



# Freeing the Natural Voice

Imagery and Art  
in the Practice  
of Voice and Language

REVISED AND EXPANDED

by Kristin Linklater

Illustrations by Andre Slob

DRAMA PUBLISHERS

an imprint of Quite Specific Media Group Ltd.,  
Hollywood

© 2006 Kristin Linklater

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior permission of Drama Publishers.

DRAMA PUBLISHERS  
an imprint of  
Quite Specific Media Group Ltd.  
7373 Pyramid Place  
Hollywood, California 90046  
www.quitespecificmedia.com  
e-mail: info@quitespecificmedia.com

This new edition of *Freeing the Natural Voice* is dedicated to the memory of Iris Warren, who was the originator of the idea contained in the first edition, published in 1976. Her work is maintained in this book and augmented with additional exercises that I have developed over the past twenty-five years.

*Uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination.*

—Ludwig Wittgenstein  
*Philosophical Investigations*  
Part I section 6

# Contents

Preface	1
Tribute to Iris Warren	5
An Introduction: The Approach to Vocal Freedom	7
How the Voice Works	13
Why the Voice Does Not Work	19
Preparation for the Work	26
<b>PART ONE: THE TOUCH OF SOUND</b>	<b>29</b>
<i>The First Four Weeks of Work</i>	
1 Workday One	31
<i>Physical Awareness: The spine</i>	
<i>The support of natural breathing . . . a tree</i>	
2 Workday Two	43
<i>Breathing Awareness: Freeing the breath, the source</i>	
<i>of sound . . . the air</i>	
3 Workday Three	65
<i>The Touch of Sound: Initial vibrations . . . pool of water</i>	
4 Workday Four	87
<i>Freeing Vibrations: Lips, head, body . . . rivers of sound</i>	
Intermission Warm-up	117

	<i>The Second Four Weeks of Work</i>	127				
5	<b>Workday Five</b> <i>Freeing the Channel: Jaw awareness and relaxation</i> <i>Getting rid of tension . . . prison gate or open door</i>	129		14	<b>Workday Fourteen</b> <i>Sinus Resonators: Middle of the face, middle range . . .</i> <i>the road out</i>	245
6	<b>Workday Six</b> <i>Freeing the Channel: Tongue awareness</i> <i>Stretching, loosening, releasing . . . story-teller</i>	139		15	<b>Workday Fifteen</b> <i>Nasal Resonators: Carrying power . . . mountain peak</i>	263
7	<b>Workday Seven</b> <i>Freeing the Channel: The soft palate</i> <i>Opening and limbering . . . space</i>	161		16	<b>Workday Sixteen</b> <i>Range: Three to four octaves . . . from basement to attic</i>	275
8	<b>Workday Eight</b> <i>The Spine and the Channel:</i> <i>Connection . . . source, journey, destination</i>	173		17	<b>Workday Seventeen</b> <i>Skull Resonator: High intensity . . . playing the dome</i>	279
9	<b>Workday Nine</b> <i>Throat Awareness: The open throat . . . chasm</i>	181		18	<b>Workday Eighteen</b> <i>Exercising Your Range: Strength, flexibility, freedom . . .</i> <i>swinging</i>	285
	<b>PART TWO: THE RESONATING LADDER</b>	185		19	<b>Workdays Nineteen, Twenty, Twenty-one, and Thereafter</b> <i>Articulating the voice into Words: Consonants and vowels—</i> <i>voice joints</i>	295
	<i>The Next Six to Eight Weeks of Work</i>				<b>PART THREE: THE LINK TO TEXT AND ACTING</b>	325
10	<b>Workday Ten</b> <i>Developing and Strengthening: Chest, mouth,</i> <i>teeth resonators</i> <i>Finding resonance . . . purple, blue, yellow</i>	187			Words . . . imagery	327
11	<b>Workday Eleven</b> <i>Releasing the Voice from the Body: Calling, triads . . .</i> <i>the rainbow</i>	199			About Texts . . . art	343
	Intermission Workout	206			Tuning in to the Text . . . imagination	357
12/13	<b>Workdays Twelve and Thirteen</b> <i>Breathing Power: Diaphragm, intercostals, pelvic floor . . .</i> <i>breathing gym</i>	213			Appendix	375
	<i>Sensitivity and Power: Enlivening and strengthening</i> <i>impulses . . . free weights</i>				Acknowledgments	381

shifting the controls from external, physical muscles to internal, psychological impulses. The criterion for assessing progress lay in the answer to the question "How does it feel?" rather than "How does it sound?" The ultimate aim was, and is, to free oneself through the voice. Iris Warren's constant emphasis was "I want to hear you, not your voice." This was happening at a time when the "voice beautiful" was still very much in vogue, when pear-shaped vowels and technical skill were preferred to "vulgar" emotion.

My own work with Iris Warren began when I was an acting student at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) in the 1950s. After completing the program, I spent two years acting in a repertory company and in 1957 was invited back to LAMDA as a student-teacher of voice production under Miss Warren. I worked with her, learning and teaching, for six years. In 1963 I decided to come to America to set up my own voice studio.

During the time that I was both student and teacher at LAMDA, the principal (director) of the school was Michael MacOwan, a visionary teacher whose artistic influence on me continues to this day. He had been a successful director in London's West End but was dissatisfied with the inconsistent quality of the actors with whom he had to work. He decided to remedy the problem at the root by taking over a failing drama school and completely redesigning it from mission to curriculum. He was my acting teacher and laid the foundation for my understanding of Shakespeare. With uncanny prescience, he saw my potential as a teacher and issued the invitation to me to learn Iris's approach to voice training.

More than forty years on, I marvel at the accuracy of Iris Warren's anatomical and psychological understanding of the voice. With the advance of technology, voice scientists began discovering in the 1970s and '80s what Iris knew intuitively. Thus far, no voice scientist has come up with procedures for enhancing voice production that perform better than the exercises Iris Warren devised in the middle of the last century.

My life-debt to my first, formative teachers, Michael MacOwan and Iris Warren, has, I think, been settled by my teaching. I will, however, always respect the memory of Michael and Iris and acknowledge with a degree of awe the long tradition to which I find I belong. I hope that Michael's devotion to truthful acting and Iris's unerring instinct for the sound of truth in the actor's voice have been preserved in me over the past several decades and have evolved into the version of those truths that I now teach, educated by the decades but fueled always by passion and tested by instinct.

## An Introduction: The Approach to Vocal Freedom

**T**HIS BOOK IS INTENDED FOR use by professional actors, student actors, teachers of acting, teachers of voice and speech, singers, singing teachers, and interested lay people. Its aims are to provide a series of exercises to free, develop, and strengthen the voice as a human instrument and to present a lucid view of the voice both in the general context of human communication and as a performer's instrument. For simplicity's sake I will address all readers as actors; perhaps those who are "interested lay people" might consider that you are in fact performers in the daily acts and scenes of your lives; as you train yourselves to pay attention to your habits of communication, you will find the same pleasurable state of self-awareness that actors develop as an essential part of their craft. As Jacques notes in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. . . ." Act II, scene 7.

This approach to voice is designed to liberate the natural voice and thereby develop a vocal technique that serves the freedom of human expression. The basic assumption of the work is that everyone possesses a voice capable of expressing, through a two- to four-octave natural pitch range, whatever gamut of emotion, complexity of mood, and subtlety of thought he or she experiences. The second assumption is that the tensions acquired through living in this world, as well as defenses, inhibitions, and negative reactions to environmental influences, often diminish the efficiency of the natural voice to the point of distorted communication. Hence, the emphasis here is on the removal of the blocks that inhibit the human instrument as distinct from, but not excluding, the development of a skillful musical instrument. I must underline at the outset that in our perception of our own voices there is a vital difference to be observed between what is "natural" and what is "familiar."

The result of the work will be to produce a voice that is in direct contact with emotional impulses, shaped by the intellect but not inhibited by it. Such a voice will be a built-in attribute of the body. It will have an innate potential for a wide pitch range, intricate harmonics, and kaleidoscopic textural qualities and will be articulated into clear speech in response to clear thinking and the desire to communicate. The natural voice is transparent, it reveals, not describes, inner impulses of emotion and thought, directly and spontaneously. The person is heard, not the person's voice.

To free the voice is to free the person, and each person is indivisibly mind and body. Since physical processes generate the sound of the voice, the inner muscles of the body must be free to receive the sensitive impulses from the brain that create speech. The natural voice is most perceptibly blocked and distorted by physical tension; it suffers equally from emotional blocks, intellectual blocks, aural blocks, and psychological blocks. All such obstacles are psychophysical in nature, and once they are removed the voice is able to communicate the full range of human emotion and all the nuances of thought. The voice's limits lie only in the limits of desire, talent, imagination, or life experience.

Physical awareness and relaxation are the first steps in the work to be done on the voice. The mind and the body must learn to cooperate in activating and releasing inner impulses and dissolving physical inhibitions. Actors must develop bodies that are sensitive and integrated, rather than super-controlled and muscular; and they must educate the voice into the union of self and body.

The voice communicates the inner world of the psyche to the outer world of attentive listeners both on the stage and in life.

The neuro-scientist Antonio Damasio reminds us that the word *psyche* originally meant "breath and blood": "I marvel at the ancient wisdom of referring to what we now call mind by the word *psyche* which was also used to denote breath and blood" (from *The Feeling of What Happens*, p.30). *Psychology*, then, means the knowledge of breath and blood. Catharsis happens when the *psyche* of the *character* disturbs the breath, blood, and *psyche* of the *audience*. The original meaning of *catharsis*, according to Martha Nussbaum in *The Fragility of Goodness*, was "to shed light into dark places." The word could have been applied to cleaning the kitchen as much as to awakening the inner world of a listener. The voice of the actor should be the most potent theatrical element by which the light of a cathartic event illuminates the dark places, hidden stories, or pent-up emotions of the audience. To achieve that potency, the actor's voice must be rooted in neuro-physiological pathways of the body that are trained to pick up and transmit impulses of emotion,

imagination, psyche, and intellect. The actor must develop a body that sees, hears, feels, and speaks. The actor's brain must *be* his or her body.

The sensitivity with which the sound-waves of the actor's voice can tune into and transmit the brain and body waves of thought and feeling allows communication to emanate and envelop an audience in invisible streams of energy. The speaker is on the stage and in the auditorium at the same time. The voice that originates deep in the body will go beyond the body, enlarging the speaker. Often, a member of the audience will be astonished to see that the actor who seemed six feet tall on stage is, on the street, six inches shorter. When the actor plugs into the character's psyche, the electrical power of the imagination amplifies and activates the vibratory flow of voice so that it pours images and impulses directly into the receptors of the audience. It is the vibrations flowing out from the speaker's body that make the speaker seem larger than life-size.

The paradox is that actors must *train* their voices so that they can sacrifice them. Actors' voices must learn to be dissolved by the impulses of thought and feeling. Actors must not use their voices to describe and transmit the story, but their voices must be wide and long and strong and tender enough to reveal the breadth and depth of the imagination. If the voice is limited by habit and tension, it will limit the transmission of the imagination. The imagination must serve the text but can only partially do so with a limited voice. Let me emphasize here that imagination is not the same as fantasy. The actor's imagination must be trained with the fanaticism that an Olympic athlete trains his or her body to be precisely truthful to the exigencies of the text. This is particularly true of classical and poetic texts, but it is also true of contemporary texts where subtext is the chief informant. You cannot be sure of the accuracy of your subtext unless you can probe the text for its underlying story with laser precision. Indulgent is the actor who fantasizes around the text. An actor whose imagination is sparked and ignited by the text discards the first, second, or even third layers of information gleaned from the text and digs deeper into her or his own imaginative archaeology until the seed of the playwright's meaning impregnates and gestates and is reborn through a cellular metamorphosis in the actor's organism.

Perfect communication demands from the actor a balanced quartet of emotion, intellect, body, and voice. No one part can compensate with its strength for the weakness of another. The actor who plays Hamlet with his emotional instrument dominant but his voice and intellect underdeveloped will only communicate the generalized tone of Hamlet's pain and agony. The audience will think, "He's suffering a lot—but why?" The emotionally available actress who plays Ophelia may tap a vein of madness that is au-

thetic, but without the voice and textual understanding to shed light onto the situation she will be dismissed by the audience as incidental to the story.

In contrast with these emotionally driven performances are those of two actors in whom the thought process dominates their work: a too-powerful intellect can also unbalance the actor's quartet. These actors intelligently argue the case for Hamlet and for Ophelia but fail to move their audience. They are bound to fail in fully communicating their characters if their emotions are not involved. A very athletic actor might dominate the quartet with his physical instrument: playing Henry V he might choose to do a back flip off the battlements and breathlessly launch into, "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more/Or close the wall up with your English dead..." The audience will be transfixed by his physical prowess but pay no attention to what he is saying. Without intellect, voice, and emotion, physical energy is mere flashiness. Communication is skewed because the quartet is again unbalanced.

The same kind of imbalance happens when an actor's voice is his strongest instrument: the audience may be moved by the sound and rhythm of his speech, but without physical embodiment, clear thought, and emotional truth that voice, despite its strength and beauty, is counter-productive to perfect communication.

The causal conductor of the actor's quartet is the creative imagination, and the actor's training must deliver to that conductor a voice, a body, intellect, and emotions that can serve the creative impulse without being distorted by personal habit. While this book focuses on the vocal instrument, its overall aim is not just to develop the voice but also to contribute to the development of an actor's quartet capable of creating unlimited characterizations.

In the following chapters I have tried to capture the work that Iris Warren said should never be written down and that I use daily in the classroom. It is intended, by its nature, to be conveyed orally, and it is dangerous to confine and define it in printed words. I resisted writing the original edition of this book for years, but its value has been proven over the past thirty years and the risk of its being misunderstood outweighed by the many experiences of understanding. The additional material must now stand the test of publication.

The obvious strength of the oral approach is in the one-to-one relationship between teacher and pupil. No two people, no less two voices, are the same, and each person's problems differ. How do you teach relaxation? By carefully laying a hand on the breathing area, on the shoulders, on the back of the neck or the jaw to feel whether the muscles are responding to the

messages being sent to them. How do you induce a new use of the voice? By moving the body in new directions that break conditioned, habitual movements. How can the student know that a new experience is a constructive one without feedback from some external and trustworthy guide? To this last question I have no good answer, and do believe that a book is a poor substitute for a class.

It is also important to keep in mind that this book may be difficult to use because it requires dealing with cause rather than effect. The exercises are concerned more with re-thinking usage than with re-doing sounds. This is a book to be engaged in slowly. It is a practical book for practical use, not one to be skimmed for new ideas.

Whenever possible, I suggest that the serious student work with at least one other person, taking turns reading the instructions and checking the results. Mutual teaching can be very rewarding, and it incorporates the central point of voice work, namely communication.

If you have to work alone, you must sacrifice your desire for results to the experience of causes. Although you will need your intellect to understand the exercises, you must abandon it when *doing* them in favor of feelings and sensory impressions. You must not jump to conclusions as to what is right or wrong because you are already a well-developed censor of self. Nor can you trust your judgment, since it is biased by habitual ideas of good and bad and wary of new experiences.

You will be reconditioning a way of communicating that has served you, for better or worse, all your life, so in order to effect real change you must plan regular and committed work for at least a year. Also, realize that you are using your voice throughout the day, and that your exercises can, and should, be practiced continually. Even if you do work regularly, progress is slow; in the beginning there can be marked improvement, but this will level off for a time. Most important of all, you must have patience. Even after you understand and practice the exercises, it may take time before you can experience the promised freedom in performance. But when you do, the results will be enormously satisfying.

Throughout the book I suggest the amount of time it might take to learn an exercise and the length of time you should practice and absorb it before moving on to the next one. These times are offered as a guide and will undoubtedly be adapted to each person's capability.

This introduction offers a general context for the ensuing work. Before proceeding to the exercises, however, you must have some theoretical knowledge of how your voice works and some psychophysical understanding of what may be preventing it from working to its full potential.

# How the Voice Works

Here is a simple physiological outline of the mechanics of speaking:

- (1.) There is an impulse in the motor cortex of the brain.
- (2.) The impulse stimulates breath to enter and leave the body.
- (3.) The outgoing breath makes contact with the vocal folds creating oscillations.
- (4.) The oscillations create frequencies (vibrations).
- (5.) The frequencies (vibrations) are amplified by resonators.
- (6.) The resultant sound is articulated by the lips and tongue to form words.

This picture is easily grasped. It is, unfortunately, a gross over-simplification of an infinitely intricate human process.

Here now is a more scientific description:

- (1.) A series of impulses are generated in the motor cortex of the brain and sent through neural pathways to the speech structures.
- (2.) The impulses are timed to arrive at the different locations in the body so that a smooth, coordinated set of actions takes place.
- (3.) First the vocal tract from the lips and nose to the lungs is opened up and the inspiratory muscles of respiration contract to lower pressure in the thorax so that air can rush into the lungs relatively unimpeded.
- (4.) When sufficient air has been inspired for the desired utterance, the respiratory system reverses itself and by a combination of elastic recoil of distended tissue and by abdominal and thoracic



muscle contraction, forces are developed to push air back up the vocal tract and out through the mouth and nose.

- (5.) In the larynx, however, the vocal folds have at least partially closed at the beginning of exhalation so that the air stream is now impeded in its upward path.
- (6.) The pliable vocal folds are set into quasi-synchronous oscillation as the air passes between them.
- (7.) These oscillations break up the outgoing breath stream into puffs of air that are released into the vocal tract above.
- (8.) These puffs of air activate the air in the resonation cavities of the pharyngeal, oral, and nasal passages, producing sound in the upper vocal tracts.
- (9.) The shape, volume, and opening of the resonators determine the overtone structure of the sound, while the basic pitch is determined by the rate at which the vocal folds vibrate.
- (10.) Resonation comes in two types: the first shapes or colors the voice generated at the larynx, regardless of the speech sound intended (i.e., creates the timbre or tonal qualities of the voice). The second type modifies the larynx-generated sound for a specific speech sound. The first type of sound is always present for the speaker, and the second type depends on what the speaker wants to say—the movements involved in this comprise what is called articulation.

