, during which time the nightly anxiety stopped and the pain in his chest went. I talked to him about his posture and, now that he was no longer fixed in a depressive attitude, he made real efforts to hold his head up and look where he was going. I saw him once more a month later. For this session, he only needed one pillow to support his head. He told me during the session that he knew he was getting better: a big admission from a man much accustomed to defeat. In retrospect, he could see how completely disjointed and dispirited he had felt. He is active again, building a bathroom extension to his house, and his main concern is that the weather will hold. He still gets tired in the afternoon, but, as he has put in nearly a day's work by then, he feels that is acceptable.

kinds of relationship. Such information can transform the working life of a therapist who blends unconsciously with her clients. Their problems may become part of her own field and so she ends each working day exhausted. Part of what makes Zero Balancing distinctive as a therapy is that it chooses to use only interface touch that connects client and practitioner as entirely discrete individuals in an equal relationship.

The additional benefit for practitioners is that their own energy (alongside that of their clients) appears to become more organized as they work at interface, so that Zero Balancers commonly find their own health and vitality increase as they work. To do Zero Balancing, people need to pay attention from a still place within themselves. 'The combination of stillness and attention allows a person to live in the present moment; to be fully aware of living and to have a vivid experience of what is happening' (Hamwee, 1999) (Box 5).

Protocol

A session of Zero Balancing follows a protocol. An initial fulcrum is offered to the whole body by holding the feet of the prone client slightly elevated and initiating a curved traction which is held. This is known as a half-moon fulcrum (Fig. 11).

The Zero Balancer then works from the lower ribs to the sacroiliac joint, on to the hips, and then to the feet, before integrating the work in the lower half of the body with another half-moon. She then moves to sit at the client's head to work with the upper half of the body—the ribcage, the neck, trapezius, shoulder joints and scapulae. This work concludes with another half-moon introduced to



Figure 11 Giving an opening half-moon fulcrum.



Figure 12 A half-moon fulcrum at the head.

the body by holding the head at the occipital ridge (Fig. 12). A series of closing fulcrums follows in order to integrate the various changes made during the session.

The amount and type of work done in any one place will vary from session to session, but the basic protocol is followed regardless of the client's presenting symptoms. The protocol is seen as a broad brush stroke that will pick up whatever needs to be addressed. This is particularly valuable in work with clients who present with a multiplicity of symptoms. Instead of chasing diagnosis through a sequence of 'this causes that', the Zero Balancer can hold the whole person in soft focus. Simply following the protocol with full attention on balancing energy and structure gives the client's own system the chance to make changes.

There is a rhythm of enquiry, work, and renewed enquiry throughout the protocol. At every place where work is done, the Zero Balancer uses her hands to ask the client's body: 'What is here?' by evaluating the range of movement of a joint or bone. This is an open question, like initiating conversation rather than interviewing someone for a job vacancy. She then offers a fulcrum or two before asking again: 'What is here?' The client shares the physical experience of the evaluations and so, if change has happened, the client knows it too. This is one of the ways in which the mutuality of the relationship within Zero Balancing is manifest.

Zero Balancers consider a series of small changes to be more effective than a single major change. They also see this as ultimately more stable since it is harder for the body to reinstate an old pattern if the path away from that pattern has been complicated and incremental. A Zero Balancer will therefore not push to clear a restriction completely, but will be satisfied with a shift of

any degree towards better balance. The practitioner has to hold her own internal balance between not taking responsibility for making anything happen, whilst still rigorously monitoring her work to be sure it is as good as she can make it.

Frequent pauses in the work also give Zero Balancing a characteristic rhythm. Since the 'work' is largely done by the client in response to fulcrums, there must be pauses to allow the client time to process and integrate that work. Zero Balancers are taught the involuntary and specific changes in the client's body and breathing pattern that show someone is engaged in this activity. Following these signs enables them to stay alongside each client's own idiosyncratic pattern of response and to fine-tune the session to suit that individual in that moment.

Conclusion

Earlier in this article, reference was made to Zero Balancing being a therapy that offers a simple and everyday way to approach energy. Zero Balancing also honours the structural, paying close attention to it and recognizing its significance. Touching at interface at bone level seems to connect both practitioner and client to the deepest level of physical being.

Zero Balancing is distinctive in its focus on the *relationship* between energy and structure, both in its theory and its actual practice, and this determines when it is appropriate as a therapy. It may be used to improve overall functioning, relieving both physical pain and mental tension. It is particularly indicated when the client manifests some disruption between the relationship of self and body, because balancing energy and structure may be seen as a way to reconcile this relationship.

Such disruption is sometimes expressed directly by clients: "I just don't feel right", but more frequently it is implicit in the story as they tell it. Obvious examples are when events in the client's personal history, whether trauma, prolonged physical pain, psychological influence, or physical or sexual abuse, have left the client distrusting of or, in some sense, absent from his or her body. The clearer and more organized energy fields promoted by Zero Balancing allow forces to pass through leaving less impression and so it is also recommended as a supportive therapy during times of life stress or transition. In addition, Zero Balancing can amplify a state of wellness, bringing clients to a full and rich experience of health.

As a discipline, Zero Balancing is both simple and transparent, whilst being also demanding and profound. Practitioners need to be able to combine precision with fluidity, structured thought with intuitive feeling, and stored experience with a 'blank sheet' state of mind. In other words, they need to be able to balance their own energy and structure as they work. The rewards are great. Zero Balancing allows the practitioner to make contact with so much of a person. At times, as they focus on touching the client's bone and feeling for the inherent forces that travel through it, Zero Balancers may unmistakably experience the whole person coming into their hands. This is a moment of real grace, and holding the person there in stillness, with full attention, makes extraordinary change become possible.

Zero Balancing shows its origins in the Eastern complexity of its simplicity. Like the Tai Qi form, learning how to do it can be the first step on a lifetime's path of fascination. Increasing familiarity with the work leads to a deepening awareness of its many subtleties, until skill becomes art (Box 6).

Box 6 Contact details for Zero Balancing Associations worldwide

USA: 801 West Main Street, Suite 202, Charlottesville, VA 22903, Tel.: (434)244-2458, email: ZBAOffice@zerobalancing.com, website: www.zerobalancing.com

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New Zealand/Australia: 43 Great Barrier Road, Palm Beach, Waiheke Island, NZ, Tel.: + +64(9)3723115, email: zbanza@xtra.co.nz, website: www.zerobalancing.co.nz/

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There are also practitioners in Belgium, Canada, Ireland, Mexico, Morocco, and Spain.

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