Dr. Robert Sataloff has contributed an elegant and extended account of the anatomy and physiology of the voice that is included as an Appendix to this book.

From this point on, I shall make minimal use of exact scientific terminology. I have outlined the physical anatomy faithfully, but I have chosen to describe the voice by its perceivable features in metaphor and in analogy. This simplification may make the voice scientist quail, but it has proven to be the best approach for the voice user.

Most of the time my references to, and images of, the voice and breath mechanisms are anatomically accurate. But there are instances when a rigorous devotion to anatomical exactness would be counterproductive to the freedom of vocal function. Let me give an example of this: it is an anatomical fact that the voice originates in the larynx; that the voice box is in the throat. If, in working on your voice, you focus on that anatomical truth, you will end up with monochromatic, forced voice production or, at best, a voice devoid of personality. For the development of an artistic and personally

expressive voice, you must refocus your attention on the source of breath and the resonators.

Here is another example of the reductive effect of being faithful to pure anatomy: the anatomically accurate fact is that breath goes into and out of the lungs and that the lungs exist in the space between the collarbone and the bottom of the ribcage. But when the imagination extends the dwelling-place of breath to the pelvic floor or even to the legs and feet, the actual lungs respond with an expansion of their capacity. Even more important, the image of breath entering and filling spaces in the pelvic basin, the hip sockets, and the thighs stimulates deep involuntary breathing musculature and connects the mind to primal energy sources in the sacral nerve plexi. The power of the imagination, properly used, can stimulate breathing on a profound level and enhance the function of the voice to maximum effect.

Returning now to the six-point outline of *How the Voice Works*, I will translate the first point, "There is an impulse in the motor cortex of the brain" into "there is a need to communicate." This need becomes an electrical impulse that travels via the spinal cord to the nerve endings that govern the speech and breathing muscles. According to the stimulus, this impulse will contain greater or lesser voltage. If someone you see daily and have no particular regard for says "good morning" to you, you will have a slight reaction in the breath and larynx muscles creating just enough vibration to serve the need of a dutiful response. If, on the other hand, the speaker is someone whom you love, whom you are delighted and surprised to see, the stimulus may arouse you emotionally; your solar plexus nerve endings will glow with warmth, your breath will react with vitality and play vigorously on your vocal folds, making the vibrations dance out through the resonators, thus serving your need to communicate your feelings. There are infinite varieties of external stimuli and internal reactions, and impulse, arousing the reflex musculature of speech, controls their expression.

Step 2, which states, "the impulse stimulates breath to enter and leave the body," means that countless muscles throughout the torso perform an extraordinary number of coordinated movements that expand the rib cage, contract and lower the diaphragm, move the stomach down, and shift the intestines to make room for the expanding lungs, allowing the air cells to suck in air and then, reversing the action, to expel it. All this is easy involuntary reaction.

Next in the physiological picture comes the play of breath on the vocal folds, Step 3. In fact, the respiratory and laryngeal actions are simultaneous; the same impulse that stimulates the breathing musculature activates the laryngeal musculature to stretch the vocal folds so that they offer enough

resistance to the breath to oscillate on impact. A gentle pressure of breath meeting relatively relaxed vocal folds creates slower oscillations and the resultant vibrations of sound are of a low frequency. A strong pressure of air finds greater resistance in folds stretched and expanded by the stronger impulse, and a higher frequency of vibration results in a higher pitch. (The vocal folds are between thirty and fifty millimeters in length, and are lengthened and shortened by the cartilage to which they are attached. Involuntary muscles reacting directly to motor impulses from the brain govern the movement.)

In Step 4 the initial vibrations of sound are no more recognizable as sound than the vibrations created on piano strings if the hammer were to strike them without a sounding board behind them. But as soon as the breath oscillates the folds, the vibrations that occur re-sound off the nearest sounding boards, which are found in the cartilage of the larynx.

In Step 5 "the vibrations are amplified by resonators." Voice practitioners have conflicting opinions about how the resonating system works and what approach to take in describing it: indeed, it may only be adequately described in terms of advanced physics. For working purposes I use the following practical, tangible description. The nature of vibrations is that they multiply as they meet appropriately resistant textures. They sound again as they bounce off different surfaces, with different quality and quantity determined by the texture of the surface and the shape of the cavity. The re-sounding (resonating) surfaces within the body, available to the initial vibrations of sound, are virtually uncountable considering that bone, cartilage, membrane, and muscle can all serve as amplifiers and conductors.

The harder the surface, the stronger the resonance: bone is best, cartilage is very good, and toned-up muscle can provide a good resonating surface, but a flabby, fleshy, nonresistant area will only muffle and absorb vibrations (like heavy velvet or a sponge). The voice finds its most satisfying resonators where there are clearly defined hollows and empty tunnels in the architecture of the body, such as the pharynx, the mouth, the nose; but the bony structure of the chest, the cheekbones, the jawbone, the acoustically powerful sinus hollows, the skull, the cartilage of the larynx, and the vertebrae of the spine all demonstrably contribute resonance.

The relationship between pitch and resonators has to do with suitable apertures, appropriate shapes, and large or small cavities. The muscle lining of the pharynx and the mouth also provides subtle tuning as it tenses and relaxes.

For working purposes, the pattern of resonating response to changing pitch can be observed as follows: the low sounds get resonance from the chest

and lower throat (pharynx); the lower-middle part of the range is amplified from the back wall of the throat up through the soft palate, the teeth, the jawbone, and the hard palate; moving upward through the middle voice, resonance comes in from the mid-sinuses, the cheekbones, the nose; finally, the upper-middle and high voice resonate in the upper sinuses above the nose, and in the skull. All the pitches and resonance spill into one another's precincts, creating harmonics and overtones.

The final stage of vocal communication, Step 6, shows the stream of vibrations, flowing unimpeded through richly resonating chambers and out through the mouth, being formed into words. There are ten general areas of articulation in the mouth: two lips, the tip of the tongue, the teeth, the front or blade of the tongue, the upper gum ridge, the middle of the tongue, the roof of the mouth, the back of the tongue, and the back of the hard palate, which can include activity in the soft palate. Consonants are formed when two articulating surfaces meet, or almost meet, interrupting or modifying the flow of breath or sound. Vowels are formed as the lips and tongue move to mold the flow of vibrations into different shapes. It is the economy with which words are formed that creates the accuracy with which they realize thought.

## ■ AN IDEAL COMMUNICATION

In order to demonstrate how this sophisticated musical instrument becomes human in its response to the impulse to communicate, I would like to posit an idea of how the natural voice would ideally function to communicate the thoughts and a continuum of feelings of a hypothetical human being who is uninhibited, open, sensitive, emotionally mature, intelligent, and uncensored.

When such a person is feeling relaxed, warm, comfortable, and content, the muscles are loose, the breathing is undisturbed, and the energies flow easily. If there is an impulse to transmit this state through words, it generates just enough extra energy to send breath gently onto the vocal folds, which, while remaining relatively relaxed, produce a low sound that resonates through the chest and lower pharynx. A change in mood from lazy contentment to positive happiness, or surprise, or impatience, increases the causal energy that then dispatches the breath with greater vigor onto tighter folds, producing a higher frequency of vibrations that ring into the middle resonators of the face. The muscle tissue lining the corridors and caverns of the throat, mouth, and mask simultaneously responds to the mood change and involuntarily tightens and relaxes, helping to tune the resonators to the pitch generated by the increased energy. As excitement grows, the breath becomes still more stimulated and the folds tighten more, producing higher sounds; correspondingly, muscles in the upper pharynx stretch and tone up, the soft palate lifts higher, and the sound is released into the upper sinuses. Finally, if excitement reaches a pitch commonly regarded as hysterical (perhaps because most people are unaccustomed to operating at that level), the pressure on the folds and their responsive tension will send a scream into the head, which is a superb acoustic dome with a bony resilience capable of dealing with the pressure of such a sound.

This pattern of emotional energy and resonating response is, as I have said, hypothetical and too simple to encompass habitually aggressive or habitually passive behavior, defense mechanisms, or neuroses, but it can offer some landmarks in the foggy geography of how we communicate what we feel.

## Why the Voice Does Not Work

**T**HE VOICE IS PREVENTED from responding with ideal spontaneity because that spontaneity depends on reflex action, and most people have lost the ability and, perhaps, the desire to behave reflexively. Except when pushed beyond control by extreme pain, extreme fear, or extreme ecstasy, nearly all reflexive vocal behavior is short-circuited by secondary impulses.

These impulses, in general, are protective, and at best give one time to think. When, however, the secondary impulses are so well developed that they blot out the impact of the primary, or reflex, impulse, a habit has formed. Habits are a necessary part of one's being able to function: some are consciously chosen (what route to take to work every day; a shower in the morning or a bath at night). But most mental and emotional habits ("I never cry," "I always think that . . .," "I can't sing," "I always cry when they play the national anthem") have been formed unconsciously and by people other than oneself. There is no choice attached to such conditioning. Behavior that is suggested or demanded from outside responds *only* to secondary impulses rather than primary ones. "Stop that screaming or you get no ice cream." "Shut your mouth right now or you'll get a spanking." "Big boys don't cry." "Nice little girls don't shout." "That's not funny; that's rude." Or, in extreme cases, "Take that; that'll teach you." And, "Sssh . . . you mustn't giggle in church, God is looking at you."

Deep in the unconscious mind, the animal instinct to respond emotionally to stimulus is largely conditioned out of us as children. There should, of course, be a balance of instinctual response and conscious control in mature behavior, but much human behavior is unconsciously controlled by habits conditioned in childhood by arbitrary influences, such as parents (or lack of

them), teachers, peers, fellow gang members, movie stars, or pop stars. If we come to a point in our lives where we, as actors, want access to the primitive sources of laughter, sorrow, anger, joy, we may find that the emotions themselves have been civilized or brutalized out of us. The nervous system impulses are blocked, rerouted, or crossed with countermanding impulses.

Here now is a simple story that illustrates the idea of primary and secondary impulse conditioning. I call it the "Chocolate-Chip Cookie Story." The story is a very simple emblematic outline of the complex psychophysical development of the voice from birth to adulthood. It differs in detail from individual to individual but is applicable in general to most human beings.

When a baby is born, a battalion of primary impulses is instantly activated to perform the body's essential first job, which is to make the baby live. Life stirs as breath pumps in and out of the baby's lungs, and a myriad other life-giving operations kick into action. That is the first experience—life or death. Breath gives life.

But life is not enough; survival is necessary. The baby's body experiences something deep in the interior of the tiny belly that we might label the Pang. The Pang signals the need for sustenance, without which life will not continue. The Pang in the middle of the belly has a built-in neural union with the baby's breathing mechanism, and the breath that has been experienced as life-giving now becomes the instrument of survival. The Pang simultaneously acts upon the lungs and larynx to produce a wail. The baby produces a cry that is astonishingly powerful for such a small agent. And the crying and wailing continue until heard. Miraculously the wail is translated by those who hear it as a cry for hunger. Warm milk is introduced to the tiny body, and the pain, the contraction, and the Pang dissolve in the comfort and warmth of sustenance. Breath and voice have been deployed in the service of survival. The first experience of the baby's voice is in response to a life-or-death need. Need, Pang, Voice, Response, Survival.

This cardinal experience is repeated countless times in the ensuing months. The baby's organism is imprinted with the experience delivered by its primary impulses: the Pang, the wail, the milk, and the comfort are all necessary for survival. The baby's organism has learned a fundamental lesson of communication, which is that it must communicate if it is to survive and that communication begins with the Pang. This is a life-or-death lesson. Wailing works!

We can see that from this first simple physical pang of hunger and the contrasting warmth and contentment that come when the pang is removed, the roots of all later emotional feelings, from sadness, anger, and fear to happiness, joy, and love, are formed.

This first conditioning works well for the baby's survival. Lessons are also absorbed that modify the primary impulse response mechanism but the impulse has, by and large, remained the engine of the child's life. But then comes a major new phase.

Imagine the little girl or boy at two to three years old. Many words have been acquired. Many of these words are attached to food—a subject of primary interest. But the Pang still rules. Imagine the three-year-old playing with his or her toys late one afternoon while Mom or Dad or caregiver is in the kitchen preparing supper. The child feels a life-or-death *need* for a chocolate-chip cookie. The child runs into the kitchen with all the force of the Pang fueling his or her body and voice. "*I want a chocolate-chip cookie! Gimme a chocolate-chip cookie! Chocolate-chip cookie! Chocolate-chip cookie!*"

As can easily be imagined, Mom or Dad or caregiver may not respond positively to this onslaught. The reaction is likely to be some variation on, "Stop that horrible noise. You will certainly *not* get a chocolate-chip cookie. Not until you learn to ask nicely. When you stop screaming and say 'please' and 'thank you' in a nice voice then perhaps you can have a cookie."

Unfortunately this phase in learning new rules of communication may continue for some time and may include physical punishment. But the new lesson learned by the child's organism is that to follow the Pang can lead not to life and survival but to the equivalent of death. The small child's body-mind ecosystem is exquisitely sensitive, and in its earliest years it experiences everything on the level of life or death. In order to continue to survive, the organism will learn, sometimes immediately, how to deploy a secondary set of neurophysiological impulses that bypass the primary ones. Communication is still the goal because communication is still necessary for survival, but instinctively the organism now knows that the Pang must be bypassed. The Pang and its primary impulse route have proved ineffective, even dangerous. Communicate the Pang and you might die.

Perhaps it is as soon as the next day that the little boy or girl is playing in the late afternoon and again feels a life-or-death *need* for a chocolate-chip cookie. The child is quick to recall the previous day's lesson. The Pang is suppressed; breath is detached from the Pang-center. The *need*, together with some breath found in the upper part of the lungs well away from the dangerous Pang-center, is rerouted to a set of muscles above the throat. A little smile emerges, lips and tongue and jaw pick up the *need*, the voice no longer resonates throughout the body with the reverberation of a fight for life but flows nicely and inoffensively up into the cheeks and head. The child walks carefully into the kitchen and says in light, high tones of beguiling sweetness, "If I'm a very, very good little boy or girl and say pretty please with sugar

on it, can I have a chocolate-chip cookie, dear Mommy or Daddy or caregiver? Please, pretty please?" And Mommy or Daddy or caregiver says, "What a good little boy or girl you are. You've learned how to speak nicely. Here are two chocolate-chip cookies!"

The child's organism has learned the next major lesson in communication: follow secondary neurophysiological impulse routes in order to survive.

This crude outline shows in almost allegorical form "why the voice does not work." *How* we learn to unhook from the brilliance of how the voice works to the less direct and consequently less truthful mechanisms of a voice running on secondary impulse pathways is particular to each person and is infinitely varied, but the skeleton of "The Chocolate-Chip Cookie Story" may be faintly discernible behind the psychophysical biography of a majority of those who seek to improve their relationship with their voices.

Secondary impulse conditioning continues throughout the formative years and results in a habitual mode of communication that may seem to be fine for the person one becomes.

In Step 1 of *How the Voice Works*, I give an example illustrating "the need to communicate," but even that need cannot be taken for granted. By adulthood the ability to receive a stimulus may be impaired to the point that an exchange of greetings is a one-way trade. Assuming it does occur, however, responding to "good morning" may be subject to secondary impulses such as "Why is he talking to me? He doesn't usually say a word." Or "What's that funny bruise on her forehead?" Or "I know, you're going to ask me to sign a petition," etc. This interrupts the voyage of electrical impulse to breathing and laryngeal musculature, and sends a second electrical impulse that tells the breathing muscles to hold tight so that they will not react spontaneously. The breathing muscles fail to deliver the natural fuel of breath to the vocal folds, but the necessity of replying remains, so a little breath is found under the collarbone, just enough to activate vibration, while the muscles of the throat, jaw, lips, and tongue work twice as hard to compensate for the lack of breath power. The resultant tone is thin, and the message it carries is non-committal. That is one way, out of a thousand more subtle ones, of avoiding a spontaneous response, and acts as an illustration of how Steps 2, 3, and 4 in *How the Voice Works* can be subverted by secondary impulses.

It is not that spontaneity is right and calculation is wrong, but that spontaneity should be possible and seldom is. Defensive neuromuscular programming develops habits of mind and muscle that cut us off from the instinctual connection between emotion and breath. The voice cannot work to its true potential if its basic energy is not free breath. As long as we are emotionally protective our breathing cannot be free. As long as breath is

not free the voice will depend on compensating strength in the throat and mouth muscles. When these muscles try to convey strong feelings, a number of possible results can occur: they find a safe, musical way to describe emotion; they drive sound monotonously up into the head; or they tense, contract, push, and squeeze with so much effort that the vocal folds rub together. Then the folds become inflamed, lose their resilience, become unable to produce regular vibrations, and, finally, grow little lumps on them as they grind together without the lubrication of breath. Then all that is heard is a gritty, hoarse sound and, ultimately, nothing.

The same inhibitory messages that confuse Steps 1 to 4 also interfere with Step 5 in which "the vibrations are amplified by resonators."

There are some constructive interferences that create harmonics and enrich the sound with complexities, but before these can be relied on, the interferences that restrict range and resonance must be removed. Usually these interferences occur when breathing is restricted. If the throat is tense with effort, it constricts the channel through which sound travels. Most commonly this constriction prevents the vibrations from traveling freely down into the lower resonating chambers of the pharynx and chest, diverting amplification to the middle and upper resonators. The result is a light, high, or strident tone. Sometimes throat tension, coupled with an unconscious need to sound manly or in control, can push the larynx down so that the sound only resonates in the lower cavities, and a monotonously rich, deep voice is developed that cannot find nuance and varied inflection from the upper part of the range. If the soft palate and back of the tongue have joined the battalion of substitutes for breath, they may bunch together with muscular effort and drive the voice up into the nose rather than allow it free passage between them into the mouth. The nasal resonator is powerful, dominating, and unsubtle. If the voice settles in the nose, the speaker will be heard, but what is heard may not be what is intended. Nuance is ironed out, and a variety of thought cannot find free play through a corresponding variety of resonating qualities. Content is distorted by the one resonating form available.

These are three of the most obvious distorted reactions in the resonators that can occur when the voice is inhibited by habitual tensions. More subtly, the whole tuning apparatus is subject to any inhibitory messages sent from the mind that tighten the body. If the breathing muscles tense, so does the muscle tissue lining the pharynx. As those tiny muscles tighten in response to inhibitory messages, they can no longer perform their subtle movements, tightening and releasing in response to the constantly changing pitches of thought inflection, regulating the aperture through which sound

flows and amplifying its changing pitches. Such muscle tension diminishes the ability of the voice to be inflected directly by thought. Voice inflections can also be manipulated by what one hears and with conscious muscular control, but as one's manipulative skill increases, so does the distance from the truth.

By the time we look at Step 6, "The resultant sound is articulated by the lips and tongue to form words," it may seem that everything has gone so far wrong that true communication is impossible. The breath and resonators have fallen victim to tension, and the compensating lips and tongue are being asked to compensate for so many duties that their simple articulative ability is buried under this newfound burden. If the tongue is not relaxed while basic sound is being formed, it cannot easily perform its natural function, which is to mold that sound. The tongue is attached to the larynx (by the hyoid bone), and the larynx communicates directly with the diaphragm through the trachea. Tension in one of these three areas causes tension in the other two. As long as there is tension in the tongue it will articulate with more effort than necessary, thereby diminishing its sensitivity of response to motor impulses from the speech cortex.

The tongue is intimately connected with the inner workings of the vocal apparatus, while the lips reflect a slightly different aspect of those inhibitions. They are part of the complex facial musculature that responds to inhibitory messages from the mind by drawing a curtain across the window of the face. The face can be the most or the least revealing part of the body. Some faces harden into impassive masks behind which their owners can calculate, plan, and maintain invulnerability; others assume the mask of appeasement—the muscles of a cajoling smile gradually programming a permanent upward slant; others have fallen into such heavy dejection that a moment of optimism can hardly lift the corners of the mouth. It is perfectly normal for facial posture to reveal the emphatic parts of a personality formed in the course of forty or fifty years. But in the early years those muscles can be prevented from prematurely setting by allowing them to pick up the complexities of changing moods and responses. Muscles of the face, like all the muscles of the body, become flaccid or stiff without exercise. For this natural exercise to happen, though, people must want to reveal themselves, be unafraid of such openness of countenance, and believe that vulnerability in communication is strength.

The lips, as guardians of the mouth, can either develop into heavily armed portcullises or into well-oiled doors that open easily. The stiff upper lip is no mere symbol of British phlegm; it exists and seems to stiffen in

response to a determined need not to show fear or doubt. It can also stiffen to hide bad teeth or a smile that its owner thought unattractive in formative years. The freedom of the top lip is essential to lively articulation. Articulating responsibility should be equally divided between the top lip and the bottom lip to achieve maximum efficiency. If the top lip is stiff, the bottom lip will be doing at least eighty-five percent of the work and will probably enlist the jaw as extra support. The jaw is clumsy compared to a lip, and articulation will not be economical in such a situation.

It would take a whole book to chart the deviations the voice can take to prevent its owner from being known. There are voices that have grown expert in proclaiming a hard, aggressive go-getter in order to shield a frightened, insecure little boy; voices that sigh out wispily to disguise the strength of a woman who unconsciously knows that in a man's world she must pretend weakness to achieve; voices that are rich and relaxed and deep, signaling confidence and accomplishment where there are none; voices that ring with a haughtiness that hides panic. The false voice can be tuned to exquisite duplicity.

This introductory description, however, is intended only as a preamble to a positive book, dedicated to the voice that will transparently reveal the truth about its owner, if the owner so wishes.

In case you feel that I have presented a daunting prospect of work, I would like to emphasize, now and continually, that clear thinking and free emotional expression help tremendously in solving the problems. A psychophysical approach is a perfect example of the conundrum, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" but the following two maxims should underlie all work on the voice:

- Blocked emotions are the fundamental obstacle to a free voice.
- Muddy thinking is the fundamental obstacle to clear articulation.

## Preparation for the Work

You are embarking on quite a lengthy journey of voice discovery that will appeal to all your senses and heighten your consciousness of who you are and how you function.

Work on the voice is initially subjective, self-examining, and somewhat introverted. I recommend that you keep a journal in which you record your reactions to the exercises you experience. You may be working alone with this book, with a friend, in a group, in private with a teacher, or in a class with a teacher. In every case you are searching for your own free voice that will easily express your true thoughts and feelings or those of the character you are playing.

Get into the habit of writing down your impressions of breath, voice, and body.

Expand your vocabulary of voice to include physical, emotional, and sensual reactions of all your senses, not just your hearing.

You may be depending consciously or unconsciously on hearing to judge the effectiveness of your voice. In order to open your voice up to the assessment of one of your other senses, I initially suggest that you try to see your voice imaginatively before beginning the technical work.

Get a set of crayons and some drawing paper.

- (1.) Draw a picture entitled,  
"My Voice As It Is Now."  
(Before you put crayon to paper, close your eyes and take a minute to invite the picture into your mind's eye).
- (2.) Now draw another picture entitled,  
"My Voice As I Would Like It To Be."

- (3.) Draw the outline of a doughboy or gingerbread man. Inside the body, color, impressionistically or figuratively, whatever you see as the problems that prevent your voice from being the voice you would like it to be.

Look at the pictures and make lists of words that are suggested by each picture. The words that occur may come from the language of form and shape, or color, or texture, or emotions, or psychology.

From these words quickly write, without much thought, a poem entitled, "A Poem To My Voice."

Let the feelings that came as you wrote your poem and the language that sprang out of the pictures expand the way you relate to your voice as you begin to work on it.

To a certain degree you have, with these pictures, become your own authority on the state of your voice, what is wrong with it and what you need to work on to allow its full potential to emerge.

*Now*—you can start a detailed examination of your voice as your own authority. Maintain your journal with your expanded vocabulary and with any other pictures, colors, or abstract shapes that help develop your connection of imagination with voice.

With each new phase of work I will suggest both the amount of time it might take to learn an exercise and the length of time you should practice and absorb it before moving on to the next one. For example: one hour to learn an exercise followed by one week to practice it.

These times are offered as a guide and will undoubtedly need to be adapted to each person.

In my plan, each new phase will begin on a new workday and the full progression of exercises will take from twenty to thirty days to learn. When you add the practice weeks to the learning hours you will find that it takes between six months and a year to acquire the information and absorb the experience before you begin to own and understand this method of work. Your voice will develop according to how disciplined you are.

# Part One

## The Touch of Sound

The First Four Weeks of Work  
Physical Awareness, Relaxation, and Freeing



The exercises throughout are presented with a timetable that suggests the length of time necessary to learn each new exercise, the amount of time it takes to practice the exercise, and the amount of time it may take to cover all the exercises. These are suggestions only. Each student or teacher will work at his or her own pace. The serious student may expect permanent vocal improvement after six months to a year of work.

Audio examples for many of the voice exercises throughout this book can be heard online at: [www.kristinlinklater.com](http://www.kristinlinklater.com).

Click on AUDIO.

# 1

## Workday One

*Physical Awareness: The spine*

*The support of natural breathing . . . a tree*

■ Prepare to work for:

**ONE HOUR**

The first step toward freeing the natural voice is to develop an ability to perceive habits and register new experiences. Such an ability must be both mental and physical, and the perception must eventually be refined to extreme subtlety in order to observe the minutiae of neuromuscular behavior that serve the need to communicate. It is fruitless to expect such subtlety when you begin to work, since few people have an immediate capacity for fine psychophysical awareness: you must take carefully graded steps to arrive at a state that you can trust to feed back reliable information. We will begin with relatively large, simple images and exercises before progressing toward the subtle economy with which the natural voice works best.

The first exercise will be useless if you read quickly though the instructions and realize that the resultant movements are to stretch and drop the spine down. It is a familiar exercise, and can be done quite mechanically, achieving some superficial release through the large external muscles of the body. But it is the process by which the stretching and dropping down are arrived at that constitutes the exercise. It is generally true in all the exercises that follow, that it is not what you are doing that is important, but how you are doing it. The conscious mind has an alarming capacity for subverting new experiences, either confusing them with things that are familiar and safe, or leaping ahead to the result and by-passing the process. For instance, to greet the sense of deep relaxation with the comment, "This is how I feel just before I go to sleep at night," reinforces the familiar equation

of sleep and relaxation, successfully precluding a new possibility: that of relaxation generating energy. The overall aim of the work on the spine is to develop physical awareness through specific relaxation. As knots of tension undo, they release trapped energy into the body, creating a lively state of awareness and potential mobility.

More specifically, you will find that the efficiency of the vocal apparatus depends on the alignment of the body and the economy with which it functions. When the spine is out of alignment, its ability to support the body is diminished and muscles intended for other uses must provide that support. If the lower spine is weak, the abdominal muscles supply substitute strength for the torso; if the abdominal muscles are employed in holding up the body, they are not free to respond to breathing needs. Similarly, if the upper part of the spine abandons its job of carrying the rib cage and shoulder girdle, the rib muscles may take on the responsibility of holding the chest high, in which case they are unavailable for intercostal breathing. Finally, when the vertebrae of the neck are not well aligned, the whole channel through which the voice travels is distorted. With a weak neck, the jaw muscles, tongue muscles, laryngeal muscles, even lips and eyebrows become supporters of the head, leaving little chance for a free passage for sound. A strong, flexible, and well-aligned spine, then, is the essential starting-point for free breathing and a free voice.

Moshe Feldenkrais, whose work on psychophysical reeducation has become part of many actor-training programs, says in his invaluable book *Awareness Through Movement*:

Any posture is acceptable in itself as long as it does not conflict with the law of nature, which is that the skeletal structure should counteract the pull of gravity, leaving the muscles free for movement. The nervous system and the frame develop together under the influence of gravity in such a way that the skeleton will hold up the body without expending energy despite the pull of gravity. If, on the other hand, the muscles have to carry out the job of the skeleton, not only do they use energy needlessly, but they are prevented from carrying out their main function of changing the position of the body, that is, of movement.

The first step, then, in freeing the voice, is *getting acquainted with your spine* and with your skeleton. The more you can imagine the following movements in terms of the skeleton, the more economically the muscles will work. Talk to your bones.

Much of this work asks you to close your eyes as you clarify the picture of the inner workings of your body. When this is the case I suggest that you tape the instructions and play them as your guide. Otherwise, read ahead and memorize the instructions.

**STEP 1** Stand easily with your feet six to eight inches apart. Be aware of your weight evenly distributed over both feet; be aware that the weight of your body is balanced equally between the balls of your feet and your heels.

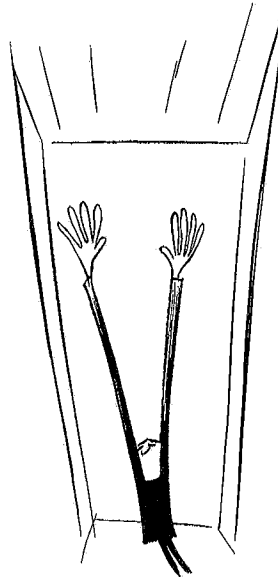
- In your mind's eye, picture the bones of your feet.
- Picture the shinbones growing up from your ankle joints.
- Picture your thighbones growing up from your knee joints.
- Picture your hip joints and the pelvic girdle.
- See the sacrum—the large bone in the middle of the back of the pelvis—at the base of your spine.
- Picture your spine growing up from the sacrum, through the small of your back, then on up between your shoulder blades, with the rib cage floating around it and the shoulder girdle on top.
- Feel your arms hanging from the shoulder sockets.
- Picture your upper arm bones, elbow joints, forearms, wrist joints, and bones of your hands and fingers.
- Let your mind's eye flow back up through your arms and into your neck.
- Picture your neck vertebrae going up into the skull.
- Picture the topmost vertebra on a level with your ears and your nose.

- Picture your skull floating, like a balloon, off the top of the spine.

**STEP 2** Focus your attention into your elbow joints; rotate them forward and let them float gently up in front of your body toward the ceiling. This should involve your upper arms only, the shoulder muscles stay relaxed, the forearm muscles are relaxed, the hands hang loosely.

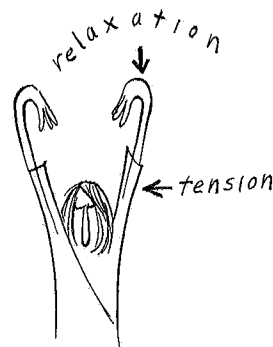
Focus your attention on your wrists, and let them float toward the ceiling. Leave your hands hanging.

Focus your attention on your fingertips and let them float to the ceiling.



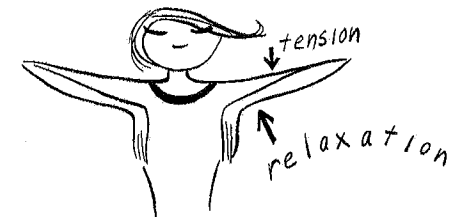
- Imagine that someone is pulling you up a little by your fingertips, and allow your ribs to be stretched from above, up out of your waist; leave your pelvic girdle, legs, and feet out of the stretch.

Now do one thing and one thing only: allow your hands to relax until they hang from your wrists.



- Register the contrasting sensations in your hands and in your arms. Label the sensation in your hands "relaxation," and the sensation in your arms "tension."

Now let your forearms relax until they hang loose from your elbows.

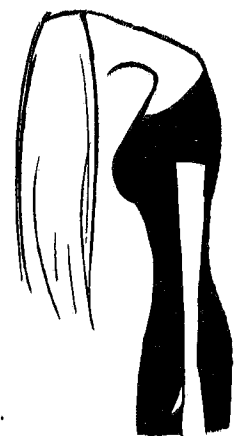


- Register the contrasting sensations in your forearms and hands, and in your upper arms and shoulders. Label the sensation in your forearms and hands as "relaxation," and the sensation in your upper arms as "tension."

Now let your upper arms drop heavily and hang loosely from your shoulders.

- Register the weight of your arms, the blood running back into your hands, and the change in temperature. Label the sensation in your arms "relaxation." Feel the force of gravity adding weight to your arms.

Now let the weight of your head drop heavily forward so that your head and neck hang off the top of your torso.



Feel the weight of your head dragging on the big vertebra that connects the neck-spine to the body-spine—sometimes called the “bull” vertebra. Gradually give in to the weight of your head, allowing the bull vertebra to drag the shoulder girdle with it. Then let the weight of your head, shoulders, and arms draw the spine slowly down toward the ground, giving in to gravity, vertebra by vertebra, through the rib cage to the small of your back. Try to picture the vertebrae one by one.

- Let your knees relax so that your weight remains over the middle of your feet. Check that you do not rock back on your heels or forward on your toes. Check that your knees do not lock. When the weight is too much to support, release the lower spine quickly and hang upside down.

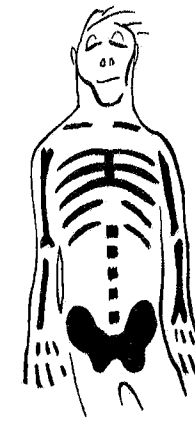


- Picture your torso hanging from your tailbone, giving in to the force of gravity.
- Breathe easily. You are doing this to relax all the torso muscles, shoulder muscles, neck muscles, head and arms.

*If your legs begin to hurt in this unaccustomed position, run your hands up the backs of your calves and thighs several times from ankles to buttocks, stroking away excess tension.*

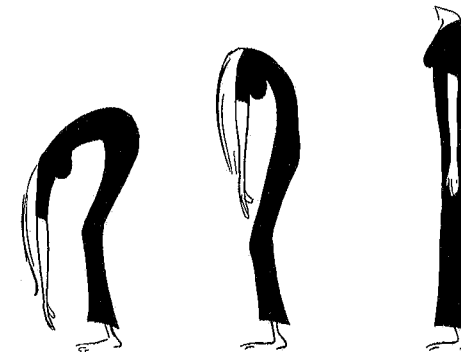
Now focus your attention on your tailbone and, from there, begin to build your spine up again, vertebra by vertebra, as though building a castle of nursery blocks one on top of the other.

*Talk to your bones. See your skeleton.*



- Do not use your stomach muscles; leave them hanging loose; breathe. Relax your shoulder muscles.
- Do not suddenly straighten your knees; let them gradually straighten without stiffening as your balance shifts.
- Find the vertebrae that carry your rib cage and build them up from the small of your back to the bull vertebra.

You are now an upright, headless torso. Picture your neck spine hanging forward at a right angle to your body spine.



- Focus on the top seven vertebrae that make up the neck and gradually bring them back up until they are in alignment with the rest of your spine. Be aware that your head is floating up as a result of your neck coming up. You do not need to lift your head.

**STEP 3** With your eyes closed, run your mind's eye down from your head to your feet and then let it travel up from your feet, up through your legs, to your torso. Consciously relax any muscles that begin to tighten in the stomach, buttocks, shoulders, or neck. You are actively transferring the energy needed to remain upright from the large, external muscles of the body, to an internal picture of the spine constantly growing upward against the force of gravity. Think of the spine as a stream of upward-moving energy that is fueled by the mind. It is as though the spine were a tree, growing up from roots in the sacrum, the legs, and the feet, with its branches springing out to become the rib cage.

Be aware of the shape your body cuts in the air.

Be aware of the feeling of air touching your skin.

Open your eyes and walk around the room, noticing that it is your skeleton that is walking.

Stand still again and, closing your eyes, turn your attention inward and become aware of your body from the inside. Spread the relaxation from outside muscles to inside muscles. With your body-mind's eye, look at your face from inside and relax the face muscles; look down through your throat seeing it as an empty, open column; look down through the lungs inside your rib cage; see the diaphragm as the floor to the lungs and the ceiling to the stomach; look down from the diaphragm to the pelvic floor, and on down through your legs to where your feet are planted on the floor.

Let your body-mind's eye travel once more from the bones of your feet up through the skeleton to your skull and then back to your spine.

Stand quietly for one or two minutes being aware of your spine supporting the skeleton that floats between your skull and the bones of your feet while the muscles and flesh of your body hang loosely on your bones.

Stretch, yawn, open your eyes, and shake your body all over.

This exercise is the first in a long series designed to transfer the message systems that run from brain to body, from large external muscles to fine internal ones. The natural voice is run on the involuntary nervous system through involuntary musculature. Taking a simplified look at the muscle systems of the body, we can see them organized into two to five layers ranging from the large outside muscles that we can consciously control to the innermost layer of muscles contiguous with the skeleton, which are under the control of the involuntary nervous system. The innermost layer of muscles may be pictured closest to the bones and the organs. These muscles are not under voluntary control. They are "proprioceptive" muscles: they "see themselves," and they operate under their own perception. They can, however, be influenced through imagery and emotion.

#### ■ COMMENTARY

The best actors, and perhaps this can be said for the best performing artists in general (musicians, dancers, singers), are relaxed in performance. That is, they have no extraneous tension. Their muscles are ready to receive the impulses necessary to fulfill action and will ripple with energies in the service of particular stimuli. When the impulse has been expressed, the muscles release and ready themselves for the next job. Tense, muscular performances may generate external excitement but seldom arouse profound emotional response in an audience. "Maximum effect with minimum effort" is the hallmark of great art. Great art is rooted in truth. Minimum effort demands a commitment to inner processes of imagination and emotion that stimulate the body and voice to truthful expression from the inside out. The body and voice will reveal large and small truths most authentically with a certain effortless ease, even in extremity.

In order to develop a voice that will create maximum effect with minimum effort and therefore be truthful, actors must exercise the vocal musculature in a way that conditions the voice to respond to imaginative and emotional stimulus. In the preceding and subsequent exercises we are beginning to do just that. Very simply, we are beginning to replace an unconscious and inaccurate picture of how the voice works with a conscious one that is both anatomically more accurate and economical, and is trained to respond to thought-feeling impulses.

**STEP 4** In this step you will be asked to reenter the experience of Step 3 but to make new observations. It is good to do this sequence with your eyes closed, so if you are working on your own, read or record the following instructions before starting.

Standing easily, with a sense of your spine moving up to support your torso, close your eyes again. With the purpose of relaxing the inner muscles of your body, allow your body-mind's eye to travel from inside the top of your skull down the inside of your face, relaxing the outer mask that your face muscles present to the world, down through your throat, down through your chest. Notice the tiny, inevitable movements of your breathing as you move your mind down into your stomach, down through your intestines and lower stomach into the pelvic floor. Undo any tension you are holding inside. Maintain a clear image of your spine moving upward as you relax the muscles around it or you will collapse.

Allow the whole of the inside of the torso to be available to the movement of your breath.

- Observe the reaction of the inside of your body to the involuntary movements of your breathing apparatus.
- Then, deep inside, feel the need to yawn and stretch; slowly and luxuriously yield to that need.
- Yawn, stretch, and shake out your body as though you just got up in the morning or as a dog yawns, stretches, and shakes its skin back into place.
- Register how your body feels; register how you feel.

In the course of these initial exercises you will have made conscious decisions about how your physical energy is to be deployed. If you have followed the process in detail, both mentally and physically, you will have momentarily dislodged a few habitual muscle responses. You should have experienced the contrasting sensations of relaxation and tension in the parts of your body that are relatively easy to contact. This experience is the basis for developing the ability to notice tensions in more inaccessible parts of the

body (such as the back of the tongue, the center of the diaphragm, and the upper lip) and to be able to release them.

The ability to relax must be cultivated slowly and with specific intent, otherwise it can degenerate into the state of general collapse that Jerzy Grotowski rightly disparaged: "One cannot be completely relaxed as is taught in many theatre schools, for he who is totally relaxed is nothing more than a wet rag." There is, however, a vital difference between relaxing for the sake of relaxation, which inevitably includes mental collapse, and relaxing in order to accomplish something. Our aim is to remove unnecessary habitual tensions so that the muscles are free to respond to impulse without the short-circuiting created by habit.

#### PRACTICE

Stretch and relax your spine every morning for the next two or three days. Be aware of the preceding details and become aware of your skeletal behavior and the contrasting tension and relaxation you feel throughout the day.

## 2

### Workday Two

*Breathing Awareness: Freeing the breath,  
the source of sound . . . the air*

- Prepare to work for:  
**45 MINUTES TO ONE HOUR**

You cannot live without breathing—without air. Your breath is the source of your life as well as the source of your vocal sound. Your breathing habits have developed as you developed into the character you are now. The profound goal of the serious actor is to transform into other characters in performance. This entails transforming ways of behaving, ways of thinking, ways of feeling, ways of breathing that are true to the behavior, thoughts, feelings, and breathing of the character you are creating. As long as the actor's breathing patterns are inflexibly held in habitual muscle usage, the hoped-for transformation will only be skin deep. To enter and live the life of a different character, one must be able to let go of deeply ingrained breathing patterns and temporarily allow new behavior from the psyche of the character one is playing to govern the breathing musculature. The events that happen to the dramatic character must be experienced in the breathing process if that character is to be believed and his or her voice is to be authentic.

What follows is a guide to the psychophysical geography of breathing. You will not find rules for correct breathing. There is no one way to breathe that is correct for all purposes. Breathing can be organized to support differing demands: the demands made on a swimmer's lungs are different from those made on the lungs of an opera singer or a Yoga devotee. The breathing processes developed by swimmers, opera singers, and Yoga practitioners are of no use to the actor. I realize that this may initially seem a controversial

idea, but you do not have to believe me in order to continue. I would like you, however, to think about purpose as you explore your breathing. The purposes of opera singing, professional swimming, or serious Yoga practice demand the development of breathing control, partly so that random impulses, particularly random emotional impulses, do not upset the necessary breathing rhythms determined by the activity at hand. The purpose of acting requires the consciously crafted pursuit of spontaneity. The actor's breathing musculature must be able to pick up rapidly shifting thoughts and feelings engendered by an imaginatively created state of being. For the actor who values truthful expression, breathing control must be diverted from muscle to impulse. The ultimate controls are imagination and emotion.

The next steps should be undertaken in an open-minded state of pleasurable expectation. Take each step slowly, for its own sake, and allow yourself to be entertained by your experience. Do not be goal oriented.

Having reached a state of some awareness and relaxation through an initial exploration of the spine, you are now ready to begin to explore the breathing process. The complexities of the breathing machinery are such that it is wise not to jump to any conclusions about how it works at this juncture. Instead, begin to develop the ability to *observe without controlling*. The aim is to remove habitual muscular controls and allow your involuntary processes to take over. It is quite possible for the conscious mind to become aware of the function of the involuntary nervous system without interfering, but it may be an unfamiliar activity. The tendency may be to observe, correctly, that when you breathe in, your stomach moves out, and when you breathe out your stomach goes in, and to use that observation to start controlling your breath with your stomach muscles. You might start to pull your stomach in, which blows the breath out, and to push your stomach out, which draws the breath in. This is a misuse of perception.

The involuntary breathing muscles are subtle, complex, powerful, and deep inside your body. Any voluntary controls that you apply will involve muscles that are large, clumsy, external, and at several removes from the lungs. Conscious control of the breath will destroy its sensitivity to changing inner states and severely curtail the reflex connection between breathing and emotional impulse. It is worth repeating here the warning that you cannot imitate a reflex action. Natural breathing is reflexive, and to restore its reflexive potential, the only work you can do is to remove restrictive tensions and provide a diversity of stimuli. These stimuli can provoke subtler, deeper, and eventually stronger reflex actions than are normally exercised in habit-run daily lives. Your breathing muscles will soon become responsive instruments of the art of speaking.

It is a good idea to start the observation of your breathing in a standing position so that later you may benefit by contrasting this observation with that of sitting or lying down.

**STEP 1** Repeat the physical awareness spine exercises. Rediscover the tree that supports you, its roots and branches.

**STEP 2** Stand easily with a long spine and relaxed muscles and allow your awareness to move inward and down so that your focus rests deep inside the center of your body.

- Tune in to the small movements that are happening as breath enters and leaves your body.
- Allow your involuntary breathing rhythm to tell you what it is.
- Let your breath tell you what it wants from you.

*The breaths that keep you alive from one moment to the next—  
in, out, in, out—are small.*

- Consciously, all you can do is keep releasing tension from your stomach area, your shoulders, and lower belly; be aware of the breath moving your body, rather than your body moving the breath. Remember that your natural breathing rhythm may not be your familiar breathing rhythm.

Explore the following description of the breathing process:

- The outgoing breath is complete inner relaxation.
- The incoming breath will happen automatically if you wait.

**STEP 3**

- Let the breath release out of you.



- Wait—but don't hold your muscles—until you feel the need for a new breath.
- Yield to the need.

Let the breath be replaced—do not actively “breathe in.”

- Let the breath release again.
- Relax into a small internal pause.
- As soon as you feel, deep inside, the tiny impulse of need, give in to it, and allow the new breath in.
- Repeat the mental processes of Step 3, observing, but not controlling, the reflex actions deep inside your body:
- Let the breath release out

Wait, without holding your breath

- Allow the breath in
- Immediately let the breath out

Wait with your muscles completely relaxed

- Allow the breath in
- Immediately release the breath out

Wait

- Allow the breath in . . . etc.
- Continue with this observation for two or three minutes.

#### ■ COMMENTARY

On a tiny scale, these breaths are very central and are sufficient to keep you alive from one moment to the next. The more relaxed you are, the smaller the exchange of oxygen necessary to sustain you. It is worth noting that in deep meditation, breathing slows down radically and sometimes is barely perceptible. Anxiety and tension either speed up the breathing rate or slow it down laboriously, or dictate a longer, heavier exchange.

Everyday, relaxed, normal breathing has a more or less universal rhythm and universal pace. That is, everyone breathes in almost the same rhythm as everyone else once habitual tensions have dissolved and involuntary processes are re-established. One outgoing breath to the next takes about four seconds. Of course the basic rhythm is there only to be disturbed by changing needs, so that you will probably find that after observing your natural rhythm of breathing for a minute or two you will be taken by an irresistible need to sigh or yawn, which will radically alter the rhythm. But it is extremely important to be able to return at will to your relaxed natural breathing rhythm in full awareness. (The rhythms of breathing when we are asleep are not a reliable guide to relaxed breathing. Not only are the breathing muscles responding to a slowed down metabolism, but if you observe the breathing of an adult asleep you will probably notice irregular rhythms that reflect the stress we often process when we sleep. A baby's breathing, on the other hand, can teach us a lot.)

#### STEP 4

- Continue the breathing awareness from Step 3, adding an awareness of whether you are breathing through your mouth or your nose. If through the latter, let your mouth drop open so that you are breathing through your mouth, not through your nose. Don't open wide, just open enough to allow the breath to pass through.

If your mouth is relaxed, the outgoing breath should automatically arrive in a small “fff” somewhere between the top teeth and the lower lip or directly between the two lips.

- Lick your lips and feel the cool incoming air passing over them and then feel the warmth of the outgoing air. The warm outgoing breath will pass through your wet lips forming a loose “fff.”

Don't make a “fff” sound; let the sound be the natural by-product of the release of breath and the relaxed position of the mouth.

Depending on the individual mouth, the “fff” may occur between the two lips or the top teeth and the lower lip; the important point is that with the small “fff” you begin to program your breath to release from the center of your body to pass through the front of the mouth, which is what happens with a free sound. All breathing awareness exercises are blueprints for sound; it is essential therefore that all breathing exercises should be done with the mouth open as it is when speaking. In repose, or when walking in the street, it is aesthetically and hygienically practical to breathe through the nose, which serves to clean, filter, and moisten the air on its long, relatively slow passage to the lungs. For speaking, the breath must be able to respond quickly to fast-changing impulses, and a direct, open passage through the mouth is clearly needed. If you open your mouth too wide, however, the breath will make its impact most obviously in your throat rather than the front of your mouth, and you will hear “hhhhh” rather than “fffff.” By opening your mouth too wide you are programming a route for sound that emphasizes the throat and will not be free. Let me say that, for actors, nasal breathing is utterly counterproductive to truthful speaking.

In practicing the breathing awareness exercises, it is necessary to realize the difference between saying “the breath should be in the front of the mouth, so I will put it there,” and “the breath will arrive in the front of the mouth if it is released freely from inside and there is no tension on the way out that holds it back.” It is necessary to condition the mind to be primarily interested in the causal, release point and merely observe the resultant, arrival point.

## STEP 5

- Continue the awareness of your natural breathing rhythm. Now picture the diaphragm moving upward as the breath releases out and falling downward as the breath drops in. Your diaphragm is a large, domed muscle that forms the floor to your lungs and the ceiling to your stomach and intestines. Its edges are attached to the bottom of your rib cage. You cannot tell the diaphragm how it should move—it is not an active muscle under the control of your conscious mind. But you can influence it by picturing its movements accurately.
- With your mouth just open, allow small “fff”s on each outgoing breath. Feel that your breath and your observing mind are both in the same place—the center of your body. Make sure that you are not split in two, with part of you sitting up in your head, commenting on or controlling what is happening from there. You and your breathing are one and the same thing. When your breath releases, you release. When you and your breath release out, your diaphragm releases upward through your rib cage; when you and your breath are renewed, the diaphragm drops downward, opening the lungs. Both the movement up and the movement down can be experienced as release in the diaphragm.
- Let each outgoing breath contain a feeling of “willing escape.” You escape from inside yourself to the outside world. Each incoming breath should be a feeling of welcome renewal. Expiration and inspiration live in the continuous cycle of a natural rhythm of breathing.
- Now feed into your middle the impulse for a gentle “sigh of relief.”  
  
No sound—just breath.
- Observe how your breathing reacts to the stimulus of a simple easy feeling of relief.
- You will find that more breath comes in in response to the impulse and that more breath releases out on a longer “ffffff” as the relief pours out—keep your mouth relaxed.

- Again consciously decide to feel a sigh of relief. Observe the reaction in the involuntary breathing musculature and in the movement of the diaphragm.

Picture your mind (the impulse-dispatcher), your feelings (impulse-receiver), and your breath all in the center of your body.

- Again feed in the impulse for a sigh of relief.
- Feel the relief go deeper inside your body—perhaps as far down as the pelvic floor.
- Release the relief and the breath as one.
- Relax inside. Allow the breath to be replaced.

The pelvic floor is an elastic web of muscles that lies within the ellipse of the pelvic girdle. (There is a connection from the diaphragm to the pelvic floor that will be explained more specifically later.) For now, begin to picture the floor of your torso within your pelvis, about twelve inches below the diaphragm and responsive to breath.

You can affect the breathing musculature, provoke it to greater effort, but do not confuse the consciousness of emotional control through the application of visual and emotional impulses, with conscious muscular control.

#### ■ THE SIGH OF RELIEF

Sighing and yawning are organic animal activities that the body initiates when it needs an extra charge of oxygen. Babies, dogs, and cats yawn copiously and without embarrassment many times a day. They also sigh soundlessly when their bodies need more oxygen. Adult humans have largely been educated out of these natural functions. Yawning in public is held to be rude, and sighing tends to serve an emotive purpose. Both can cause embarrassment.

>

If, however, you can now begin to enter the pleasures of yawning and sighing for their own sake, you will revitalize your body and your mind. The life of your body and your mind depends on the circulation of oxygen; they may well have been undersupplied in this essential nutrition and their life underenergized because of habitual tension and inhibition.

In establishing the breathing groundwork for freeing your natural voice, you must be able to differentiate between a "sigh of relief" and a "big breath." A big breath engages the muscle machinery of the body without any feeling content, while a sigh of relief is triggered by a thought-feeling impulse. For the actor who wants a voice that will reveal thoughts and feelings rather than merely describing them, exercising the sigh of relief means exercising the connection between thinking and feeling, breath and voice. The ability to create and re-create causal impulse is part of the actor's art. Creating and re-creating a genuinely felt sigh of relief as the underlying energy for breathing and voice reeducates connection. The repetition of exercises means exercising the ability to create imaginative cause.

Actors are often urged to "let go," to "release" in their work. If, as is most often the case, they have grown up conditioned to "control," it may be impossible to accept the invitation to "release." Deep in their mental processes lies the protective counter-command: "don't let go, don't reveal what you're thinking and feeling—it's dangerous." The primary neural pathways have long since ceded their expressive knowledge to secondary impulses of defense and control.

The sigh of relief is the first key to unlocking the doors to those primal impulse centers and reopening the primary neuro-physiological routes between brain and body. The key is mental but it can be turned by physical means. We cannot assume that when we give ourselves the message "let go" or "release" we can do it. We first have to experience in very simple and incontrovertible ways what "letting go" is really like. The force of gravity is one of the best allies we have for finding out what "letting go" is.

**STEP 6** Here is a simple game you can play with your mind, your body, and gravity that may clarify and develop your understanding of the sigh of relief.

- Stand at ease and float one arm up from your side until it makes a straight line out from your shoulder, parallel to the ground, and at right angles to your body.
- Ask yourself the question "What keeps my arm up in the air against the pull of gravity?"

I often spend a long time with my students at this point as they suggest "My muscles," "Nothing," "It just stays there," or "God," but eventually I can convince them that it is the mind that is telling the arm to stay up in the air.

- Now tell yourself, "I'm going to take my mind out of my arm."

Again, after much philosophizing and trial and error in my classes, it becomes apparent that when the mind "lets go" of the arm, the arm drops because of gravity. (Body-mind consciousness keeps us standing upright against the pull of gravity. Unconscious, we fall.)

- Now carefully observe the attributes of that drop. The drop will be sudden, uncontrolled, and the arm will hit the side of your body with some force.

The observation shows that when the mind "lets go" and gravity takes over, energy is released. Your job is now to transfer that experience to the sigh of relief.

- Feed in an impulse for a deep, pleasurable sigh of relief (without sound) that seems to hold in it as much potential energy as your arm floating up against the pull of gravity. If you find a sigh of relief elusive, imagine a situation in which something bad was about to happen, but was averted. Feed the resultant relief deep into your breathing area and feel breath being drawn in.
- Now take your mind out of the breathing area. Breath will release with an equivalent energy to that released when your arm dropped

to your side. The sigh HAPPENS as a result of letting go. Its energy sends the diaphragm flying UP through your rib cage.

The energy of the sigh's release depends on the size of the entering impulse. Although gravity is not giving a helping hand to the outgoing sigh, the mental experience gained from your arm's dropping to gravity should directly influence the sigh experience. Gravity can teach your mind how to let go.

- Now float your arm just halfway up toward your shoulder (about fifteen inches, or at a forty-five degree angle).
- Ask yourself the question, "What is keeping my arm up against the force of gravity?"
- The answer is the same: "My mind."
- Take your mind out of your arm.

Your arm will drop suddenly, giving in to gravity; it will hit your side but with only half the force experienced when it dropped from your shoulder.

- Transfer this experience to a sigh of relief (no sound, just breath) that is now medium size.

A medium-size impulse of relief enters the body-mind bringing with it a medium-size amount of air, and when it lets go it releases a medium-size gust of air. But it is still a "letting-go." The energy release is still sudden and not controlled by conscious musculature. The diaphragm still flies up—but not so far.

- Finally, float your hand up off your wrist, leaving your arm by your side.
- Ask yourself the question, "What is keeping my hand up against the force of gravity?"
- The answer is the same: "My mind."
- Take your mind out of your hand.

Your hand will drop from your wrist, suddenly, giving in to gravity. It will tap the side of your body with a delicate energy that is free of conscious control.

Transfer this experience to a tiny, central sigh of relief.

However small and interior this breath is, it goes out with the release, relief, or letting go. The energy that is released may be minuscule but it is free. The diaphragm releases upward in a tiny movement from its central point.

The natural rhythm of breathing is free, uncontrolled, and infinitely subtle. This exercise begins reconditioning the body-mind to experience communication as release and communication as a by-product of a need to speak that has the freedom to do so. We begin with a sigh of pleasurable relief—eventually it will be relief even when we are releasing large or painful feelings.

Let gravity be your teacher.

**STEP 7** This will all be made easier now by lying flat on your back on the floor and observing the breathing processes in a position where no energy is expended on standing upright. All your attention can go into noticing how breathing works when the body is fully relaxed.

The following exercise clearly needs to be heard rather than read. Tape the guided visualization or have a friend read the instructions—slowly.

- Lying on your back, let your whole body give in to gravity.
- Send your mind into the soles of your feet and think of relaxing your toes and feet so that they appear to drop away from your ankles.

- Imagine your ankle joints are filled with air.
- Let your calf muscles relax so that the flesh, skin, and muscle seem to dissolve off the shinbones.
- Imagine your knee joints filled with air.
- Let your thigh muscles relax so that the flesh, skin, and muscle seem to dissolve off the thighbones. Imagine your hip joints and thigh sockets filled with air so that your legs do not seem to be attached to your torso.
- Let your buttock muscles, pelvic muscles, groin, and lower belly muscles dissolve and melt.
- Be aware of your spine giving in to gravity from the tailbone to the skull.
- Let the small of your back relax, but realize that there is a natural curve there—don't try to flatten it out.
- Let the whole stomach area melt, dissolve, relax.
- Picture the area between your shoulder blades spreading away from your spine to either side.
- Imagine the rib bones as soft as the belly: let them give in to gravity and release into breath.
- Picture the torso releasing along and across the floor.
- Imagine your shoulder sockets filled with air, so that your arms seem hardly to be attached to your torso.
- Be aware of the weight of your arms and hands, heavy and abandoned on the floor.
- Be aware of your fingers.

- Let your attention travel back up your arms, through your shoulders, and into your neck.
- Let your neck-spine give in to gravity, but realize there is a natural curve in these top seven vertebrae—don't try to flatten it.
- Let your throat relax.
- Feel the weight of your head on the floor.
- Let the jaw muscles relax right beside your ears so that your teeth are not clenched.
- Let the tongue relax inside the mouth so that it is not clamped to the roof of the mouth.
- Be aware of your face muscles and let them melt so that the skin of your face feels heavy on the bones.
- Let the cheeks relax, and the lips, the forehead, the eyelids.
- Let the scalp muscles relax.
- Now let your attention sweep back down through your whole body, abandoned on the floor.
- Imagine you could melt down through the floor.
- Take a little time to enjoy this sensation.

Now become aware that in the middle of the stillness of your completely relaxed body, there is an inevitable involuntary movement as your breath enters and leaves you.

- Let your mouth drop open. Lick your lips. Feel the cool air being drawn in from outside, traveling down to the center of your torso, and then feel it being released from there, warm, to escape again to the outside.

- Flop a hand onto your breathing area so that you can feel from outside a reflection of what is happening inside. (For the moment I will designate "the breathing area" as the section below the front ribs and above the navel. The part your hand rests on is called the abdominal wall.)
- Notice that on the outgoing breath, the area under your hand falls toward the ground as the abdominal wall drops.
- Now feed a huge, deep sigh of relief (without sound) far down into your body—imagine the relief moving down into your groin, moving the pelvic floor—and then let the feeling and your breath fall out of you with abandon.
- The breathing area now extends below the navel; the lower belly, as well as the abdominal wall, seems to move in response to the sigh.

#### ■ COMMENTARY

Here, you are enlisting the aid of gravity to increase the possibility of complete muscular release on the outgoing breath. The whole belly area should be able to drop suddenly, without controls, with much the same quality of release that happens if you lift your arm off the floor and then let it relax completely, giving in suddenly to gravity. You can test your body-mind's willingness to relinquish physical control of breathing by asking it to hand the process over to the pull of gravity. Until you can remove all controls, there is no way of choosing controls when necessary; you are still prey to unconscious habitual controls.

The exercise, therefore, is to:

- Feed in a feeling of relief (causal impulse).
- Let it fly out of you uncensored by controls (resultant communication).

- Observe that a larger, deeper impulse of relief triggers a larger breath experience.
- Now that you're on the floor, observe the movement of the diaphragm in all these impulses as it releases toward your pelvis as the breath enters and as it "whooshes" through the rib cage as the breath releases out.

Observe that the impulse moves the breath and the breath moves the body.

If you think along these lines you are less likely to add extra effort to the economical work performed by the involuntary nervous system.

- Explore varying degrees of strength in the causal impulse feeding into the breathing center—first, the natural breathing rhythm exchanges to a small, contented sigh, then to a larger, grateful sigh, and finally to a huge, deep sigh of relief. Use your imagination to create situations to stimulate appropriately the differing intensities of the sighs.
- Relax back to natural breathing.

#### STEP 8

- Slowly, with complete physical awareness of your skeletal activity and muscular relaxation, rise from the floor to a standing position. Let your head be the last part of your body to rise.

As you stand upright, see how much you can retain of the physical sensations you experienced while on the floor, for instance:

- Imagine that the floor is still supporting your back.
- Leave your stomach muscles as sloppy as they were when you were lying down.
- Imagine the force of gravity is behind you and let the abdominal wall fall toward it on the outgoing breath.

- Observe the natural rhythm of your breathing.
- Observe any differences between breathing lying down and standing up.
- Observe that the diaphragm now moves vertically rather than horizontally.
- Observe any differences there may be between your breathing now and the last time you were aware of it while standing.

Understand what you are experiencing in terms of change, rather than in terms of right and wrong:

Where, specifically, in your body do you feel movement in response to breath? In your ribs? Back? Sides? Belly? Groin? Internally? Externally?

What feels better than before? What feels worse? How do you feel?

From where is the breath releasing? Where is it going?

Can you feel or picture the diaphragm dropping when the breath enters and then "whooshing" up through the rib cage when the breath releases out?

Do you feel more awake? Do you feel sleepy? Do you feel confused?

Have you found anything new?

I do not have answers to these questions—you do. It is important that each of you keeps asking such questions and keeps answering with a growing knowledge of what is true in your individual, organic experience.

The difficulty in working on oneself is to admit new experiences. Most of us have considerable investment in our conditioning because it has brought us this far and is reasonably reliable and safe. If you ask yourself questions about the new sensations you have experienced and make it an exercise to articulate your answers out loud, you will learn and change twice as fast. As has been pointed out before, the mind is reluctant to embrace deep change,

and will play devious games to maintain the status quo. We are dealing with functions that should be automatic, and it takes great determination to change habits programmed at this level. In these exercises the new experiences are on a deeper level of consciousness and when you verbalize the experience, you bring it up to a more familiar level of consciousness, and the new experience becomes reinforced, making a firmer imprint.

Here is a scene often enacted, with variations, in the course of voice classes I have taught; it illustrates some of the ways in which the mind manages to escape change. The pupil has been taken through the work described in this and the previous lesson, and it is visibly evident that the breathing is deeper in the body, freer, and less labored.

ME: How do you feel?

PUPIL: Fine. Good.

ME: What do you feel?

PUPIL: I don't know exactly.

ME: Do you feel any differences?

PUPIL: Not really. I feel dizzy, and a bit nauseous.

ME: What about your breathing? (Silence). Do you notice it affecting any new parts of your body?

PUPIL: Oh, yes. It's much easier.

ME: Where?

PUPIL: Wait a minute; I'll have to think back. Mmmmm-yes- well, I've never felt it in my lower back before. (Or stomach, or legs, it doesn't matter.)

ME: What do you feel happens there now?

PUPIL: Well, it's sort of as though I breathe into my buttocks (Or pelvis, or knees, etc.).

ME: OK, fine.

PUPIL: Is that right?

ME: If that's how you felt it, that's fine for the time being.

PUPIL: But are you supposed to breathe in your ass?

We might then go on to discuss the fact that the lungs only go down as far as the diaphragm, which cuts the body in two horizontally, and that when breath goes in, the diaphragm moves down, pushing the stomach down, which in turn pushes the lower intestines down, so that there are graphic movements in the lower torso in response to breath. These movements are not confined to the front of the body; therefore, the lower spine

must be free of tension to allow full use of the breathing apparatus. It lengthens in response to large breathing demands, helping to create the greatest space possible inside the torso into which the lungs can expand and shorten on release. These spine movements are almost imperceptible when standing, but can easily be observed when lying face down.

The important thing in badgering the pupil about what had happened in the course of the exercise was to find even one specific point in the general experience that could be articulated and therefore learned, both organically and consciously. The diversionary tactics employed by the pupil's mind to avoid coping with something new were, roughly, as follows: The first answer, "Fine—good," indicates that he thinks I will be flattered by the success of the exercise and leave him alone. The second response, "I don't know," can be interpreted as "Let me enjoy my subjective experience which is private, personal, and will be spoiled if I talk about it;" this is generally resistant. The third response, which translates to, "I will not admit change for the better; I will concentrate on this rather unpleasant, disoriented, dizzy feeling" is avoidance.

#### ■ COMMENTARY

If you can learn to accept nausea or dizziness when they occur you will find you can embrace the state as a useful disorientation out of which you can explore a new use of yourself. If, however, you are frightened by the experience, you may throw up or faint and, by so doing, you will have successfully escaped a new experience. The release of tension in some extremely nervous people, and the consequent submission of the lungs to the powerful involuntary nervous system, can be such a turnover in the whole state of being that dizziness is a way of life for a time. Once such people have fainted a couple of times, they become familiar with the process and find the moment when they can choose to go with it and pass out or focus on something more interesting such as the exercise at hand. This may sound callous but without such confrontation, significant change and growth can be postponed forever. It should also be emphasized that it is not necessary to faint or throw up in order to liberate your breathing.



It is very natural to feel a bit dizzy on standing up after lying on the floor for some time because of the alteration in the balance mechanism and because, with deep relaxation, more oxygen enters and leaves the body, stimulating circulation and pumping more blood to the heart and the brain, thereby altering the glandular and chemical status quo. Dizziness in this work is nearly always healthy because it demonstrates that something has changed.

In soliciting feedback from my students I try to teach a way of learning that recognizes and tackles a persistent tendency many of us have to be self-denigrating, self-judging, and ultimately more ready to fail than to succeed.

Here are some other common responses to the question "How do you feel?": "I was really cold lying on the floor;" "My back hurt when I stood up;" "My legs started shaking;" "I didn't like looking at my bones like that;" "I missed it all because I went to sleep;" "I tensed up all over again when I stood up."

Each of these experiences may well seem preeminent to the student but none of them relates to the exercise, which had to do with breathing. I will then ask the next question, "Was that the *most interesting* thing that happened in the course of that long exercise in breathing awareness?" As I prod and provoke, the student will eventually say, "Well, I felt much more breath go in than I ever have," or "I saw all sorts of colors when I started really sighing," or "I thought I was going to cry."

The lesson I try to teach here is that *first* one must articulate anything, however small, that is *fresh, new, or interesting*. After that, one can talk about the problems and the pains. Any new experience must be acknowledged if it is to become an agent of conscious change. Otherwise the new experience will disappear and old habits will settle back in. A most persistent old habit may be a silent, negative litany almost unconsciously beating inside the head: "You didn't get it;" "You'll never make it;" "You're not clever enough;" "You haven't got what it takes;" "You probably didn't understand the instructions;" or some other phrase once delivered long ago by a parent or teacher who suggested you would not succeed, and was imprinted on your hypersensitive young heart and made indelible by every subsequent small failure. In order to protect yourself from the possibility of failure on the exercise in question, you evade the issue by reporting in on irrelevant "problems."

If you cultivate the habit of looking for the *fresh, new, or interesting* experiences and articulating them, you will gradually erase the negative litany and replace it with your own positive litany. Celebrate whatever you experienced in the exercise that was of fresh interest instead of flagellating

yourself with unpleasant or unsuccessful things. The slogan is "Celebrate—Don't flagellate!" This does not mean you have to have a wonderful or revelatory or profoundly meaningful experience—just that transformation comes in small, incremental steps and each step should be positively acknowledged.

Thus I encourage you to celebrate whatever you experienced in the previous exercises that was *fresh* (an experience that was somewhat familiar but suddenly caught your interest afresh, or something you had known before that appeared in a new light), *new* (never before experienced), or *interesting* (piqued your curiosity or made you think twice about it) as you explored some initial awareness of your natural breathing process. Consider the alternative: what you have just done was stale, old, or boring.

In this exploration it has been suggested that the involuntary nervous system does things best. That if you allow your breathing to tell you what it wants, you will not have to waste energy controlling or sustaining it consciously. That the ultimate controls for the breath are thoughts and feelings. That instead of sending active messages to yourself, such as "breathe in," "breathe out," "take a breath," "inhale," "exhale," you send passive messages such as "allow the breath in," "let the breath out," "let the breath enter," "let the breath fly out." The nouns attached to breathing are no longer "inhalation," "exhalation," but are "incoming breath" and "outgoing breath." If you do not change the language attached to the breathing process, you will not change the behavior. It takes longer in the beginning, but once reprogrammed, you will find the newly found natural way much more efficient than anything you could consciously devise.

## PRACTICE

Do your spine and breathing exercises for two or three days. Be aware of any tensions, and make the decision to relax; notice how your breathing responds to the events of your day; notice moments when your breathing holds and why; notice how you feel when you relax and breathe naturally; make use of your friend, the sigh of relief.

Make notes of your observations.

# 3

## Workday Three

*The Touch of Sound:*

*Initial vibrations . . . pool of water*

■ Prepare to work for:

**ONE HOUR OR MORE**

My insistent endeavor, in this and subsequent chapters, will be to shift the job of judging sound from the aural sense to the tactile and visual senses. As long as work on the voice includes listening to sounds to check their quality, there will be a conditioned split between the head and the heart, and emotion will be censored by intellect rather than shaped by it. By the *touch* of sound I mean the feeling of vibrations in the body. We will initially explore sound as another inhabitant of that central part of the body housing breath, feelings, and impulses. The impetus for sound is impulse, and the raw material is breath; in order to remove effort from the throat, it helps to imagine that sound, as well as breath, starts from the middle of the body. Be prepared for a powerful application of your imagination in this. People tend to be conditioned to an unconscious physical sense that they communicate from just behind the face, with an unconscious visualization of the passageway for the voice going from the throat through the jaw. Here you will be challenged to find a communicating center a good eighteen inches lower than expected and a passageway some four to six inches higher.

Thus far I have led you through a preliminary exploration of your body and your breathing, one which required you to expand your sense of self. We shall now branch out, and imagery will now come more and more into play. I shall again refer to Antonio Damasio (see Preface and Introduction), a neuro-scientist who sheds light on the interactions of body and emotion in the creation of consciousness and often suggests a fresh articulation of

specific stages in the actor's journey. In his book *The Feeling of What Happens* he uses the term *core consciousness*.

(Core consciousness) provides the organism with a sense of self about one moment—now—and about one place—here. The scope of core consciousness is the here and now. Core consciousness does not illuminate the future, and the only past it vaguely lets us glimpse is that which occurred in the instant just before. There is no elsewhere, there is no before, there is no after.

(p. 9)

Though I generally use the word *awareness* in teaching, I think that Damasio's term *core consciousness* is the state of being alive, alert, and aware that the actor seeks as a launching pad to creativity. It is the foundation for "extended consciousness" (Damasio) and the exercise of imagination. The touch of sound is an exercise of the imagination rooted in the here and now.

In the following exercises I will be asking you to use the power of imagery to help stimulate your voice to become free. Imagery is the language of the body. Imagination is the language of acting. When you regularly employ imagery to exercise the experience of voice, you program a mind/body connection that brings imagination out of the head and into the realm of the body. Images arouse feelings that trigger impulse and action. Imagination in the head is not of much use to the actor (I would call it "invention"), but embodied imagination is the stuff of acting. Embodied imagination can be exercised and developed as muscles can. Only when imagination is embodied in the actor's organism will the actor perform as a unified entity. The way you train your body and your voice will determine the way your body and voice serve you on stage. I would emphasize that imagery is not confined to the visual. All the other senses contribute "imagery" to the body-mind and the sense of smell and the sense of touch are particularly powerful in provoking memory and emotion. Here is Antonio Damasio again:

I regard the problem of consciousness as a combination of two intimately related problems. The first is the problem of understanding how the brain inside the human organism engenders the mental patterns that we call, for lack of a better term, the images of an object. By object I mean entities as diverse as a person, a place, a melody, a toothache, a state of bliss; by image I mean a mental pattern in any of the sensory modalities, e.g. a sound image, a tactile image, the image of a state of well-being. Such images convey aspects of the physical characteristics of the object

and they may also convey the reaction of like or dislike one may have for an object, the plans one may formulate for it, or the web or relationships of that object among other objects. Quite candidly, this first problem of consciousness is the problem of how we get "the movie in the brain," provided we realize that in this rough metaphor the movie has many sensory portals—sight, sound, taste and olfaction, touch, inner senses, and so on.

(From *The Feeling of What Happens*, p. 9)

Images are constructed either when we engage objects, from persons and places to toothaches, from the outside of the brain toward its inside; or when we reconstruct objects from memory, from the inside out, as it were. The business of making images never stops while we are awake and it even continues during part of our sleep, when we dream. One might argue that images are the currency of our minds.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 318-19)

Steps 1 and 2 rely on a lengthy physical awareness and visualization process and are best done with eyes closed. If you are working alone you should record the instructions for the first two steps. Steps 3 through 8 follow later.

#### STEP 1

- Stand easily, being aware of your long spine moving up the middle of the back, carrying the weight of your torso off your legs.
- Let your stomach muscles relax.

You must sacrifice your vanity for a little while in the interest of inner relaxation. Let your stomach sag, without becoming swaybacked or locking your knees.

Keep sending two messages:

- Lengthen the spine.  
Let the muscles go.

- Tune in to the natural, everyday breathing that is deep inside your body.
- Induce a deep sigh of relief.
- Be aware of the breath responding and releasing through your mouth on an easy and loose "fff."
- Feel that the breath is relief and the relief is breath. See if you can induce a large enough feeling of relief for the ingoing breath to open you all the way down into the lower half of your torso, from the diaphragm down to the pelvic floor.
- Picture the billowing movement of the diaphragm as it drops to receive breath and whooshes up through the rib cage to release it.

From the pelvic floor let your body-mind's eye travel down through your legs to your feet, and then continue on down from your feet to the ground below and deeper still to the electro-magnetic currents that run below the surface of the earth.

- Picture those electro-magnetic currents flowing back up from beneath the earth through your feet, legs, and torso to your breathing area.
- Let your mind rest with the easy in-and-out of your breath.

Now introduce a picture that can take over the inside of your body from the diaphragm downward.

- *Picture:*  
A deep, calm forest pool with a surface roughly level with your diaphragm and its depths in your pelvic region. The pool is fed by underground streams that come from below the earth through your legs.
- *Picture:*  
Your spine as if it were a great tree rooted at the edge of the forest pool.

- *Picture:*  
The surface of the pool suffused with sunlight.
- *Picture:*  
A small image of yourself standing at the edge of the pool, leaning against the tree looking at your reflection in the sunlit surface of the pool.
- *Picture:*  
The surface of the pool reflecting an enlarged image of your face looking up to your real face with a slight smile. Your lips are open.

**STEP 2** When the image is clear, transform the picture from a pool of water to a pool of the vibrations of sound. The pool is now the pool of your voice.

- With your body-mind's eye, look at the image of your face on the surface of the pool. Focus on your mouth, lips open, perhaps smiling slightly.

Allow a bubble of vibration to break the surface of the pool, escaping through the image of your lips and through your actual lips:

- Huh

As the mouth is only a little bit open and quite relaxed, the resultant sound of this sigh from the pool of vibrations will be a bubble, a rather formless "huh." (It is similar to an English *her* or the American *her* before the *R* changes the vowel or some American pronunciations of the vowel sound in *hut*. I shall be spelling it "huh.") If the mouth opens wider, the sound becomes more like "haa-aah" in *father*; if the mouth is not relaxed enough to drop open easily, three-quarters of the sound will go into the nose. The sound should be the primal, unformed, neutral one that happens when there is no tension in the throat or mouth to distort it and no vowel demand to mold it.

- And now a double bubble comes up from deep down below, breaking the surface of the pool:
- Huh-huh
- Leave the mouth loosely open.

Feed in the impulse for a sigh of relief deep into the pool of vibrations.

- Sigh the relief out on a long fountain of vibrations that rises up from the underground springs and out through your mouth.
- Hu-u-u-uh
- Relax inside, and allow the breath to replace itself.

Yawn, stretch, open your eyes, and shake the vibrations out from the pool through your whole torso and all your limbs.

Explore the possibility of sighing relief out on the vibrations of sound. Picture the source of feeling and vibration deep inside your body, with nothing impeding the "hu-u-u-uh" sound as it sighs through your mouth to the outside. The pool is a pool filled with relief.

Make sure that the relief connects with one hundred percent vibrations, not fifty percent breath and fifty percent vibrations.

This is general work to focus your mind toward a causal energy source for your voice that involves image and feeling and to begin to experience a tangible connection between sound vibrations and feeling. The imagination has been invoked, and at the same time the anatomy of breathing has been accurately engaged.

In Step 3 you will be looking for a more precise and sensitive touch of sound. The more economically the breath and vocal folds interact, the better, both for the sake of vocal health and in pursuit of a faithful communication of thought. Paradoxically, an inaccurate picture of vocal anatomy most successfully achieves the economy of function between breath and vocal folds. The voice works best when the starting points for breath and vibration are fused in one picture, which is at some distance below the larynx.

To begin, we will zero in on the center of the diaphragm as the fuse-

point. In the interests of economy this involves a specific picture of the diaphragm as the most central and initial point of connection between the breath and the sound. The picture includes, consciously or unconsciously, the powerful plexus of nerves known as the solar plexus. Although emotions and feelings are registered throughout the body in differing degrees of vividness, feelings of sadness, joy, anger, shock, and grief are commonly registered with tangible sharpness in the solar plexus/diaphragm area. For those of us who wish our voices to convey the emotions we feel, the fuse-point of breath, sound, solar plexus, and diaphragm becomes palpable with the repeated exercise of imagination. The experience of voice originating in and coming out from that fuse-point becomes habitual. This experience becomes the touchstone of truth and, eventually, the natural way to speak. You might argue that most of your communication is unemotional, but it is a fact of the human organism that we exist in an emotional flux that cannot be stopped and is part of the essence of life.

Here again is Antonio Damasio, to whom I referred at the beginning of this section:

Normal human behavior exhibits a continuity of emotions induced by a continuity of thoughts. The contents of those thoughts, and there are usually parallel and simultaneous contents, include objects with which the organism is actually engaged or objects recalled from memory as well as feelings of the emotions that have just occurred. In turn, many of these "streams" of thought—of actual objects, of recalled objects, and of feelings—can induce emotions, from background to secondary, with or without our cognizance. The continuous exhibition of emotion derives from this overabundance of inducers, known and not known, simple and not so simple.

The continuity of the melodic line of background emotion is an important fact to consider in our observation of normal human behavior.

*(From The Feeling of What Happens, p. 93)*

Taken out of context, this seems like a good note for a book about acting.

Given that the actor must observe and understand his or her own human behavior before s/he can know how to take on the behavior of a character in a play, let us return now to further exploration of the behavioral connection between emotion, breath, and voice.

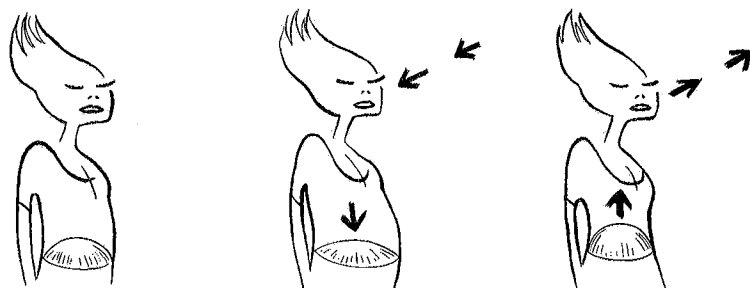
Your exploration will focus not just on the diaphragm, but the center point of the diaphragm. You cannot feel the diaphragm, but by picturing it, you can influence its action and sharpen and sensitize the mind's connection

with sound. The more accurately you can visualize the diaphragm and its movements, the more you can restore and enhance its function.

In repose, the diaphragm is dome shaped. The largest single muscle in the body, it is attached at its circumference to the bottom of the rib cage from the breast-bone and abdominal wall in front, to the spine in the back. It cuts the whole body in two, horizontally.

When breath comes in, the diaphragm moves down, flattening. When breath goes out, the diaphragm moves up, the dome becoming more cone-shaped. The downward movement is contraction, and the upward one expansion, but this is one of the scientific facts that only serves to confuse the lay practitioner and is best translated by subjective perception. Subjectively the sensory picture is of expansion. As breath comes in, the lungs expand and the feeling in the diaphragm area is of expansion downward, a small expansion for everyday breathing and a larger one for larger expression such as sighing. The outgoing sensory breath picture is of the diaphragm releasing up through the rib cage. As long as the external abdominal muscles dominate this experience, all interior life is diminished.

You will find in the following three illustrations an idea of how the diaphragm moves as breath goes in and out.



Before moving to Step 3, feed in several sighs of relief with the picture of your diaphragm as a thin, elastic, rubbery dome being blown down by the incoming breath, and up by the outgoing breath. The picture applies to the large effect of a sigh impulse; the movements are infinitely subtler for ordinary breathing. For the ultimate outgoing sigh release, the dome of the diaphragm can be pictured softening, softening, softening in the release until it almost becomes cone shaped with the tip of the cone almost reaching the collarbone. Then you can induce a sudden drop of the diaphragm to the floor of the lungs. Don't squeeze the breath out—soften it with release.

**STEP 3** Visualize a point at the very center of the dome of the diaphragm that responds to the tiny in and out of everyday breathing. With your mouth open, observe the in and out of small “fff”s in the rhythm of natural breathing. Use the picture of the center of the dome of the diaphragm as the starting point of breathing.

- Now let the thought of an unformed neutral sound enter the center of the dome of the diaphragm on the incoming breath and be realized in vibration on the outgoing breath. The sound that results will be “huh.”

This is the “bubble” that emerged from the “pool of vibrations” in Step 2.

Stay within the rate and rhythm of your natural breathing.

Instead of “fff” on the outgoing breath, there is now a small “huh” sound.

- As soon as the “huh” has released on the escaping breath, relax in the center of the diaphragm, and breath will replace itself.

Let the picture of the pool of vibrations and the release of the bubble “huh” merge with this exploration

Release the “huh” vibrations lightly and let them go. (They last no longer than the small outgoing “fff.”)

Breath will automatically drop back in.

Don't listen to the sound—picture it and, if possible, feel it. (Eventually you will actually feel vibration in the center of your diaphragm but don't worry if you can't feel it now. If you keep introducing the picture, the tangible sensation will come.)

The sound touches the center of the diaphragm as a result of the picture and the thought. You do not make the sound—the sound happens as a result of causal thought/impulse.

This is “The Touch of Sound.”

- Let the “huh” thought enter again and again be realized in the touch of sound: “huh.” Relax, and the breath will drop back in.
- Repeat this within the ordinary rhythm of your natural breathing.

It is a small sound, and a small exchange of breath.

- Now let there be a double-release bounce of vibrations, “huh-huh,” still in the rhythm of natural breathing. This is the double bubble from the center of the pool of vibrations. You can induce a bubble but you can’t make one.

The touch of sound is in the center of the diaphragm.

- Huh-huh
- Wait for the breath to want to replace, then yield to that need.
- Breath goes in:

( $\Delta$  will be the symbol for a new breath.)

Stay with the touch of sound sequence:

- Huh-huh
- Relax inside.
- Breath goes in.  $\Delta$
- The touch of sound
- Huh-huh
- Relax
- The breath replaces.  $\Delta$
- Huh-huh

- Huh-huh  $\Delta$  huh-huh  $\Delta$  huh-huh  $\Delta$

Now exercise this touch of sound following semitones down from a middle C and back up to middle C again. Then speak “huh-huh” once more.

women  $\Delta$  = breath  
huh huh huh huh etc.

men  
huh huh  $\Delta$  huh huh  $\Delta$  etc.

- Repeat the “huh-huh” on ascending pitches as you drop your spine down and on descending pitches as you build it back up to standing.

women dropping down your spine uncurling up your spine  $\Delta$  = breath  
huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh

men  
huh huh  $\Delta$  huh huh  $\Delta$  huh huh  $\Delta$  huh huh  $\Delta$  huh huh  $\Delta$  huh huh  $\Delta$  huh huh  $\Delta$

Throughout Step 3 explore the physical sensation of sound in the center of your body. The physical sensation of breathing should remain as close as possible to the sensation there is when you are breathing naturally without sound. Try not to make the sound; try to let sound be the by-product of the “touch” picture in the same way that you do not produce light in an electric bulb: you press a switch or put a plug in a socket, and light happens. The analogy is exact—let sound happen. You are practicing dealing with cause and letting effect follow.

You should take a break at this point. In the next phase of the initial exploration of breath, sound, and image, I will lead you through a lengthy pictorial journey lying on your back on the floor. You must set aside twenty to thirty minutes for the work and, if possible, tape the instructions rather than try to read them as you go. If you can have with someone else read the instructions, that would be best.

**STEP 4** Gravity and breath: there are some physical positions that are wonderfully conducive to experiencing the connection of breath, voice, and impulse. The positions themselves are not so important as the images of the positions that you create and maintain. The positions we will experience now are beholden to the force of gravity for their effectiveness.

I will ask you to play with two counteractive pictures. The first is the picture of *gravity*, an active magnetic force that lives in the center of the earth. Gravity loves to feed off your excess tensions. When you lie on the floor, gravity will happily suck tension out of you. When you stand up, gravity will happily play games with you to see how you can compete with his pull. Gravity is constantly challenging us in the game of life.

The second picture is more imaginative. Create a picture, vague or clear, of a Grand Marionettist in the sky who has strings attached to every joint and bone of your body and who is playfully engaged in an ongoing contest with gravity.

This imaginative exercise is designed to induce the most economical of relationships between mind and body. You will exercise the power of mind over matter by asking the bones of your body to respond to your imagination as if the muscles were out of the picture altogether.

This is a deliberately long, slow, contemplative process.

Do not hurry.

Do not aim for a result.

Be lazy. "Waste your time." (Moshe Feldenkrais, *Awareness Through Movement*)

Lie down on the floor on your back with your legs released into their full length.

- Close your eyes in order to deepen your familiarity with the inner geography of your body.
- Let your arms slide out from your sides and align with your shoulders so that your arms are at right angles to your torso.

- Introduce a picture of Gravity. Allow every part of your body to give in to the pull of Gravity. Allow all your tensions to be drained out of you by Gravity's hunger.
- Picture the bones of your body lying on the ground free of muscular constriction.

Now picture the Grand Marionettist in the Sky.

- Picture the string he has attached to your right knee joint. Let him pull on the right knee string so that your right knee moves up toward the sky, dragging your heel along the floor until your foot is flat on the floor.

Don't use any muscles. Picture the bones.

Notice that the small of your back on the right side has fallen closer to the floor.

- Now picture the string the Grand Marionettist in the Sky has attached to your left knee joint. Let him pull on this string so that your left knee moves up toward the sky, dragging your heel along the floor until your foot is flat.

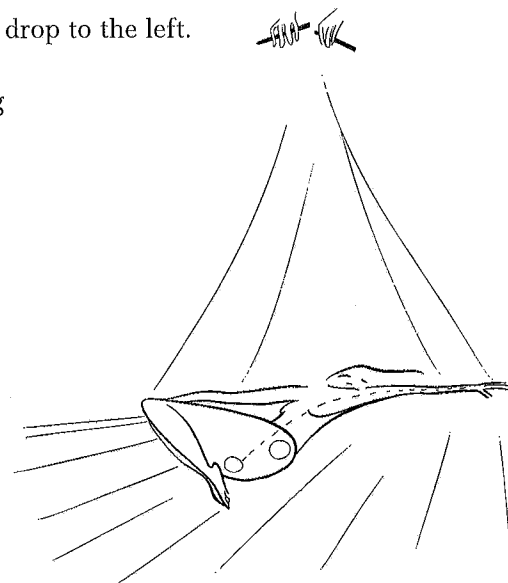
Notice that the small of your back on both sides of your torso has fallen closer to the floor.

- Now the Grand Marionettist pulls on the right knee string so that your knee and thighbone swing up and float over your belly.
- Picture the smooth round top of the thighbone as it rocks in the cradle of your hip socket.
- Now the Grand Marionettist pulls on the left knee string so that your left knee and thighbone swing up and float over your belly.
- Picture the smooth round tops of both thighbones as they balance in the cradles of your hip sockets.



- Then the Marionettist swings both knees over to the right and lets the strings go so that your knees fall to the floor, left knee on top of right knee, comfortably close to your chest.
- At this point let your head drop to the left.

Your torso is now experiencing a diagonal stretch.



- Let your legs, thighs, and hips relax completely to gravity to your right while your head and left shoulder blade and arm relax completely to your left. Don't do anything. Let gravity take your torso into as long and elastic a diagonal stretch as possible.
- Breathe. Sigh into any tight or painful places.
- Stay in this position as long as you can tolerate it allowing the force of gravity to undo tensions and open the torso.

Picture the right hip socket.

- Imagine that your lungs go all the way down to your hip socket. Enlarge the size of the picture of your hip socket, increasing in your imagination the space available for your lungs.
- Feed the impulse for a deep sigh of relief all the way down to the hip socket. Picture the sigh-breath releasing without sound along a wide diagonal breathing channel that travels from the right hip socket to the

left shoulder socket, out through your mouth and also through an imaginary mouth in your left shoulder.

- As the sigh releases, picture the horizontal release of the diaphragm through the rib cage.

Bring back the picture of the Marionettist.

- He pulls on the string attached to your left knee and swings it up over your belly bringing your foot off the floor. As your back falls into the floor your right knee will inevitably be drawn up off the floor to hang over your belly. Both feet are off the floor.
- For a moment the knees and legs are suspended over the torso, then the strings draw them to the left, and as the Marionettist releases the strings, your knees fall heavily to the floor on your left, comfortably close to your chest. Your head drops to the right.

Repeat the pictorial exercises now for the left hip socket and a diagonal channel going from that space all along the inside of the torso and out through your right shoulder.

- Sigh—without sound—from your left hip socket along the diagonal channel. Bring back the picture of the Marionettist.
- He pulls on the string attached to your right knee and swings it up over your belly, your foot off the floor. As your back falls into the floor, your left knee will inevitably be drawn up off the floor to hang over your belly, and both your feet will be off the floor.
- For a moment your knees and legs are suspended over the torso, then the strings are released and both your feet fall straight to the floor.

You are now on your back with your knees up and your feet flat on the floor.

Picture the two hip sockets and the space between them that encompasses the whole pelvic basin.

- Now feed in a huge impulse for a sigh of relief that is big enough to fill the great cavity of the pelvic basin and the hip sockets.

As this great sigh-breath escapes (without sound), it will flow out through the length and breadth of your torso from the pelvic floor to the shoulder girdle and the mouth, and your diaphragm will flow up through your rib cage.

### Adding Sound

In the next exploration, repeat all the stages of the diagonal stretch exercise with careful reconstruction of the images.

**STEP 5** Having arrived in the diagonal stretch with your knees over to the right and your head to the left, look with your mind's eye down into the right hip socket space, and picture, if you can, the vibrations of sound preexisting in that space. You might visualize the vibrations as water gathered in the rock-pool of your hip socket.

- Now feed the impulse for a deep, long sigh of pleasurable relief way down into the rock-pool hip socket, galvanizing the vibrations into life. Let the vibrations be a river of relief flowing out along the wide, diagonal channel that leads from your right hip socket and out through your left shoulder and your mouth.
- Hu-u-u-uh
- Feed in two or three new impulses, each time picturing sound vibrations as a broad flowing river of relief that flows unimpeded through the diagonal river channel with no boulders, no dams, everything open.
- Hu-u-u-uh
- Float your legs over to the other diagonal stretch and repeat the visualization with the sensation of the river of relief and vibration flowing from your left rock-pool hip socket through your torso river-channel and out into the air in front of your face.

- Hu-u-u-uh
- Now float your knees into the middle, up over your belly, and drop your feet to the floor.

Picture that a great reservoir of the vibrations of sound preexist in the pelvic basin from hip socket to hip socket.

- Feed in a huge impulse for a sigh of relief big enough to draw breath down and fill the whole pelvic region. Let the sigh impulse enter the reservoir of sound and release a long, broad river of vibration and relief that flows out through the whole torso and into the air in front of your face.
- Hu-u-u-uh
- Now induce an enormous yawn that starts in the middle of your body and stretches you out to your fingers and toes.
- Yawn with sound and see the vibrations traveling down through your legs, out through your arms, up and out through your head until the whole of the inside of your body seems to be flooding with the vibrations of sound.



**STEP 6** Slowly roll over on to your side, then onto your hands and knees; tuck your toes into the floor, float your tailbone up into the air while leaving your head hanging heavily down, then shift your weight off your hands and on to your feet. Slowly uncurl your spine with your head coming up last.

Shake your whole body loosely, as if you were trying to shake your skin and flesh off your bones—or like a dog shaking water off its back.

- Shake the vibrations of sound out from your whole body.

Walk around. Check your state of body and state of mind. Note the details of things that are fresh, new, or interesting. Say what those things are out loud. Describe out loud anything that was fresh, new, or interesting about your voice, anything that struck you in the course of the previous exercise.

It may be hard to prevent your muscles from helping make the sound at this point. It may seem that the sound still centers in your throat however much you try to visualize it lower down. As you relax more and more, you should find that your abdominal wall can give in to gravity, and that both your picture and the sensation of sound happening deeper in your body will become clearer.

**STEP 7** Lie down on the floor again.

- Sigh with relief with sound. As you sigh out, jiggle your loose belly with your hands so that the sound gets shaken manually.
- Hu-u-u-u-uh  
(Let this sound go on as long as possible.)

Imagine you are massaging the actual vibrations inside your belly, so that you become more and more familiar with the feeling of the vibrations being there rather than in your throat or mouth.

Then, reintroduce the central, sensitive touch of sound that happens in the very center of the dome of the diaphragm.

- Huh-huh △

Huh-huh △

With the same sensitivity and clear picture of the central connection with sound:

- Count one to five.  
Say your name.  
Describe how you feel.  
Speak a poem.  
Do all of this with the awareness of the physical sensation of sound in the center of your body.

It's as though the inside of the whole of your torso from the pelvic floor to the shoulder girdle is available to breath and vibration. You choose to have the thought-impulse make economical and sensitive contact with the solar plexus, the emotional receiving and transmitting center.

**STEP 8** Roll over to your hands and knees, tuck your toes under, release your tailbone to the ceiling, shift the weight off your hands to your feet, slowly build up your spine and repeat the whole process standing.

- Emit a sigh of relief on sound.

Hu-u-u-u-uh △

- Jiggle the sound with your hands on your belly.

Hu-u-u-u-uh △

Then:

- Huh △ huh △ huh △

- Each new breath (△) is a tiny central sigh of relief.

- Repeat with pitches, dropping *down* your spine as you go *up* through the pitches and coming *up* your spine as you go *down* in pitch.

- Huh-huh △ huh-huh △ huh-huh.

The sounds should be gradually getting easier, freer, deeper in the body—more pleasurable.

Remember that we are only dealing here with the source of sound, so do not be alarmed if it all seems very deep and introverted and self-indulgent. It should be. The depth of the sound, in terms of pitch, is a result at this stage of both the breathing muscles' and the laryngeal muscles' relaxing. You are feeding in very low energy because the first steps are concerned with undoing tension. Relaxed vocal folds produce a low frequency of vibrations and low sound.

It is vital that you cultivate a familiarity with the state of relaxation. If that state is practiced and easily available when you are making little demand on your voice, there is a chance you will be able to maintain a balance between necessary tensions and unnecessary ones when demand is increased. This is the road to achieving maximum effect with minimum effort. You haven't a chance of singing a high C or delivering a speech charged with emotional intensity without undue strain if you have not mastered relaxation while exploring deep, easy, low-energy sound.

I have placed a deliberate emphasis on turning attention inward at this stage. This is to condition you to work causally, which, in the case of the voice, means feeding the source of sound, building the need to communicate, and accumulating inner energy so that speaking will be a release. There is no advantage in developing a vocal instrument that performs dutifully, but has nothing it must say. I would like to point out that this inner energy and connection is also the key to truthful acting for the camera.

Here are some typical observations made by my students after doing the previous floor exercises:

"The more clearly I could see the Grand Marionettist in the Sky and play with that image, the less I used my muscles."

"I began to feel how much farther down in my body my breath can go. The inside of my body became huge."

"Every once in a while I could feel sound starting in my hip socket or pelvic area, and I was surprised at how powerful it was. It was quite scary. It didn't seem like my voice."

"I felt vibrations in my bones and along the floor."

"Even after I stood up I could still feel sound vibrations coming up from down below."

"My voice seemed to be more in my body and my mouth and less in my throat where it usually is."

Having articulated the things—however small—that were fresh, new, or interesting, you should now write them down in the journal that accompanies your ongoing work. Perhaps redo the gingerbread man with a rendition of how you would *like* your voice to live and move in your body—without blocks.

You may now pay attention to the things that seemed problematic. You may write them down or draw pictures of them.

#### ■ COMMENTARY

This has been a long and, I hope, relaxing session. As you go about your day, pay attention to what is happening in your breathing. Notice the moments when you seem to hold your breath and register what it is that makes you stop breathing. Is it a moment of fear? of boredom? of indecision? of feeling inadequate? (You are, of course, continuing to breathe, but minimally, just under your collarbone).

Once you have noticed when you are not breathing, you have the opportunity to breathe consciously in a situation when you may unconsciously be protecting yourself by holding your breath. I can assure you that as you renew your breathing deep in your body, the oxygen that is released into your blood and your brain will enhance your ability to function.

I have a personal experience in this kind of daily observation that you might find helpful. It often happens that when I am in the presence of people who intimidate me—intellectually or socially—I feel stupid and can't think of anything to say. At the same I may notice that I am hardly breathing, that my stomach muscles are tense and that my buttock muscles have tightened. When I relax my buttocks I immediately become more intelligent and find all sorts of things to talk about. The buttock muscles connect with deep breathing musculature that is woven into the pelvic floor and when all these muscles relax, more oxygen is released into the circulation. I assume the livelier blood chemistry affects the brain because I am no longer stupid. Try it!

## PRACTICE

Practice the spine, breathing, and touch of sound exercises for a week.

# 4

## Workday Four

*Freeing Vibrations:*

*Lips, head, body . . . rivers of sound*

■ Prepare to work for:

**ONE HOUR AND A HALF**

Having established a working picture of the vibrations of sound originating in the middle and lower depths of the body, we are now going to explore how those vibrations can be amplified and encouraged to grow. The next few exercises are based on three general ideas:

- (1.) Vibrations are murdered by tension.
- (2.) Vibrations thrive and multiply in an atmosphere of relaxation.
- (3.) Vibrations love to have attention paid to them.

To deal with (1.), we will isolate and eliminate pockets of muscle tension that trap and stifle vibrations. After having eliminated tension, we will consciously encourage relaxation for (2.). And for (3.), we must recognize vibrations when and where they occur, welcome them, indulge them, and nurture them.

Given the opportunity, vibrations' nature is to multiply: to re-sound or resound. They reverberate off a variety of sounding boards. The first of the sounding boards we shall work with is formed when you close your lips on sound. Vibrations, originating centrally, will re-sound on them.

Each new exercise you do should grow out of the previous one. Before entering this exploration of vibration, prepare with the previous exercises: the pool of vibrations, the diagonal stretch, the sighing, and the images and pictures of sound releasing from deep inside the body.

If you are standing, the sound releases upward like a fountain of relief.

If you are lying down, the sound flows like a river.

If you are hanging head downward, the sound is like a waterfall.

### Freeing the Vibrations: Lips

#### STEP 1

- Stand fully aware of your skeletal support and loose muscles, sigh the vibrations of sound up from the pelvic floor, and shake your belly with your hands.
- Hu-u-u-u-uh △
- Re-create the sigh impulse and, on the next long sighing "hu-u-u-uh," slide your hands from your belly up to your chest as though you are drawing the vibrations into your chest.
- Hu-u-u-uh △
- Bring your hands back down to your belly, re-create the sigh impulse and on the next long sighing "hu-u-u-uh" slide your hands from your belly to your chest and then onto your face. *As your hands touch your face, close your lips on the sound.*

Let your hands awaken your awareness to the tactile, physicalized sensation of your voice. See and feel it traveling from the originating source deep down in your body to the arrival place in your face. You should be able to feel clearly the buzz of vibrations between the skin of your hands and the skin of your face. Don't lose connection with the starting point in your pelvic floor.

- Repeat
- When the next long sigh of sound arrives on your lips and hands, let it continue as you *open your lips, and your hands move forward off your face*. Your hands seem to draw the vibrations off your face and out into the air in front of you.

#### ■ △

You will notice that when your lips close on the vibrations, the sound that occurs is "mmmmm."

These "mmmmm" vibrations strengthen the voice by contributing extra sound—the lips re-sound the initial touch of sound vibrations.

The long sigh is now a "hu-u-u-u-ummmmmmm-uh."

- Repeat several times using your hands as a guide to your awareness of the vibrations.
- Then repeat the exercise without your hands. Your awareness of the buzz of vibrations and their movement outward will substitute for your hands.

A fountain of vibrations flows vertically upward and onto your lips and then escapes horizontally into the air.

- Using your hands again: establish a flow of sound vibrations that releases up from the pelvic floor and that you can shake from your belly with your hands.
- Hu-u-u-u-uh △
- Now think the word *I*—personalize it. Let that thought be an impulse that goes down to your source of breath and sound and then releases on a long drawn-out expression of who you are. Use your hands to draw the "I-I-I" from your belly through your chest and out through your open mouth.
- I-I-I △
- Feed in the deep sighing *I* thought-impulse, but this time as your hands touch your chest, bring in the word *am*.
- Am △

It is as though the sense of who you are starts deep in the pelvic floor and then spreads into the region of your heart and lungs with a physical awareness of your state of being in the vibrations.

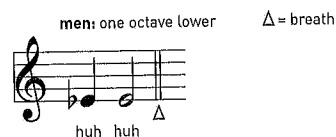
- Repeat, and then as your hands feel the vibrations on your face and lips and move forward into the air, the word *me* releases out of your body.
- Me Δ
- On one long sigh of relief, place your hands on your belly on "I"; on your chest on "am"; then on your face and out to the air on "me."

This will make a very clear personal connection between you and your voice. As you continue with sounds that are not formed into words and may seem more abstract, search for ways to create and re-create a personal connection so that it is always *you* being released through your voice, not just the sound of a musical instrument.

Continue to move your hands over your body as you develop the previous experience into a more formal exercise that can be repeated.

If possible, you should use a piano to confirm pitches.

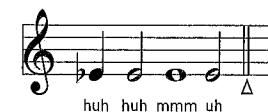
- Establish your connection with the central starting point of sound on the double-bubble release "huh huh."
- Then, finding a pitch that is close to the sound that has just happened, let the sound now happen on pitch.
- Huh-huh Δ



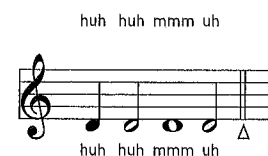
Now, let the sound continue as though on a long sigh, still on pitch, but this time close your lips on the sound.



- Register the feeling of vibrations on your lips.
- As you hum, massage your face with your hands.
- Δ
- Re-create the sigh impulse, but this time open your lips while continuing the sigh sound.



- Huh-hummmm-u-u-uh
- Stop.
- Relax inside, and let the breath replace Δ
- Repeat the impulse and the thought.



- Huh-hummmm-u-u-uh
- As your lips close, place a finger on them to feel the vibrations and then, as your lips open and the sound escapes, move your finger forward to lead the vibrations out.

Try to carry out this exercise purely through the physical steps, letting the sound be a by-product. Don't try to figure out what the resultant sound will be because you will merely be repeating an old and familiar sound, rather than discovering a new set of physical sensations in which the "sound" of the sound is relatively unimportant. It is the feeling and the picture of the sound that matters.

Now let the pitch drop—just a semitone.

- Sigh out "huh-hu-u-u-uh" on pitch, picturing the vibrations streaming up from the middle of your body and through your mouth.
- Close your lips gently on the vibrations.
- Feel the vibrations on your lips as though they were gathering reinforcements there.
- Allow your lips to open and the sound will stream out, reinforced by the extra vibrations found on the sounding board of your lips.
- Relax inside, let the breath drop back in.
- Δ

Repeat the process on several more pitches, going down in semitones to a comfortably low note, then up again to the easy mid-register pitch you started on.

continue down to a comfortably low note

continue up to E<sup>4</sup>

■ COMMENTARY

The fundamental difference between speaking and singing is that in singing we sustain a pitch and in speaking we come off the pitch immediately. We are using pitches in these exercises and in the ones that follow to develop range in an organic manner, to increase the variety of sounds in the voice and to encourage flexibility. You are sighing on pitch.

The sound that happens when you close your lips on the vibrations is commonly known as humming. Keep working with it, however, in terms of physical awareness. When I take a short cut and ask you to hum, try not to respond mechanically with familiar humming, but let the vibrations flow from the middle of your body, through your mouth: close your lips and let the vibrations gather reinforcements from the sounding board of those lips. Think of the vibrations on your lips as though they were strawberries and cream—delicious!

There is nearly always some tension in the lips, either through undue effort or habit. Since one of our underlying premises in exploring how to increase vibrations in the voice is that tension murders vibration, the next step will be to see whether the lips can relax more and thereby deliver more reverberation for sound.

**STEP 2** Blow air out through your lips so that they flutter. This is sometimes called a "lip trill."

This is rather difficult to describe on paper, but horses do it in a relaxing way, babies do it, and small children do it with sound when they are pretending to be trucks and motorcars. It is not essential as an exercise, but it relaxes and stimulates the whole lip area; it wakens dormant vibrations; it helps energize the sound in the very front of the mouth; it is also fun to do. So it is worth working out the movement, with and without sound. Here are a few introductory ideas and different ways of describing it if you are still in doubt.

- (1.) Put your fingers in the corners of your mouth and stretch your lips sideways into a wide grimace. Let go suddenly and blow out



through your lips, vibrating them with the air.

- (2.) Put your index finger against your front teeth between your lips as though you were miming brushing your teeth. Let your lips relax completely so that they fall on your finger. As though you were going to hum, let vibrations flow through your mouth.
- Imagine the vibrations are toothpaste, your finger a toothbrush, and brush your teeth up and down leaving the lips quite relaxed. Revert to a childlike state of playing with sounds between your finger, your lips, and your teeth.
- Retain the relaxation of the lips, remove your finger, and blow out through your lips with the vibrations. The resultant sound will start with a loose sort of *b* and then sputter or flutter into a vibration that lazily imitates that of a motor. Let this happen very loosely, as though your lips started in your cheeks, and feel the vibrations spread as far as possible over your face. It will probably tickle. Look in a mirror to make sure the corners of your lips are loose, not tucked in.

### STEP 3

- Blow out through the lips on vibration, this time on pitch (start with an easy, mid-register pitch); on the same breath, bring the lips together in a hum, then open the lips and let the vibrations escape. Here now, are the physical steps and physical awareness for this exercise.
- Loosen up extra vibrations on your lips by blowing through them, gather those vibrations together on your lips where they touch each other, let the vibrations escape as your lips open.
- Sustain the exercise with a long drawn-out sigh of relief under it.
- Then relax inside and let the breath drop in to replace what has been used.
- Repeat on descending and ascending pitches. (The symbol  $\approx$  will be used to represent “blowing out through the lips on vibration.”)

men: one octave lower       $\approx$  = blowing through the lips       $\Delta$  = breath

$\approx$  mmm\_uh     $\approx$  mmm\_uh     $\approx$  mmm\_uh     $\approx$  mmm\_uh    etc.  
(loosen)(gather)(escape)

- $\approx$  mmmu-u-uh

Take your time; don't hurry the ingoing breath; let the sequence of actions find their own pace and rhythm while you explore and become familiar with the vibrations.

### STEP 4

- Repeat Step 1, observing any changes that you experience. You may, for instance, find that there are more vibrations naturally happening in the very front of the mouth. Move your lips around on the humming, as though savoring the taste of the vibrations before letting them escape.

Vibrations thrive on having attention paid them.

- Become a connoisseur of vibrations:
  - Taste them.
  - Spread them around your face.
  - Luxuriate in them.
  - Indulge them.
- Really bring your mind into your lips as they touch—imagine your two lips as two slices of bread making your favorite sandwich. Imagine the vibrations as your favorite sandwich filling: peanut butter and jelly, mozzarella, honey, tuna. Focus on the taste of the filling of your sandwich as you hum.

Now that sound is being prolonged through three phases (touch of sound, vibrations gathering on the lips, and escape of sound from the lips), you are naturally making more demands on your breathing. You have begun, in effect, to use longer sentences. They are primitive sentences, and the earlier exercises, “huh-hummmmmuh” or “um-mmmm-uh,” can be regarded as three-word sen-

tences. With an impulse to communicate, the faster thought/speech impulses in the brain can be conditioned into spontaneous integration with breath/sound responses in the body. Be sure, therefore, in dealing with longer "sentences," however primitive, to sustain the thought, which will automatically make the breath last. You need never try to sustain the breath as such; the breath will serve a sustained thought.

It is very important never to continue the sound until you run out of breath. Let each set of sounds have an easy, rhythmic pattern that stimulates the breath but does not punish it. The breath serves the thought, and each thought has an intrinsic length. Each new thought has a new breath: short thoughts have short breaths, medium thoughts have medium breaths, and long thoughts have long breaths. Seldom does an organic thought drive the breath through to the last gasp. No purpose whatsoever is served by learning to sustain a breath over a longer and longer span of time; all that happens is that the natural elasticity of the breathing muscles is impaired, and capacity is reduced because the effort involved creates tension, and tension contracts. Everyone has a natural breathing capacity, which when free from inhibitory tension is fully capable of serving the individual emotional and imaginative capacity. The assumption here is that work on the voice is in the interest of the human truth it expresses.

I shall use the suggestions "sigh out on a hum," "sigh the sound into your head," and so on in the early exercises. This is to condition a combined muscular and emotional release at the beginning of every sound. The responsibility for sustaining the breath throughout a sentence is thus relegated to mental activity.

There is basic mental conditioning contained in the treatment of "huh-hummmmmuh" as a sentence with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The touch of sound, "huh huh," is the beginning; the gathering of vibrations on the lips, "mmmmmm," is the middle; the escape of vibrations from the lips, "uh," is the end. Through the application of awareness, your mind should be contained in each of the "words" that make up this sentence; this will program the unification of thought and sound. When you "sigh with relief" through each sentence, you involve yourself on a feeling level as well as a mental and physiological one. A sigh of relief is a very easy feeling to induce, and if you commit yourself to that feeling as an integral component of these early exercises, you will be practicing the synthesis of feeling, thought, body, and voice in simple ways that will make it that much easier for you to freely attack, "Once more into the breach, dear friends, once more/Or close the wall up with our English dead . . ." or "Brave warriors, Clifford and

Northumberland, come, make him stand upon this molehill here . . ." when playing, respectively, Henry V or Queen Margaret in *Henry VI*, Part 3.

#### ■ COMMENTARY

It is necessary to explain such phrases as "sigh out the sound on pitch," "let the sound happen on pitch," and "let the sound continue on pitch." These phrases are used to avoid a conditioned response to the word "sing." The immediate response to the idea of pitch for some people is "I can't sing" or "I'm tone deaf," while others respond by producing sound quite differently from the way in which they would produce a speaking sound because they have been trained to sing. The word "sing" is too loaded to be used casually in the present basic work. At this stage there is no difference in the physical procedures necessary for speaking or singing other than that, in singing, a pitch is sustained, while in speaking, you come off the pitch immediately. Speaking spontaneously engages half tones, quartertones, eighth tones, even sixteenth tones in inflection and intonation while in conventional singing, whole, half, and quartertones are predetermined and sustained. The speaking voice can, however, benefit from music, and the use of ascending and descending pitches introduces new notes and a fresh range of tonal possibilities that will automatically liven up your speaking voice in ways you could not consciously plan. At this point the whole emphasis in the work is on physical awareness, and it helps to have variety in range and pitch while practicing the physical processes. If you repeat an exercise only in your habitual speaking voice, you will tend to remain within your customary range and habitual patterns of inflection and never expand into unknown areas.

#### Freeing the Vibrations: Head

At this stage we will be freeing and amplifying the vibrations of the voice mainly while humming; the effective hum means that there is an open channel from the breathing area directly onto the lips. As we move from the awareness of a small vibration surface, the lips, to larger re-sounding surfaces, first the head and subsequently the whole body, make sure that the hum remains free of the tongue.

■ COMMENTARY

Humming is the sound that happens when the passageway through the mouth is blocked and sounds can only exit by way of the nose.

But it is not enough to say "the mouth" is closed for a hum because the passageway through the mouth can be closed off by the lips or by the front of the tongue touching the front of the hard palate (the upper gum ridge) or by the back of the tongue touching the back of the hard palate or the whole of the tongue being clamped to the roof of the mouth or any combination of these positions.

It is quite likely that your tongue is leading a secret, traitorous life and that when you say to yourself "close your lips on the sound so that a hum occurs" some part of your tongue is also picking up the message and adding an "nnn" or an "ng" to the "mmm."

To test this, look in a mirror:

Sigh a hum onto your lips and then open your lips letting the sound release forward "aaa" Now put the back of your tongue up to touch the back of your hard palate (and probably the soft palate as well) in an "ng" sound—really feel the touch between the tongue and the palate—drop the back of your tongue and let the sound escape on an "aaah"



Now put the front of your tongue up to touch the upper gum ridge (just behind your top teeth) in an "nnn" sound—really feel the touch between the front of the tongue and the gum ridge—and drop the front of your tongue and let the sound escape on an "aaah."



Now play a mouth awareness game, looking in the mirror to see that the part of your mouth you have sent the message to is actually doing the job:

On a pitch put the

- (1) Back of your tongue to the back of your hard palate "ng." Now open—"aaah."
- (2) Front of your tongue to your upper gum ridge "nnn." Now open—"aaah."
- (3) Lips together "mmm." Now open—"aaah."
- (4) Lips together "mmm," then *add* the back of tongue to the back of the hard palate "ng." *Then* open the lips—back of tongue/hard palate remaining closed "ng." *THEN* open—"aaah."
- (5) Back of your tongue to the back of your hard palate "ng." *Then add* the front of the tongue to the upper gum ridge "nnn." *Then* drop the back of your tongue while the front of your tongue/upper gum ridge remains closed. *Then* open from the "nnn" to "aaah."
- (6) Lips together "mmm" and *add* the back of the tongue to the back of the hard palate "ng." Keep the lips together and open and close the back of tongue and back of hard palate behind the closed lips.



Register where the vibrations predominate when the back of the tongue is up and when it is down.

Clearly the vibrations gather more into the nose when the back of the tongue is up and touching the soft palate and focus much more into the lips when it is down.

*This final experience of the hum—when only the lips are closed and there is a clear space behind them—can be called the effective hum.*

The other hums are not wrong or illegal in any way; they just don't deliver vibrations as effectively into the front of the mouth. The effective hum is the one that heals and nourishes and strengthens the voice.

Remembering that no vibrations can exist freely unless the breath is free, (that is, be sure to continue to create and re-create a sigh to fuel each new sound) let us return to the vibrations that amplify sound, with an exploration of what happens when the whole head and neck area starts to relax.

Tension, to a greater or lesser degree, is common in the back of the neck, the jaw, and throat. As long as such tension exists in such a vital part of the vocal channel, vibrations are trapped in contracted muscles. The job will be to release those vibrations by undoing the tension. The aim in the following exercises will be to relax the muscles of the neck and throat and, in a sense, to get rid of your head. Physiologically you will be rolling your neck and head around in a loose circle; psychologically you will be transferring yourself from your head to your middle, so that the controlling center is not in the shopping list part of the brain, but deep inside the body.

We are going to be focusing attention on the back of the neck and picturing the top seven vertebrae of the spine that comprise the neck. The top-most vertebra is just up inside the skull, roughly on a level with your ears and nose. The vertebra that is the bridge between neck and body-spine is the

big one that sticks out at shoulder level called the bull vertebra. It is very visible in Spanish fighting bulls and combines a picture of strength and vulnerability. There is a nerve plexus centered in this vertebra that spreads its corolla up through the neck, out into the shoulders and down between the shoulder blades. These nerves seem particularly sensitive to messages of anxiety, fear, and doubt from the brain and they tell the surrounding muscles to tense up in protective mode. The protective stance of hunched shoulders, short, stiff neck, and rigid jaw then gives a message back to the brain of determination, belligerence, responsibility, and confidence. (It is, I think, pure coincidence that the word *shoulder* contains the word *should*. A great deal of shoulder tension is holding all the things we know we *should* do; our responsibilities, goals, and ambitions.)

With a triangle of tension going from the base of the skull, down the neck and out to the end-points of the shoulders it is hard for messages to flow freely from the brain through the spinal cord into the rest of the body. For a free and expressive voice we want impulses to be able to travel unimpeded back and forth between the solar plexus/diaphragm region and the brain.

For the actor this neck and shoulder tension can be a kind of Bermuda Triangle where creative impulses sink without a trace. Annihilated by tension, the impulses never reach their creative destination.



With all this in mind to add motivation and interest to the next activity, here it is.

#### STEP 5

- Stand easily with your feet just apart, your spine long, and your stomach muscles relaxed. Let the whole neck drop forward, giving in to gravity.

- Feel the weight of your head pulling on the bull vertebra
- Picture the seven vertebrae of the neck and roll them to the right, until they hang over your right shoulder with the head heavy and your right ear directly over your shoulder.
- Register the stretch on the muscles and tendons in the left side of your neck as the head drops heavily to the right and the left shoulder drops toward the floor. (Check in a mirror to see whether you are facing straight forward—facing straight forward will give the optimum stretch to the muscles and tendons on the left side of the neck.)
- Let the neck fall forward again with the head dropping heavily to gravity, and then let the neck and head roll over to your left shoulder.
- Register the stretch in the right side of your neck—right shoulder dropped, head dropped in the opposite direction, side neck muscles stretching between the two.
- Now, maintaining the picture of the right side of your neck as very long, float the neck up until it is in alignment with the rest of your spine with your head balanced on top.
- Drop the neck heavily forward and roll it to the right shoulder—feel the stretch and then, maintaining the picture of the left side of your neck as very long, float the neck up until it is in alignment with the rest of your spine with your head balanced on top.
- Picture the very long sides of your neck.
- Keep your upper spine long—don't collapse.
- Slowly now, keeping the sides of your neck long, lengthen your neck backward. (*Do not let the neck collapse.*)
- Let your jaw relax and your mouth drop open. Picture your throat stretched, making the front of your neck very long.
- Now roll your long neck up over one shoulder, let it drop forward while noticing the length of the back of the neck and then continue

rolling on to the other shoulder.

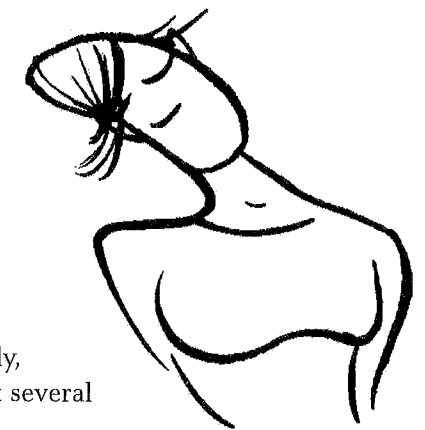
- Maintaining a picture of the sides, front, and back of your neck lengthening and shortening as they move from shoulder to shoulder and forward and then back, roll your very long neck around in a big circle, first in one direction, then in the other.

You roll your neck, and your head goes with it.

- Roll your neck (and head) loosely from right to left, and then from left to right, on to your shoulders. Feel the stretch in the opposite muscles and tendons when it is on the shoulder. When the neck is back, let your mouth and throat drop open. When it is up on the shoulder, feel the stretch, and when it is forward, feel how heavy it is.

Let the neck be active and the head passive.

If you think about rolling the head you will tend to twist the neck and involve only the top three or four vertebrae. The neck should be moving from the bull vertebra that sits at the bottom of the neck and the top of the body-spine. You can check to see whether you are involving the neck as fully as possible by noticing where your face is in relation to your shoulder as you roll over the side. You should, if you are really releasing the neck from its base, be looking straight ahead as you go over the shoulder. If your head is the activator, you will tend to be looking at the shoulder or at the floor as you go over the sides. Your earlobe should be directly above the shoulder in the side position—another checkpoint.



- Roll the neck and head slowly, heavily, in a big loose circle from right to left several times.

- Roll from left to right several times.
- Then roll a little faster, allowing gravity and momentum to take over.

Remember that the objective in rolling the neck and head is to relax the muscles at the back of the neck and to begin to release the throat, tongue, larynx, and jaw; that is, to free the channel through which sound travels.

**STEP 6** Leave the head dropped forward for a moment.

- Focus your mind firmly on the back of your neck and bring it back and up through the neck vertebrae until the neck is in alignment with the rest of the spine and the head is balanced easily on the top vertebra.

Tune into the breathing center and sigh a hum on a sustained pitch from there onto your lips.

- Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm (Sigh of relief underneath.)
- As soon as you feel the vibrations on your lips, drop your neck and head forward and roll them around in a loose circle as explored in Step 5.
- Remind your throat to drop open behind your closed lips as your neck rolls round.
- When you get to the end of the sigh and an easy neck/head roll, relax in your middle and let the breath drop back in.
- △
- Again sigh a hum onto your lips and picture it reverberating through your whole head.
- Drop your neck and head forward and roll around the other way.
- Relax for the new breath.

- △
- Hum again (on pitch) and roll in the other direction.
- △

Don't go too long on each breath. Let your breath have its own life without pushing till you are empty.

- Find a new pitch for each new head roll, going up three or four notes, then down three or four notes.

Despite the fact that your lips are now closed to form a hum, let your throat and jaw relax open behind them as your head rolls over backward. Your lips are elastic enough to cover the gap, and the effect is similar to stifling a yawn in polite company, keeping the lips together, but yawning somewhere in the recesses of your throat.

**STEP 7**

- Bring your neck up into alignment with the rest of your spine.
- Sigh a hum on pitch into your head and feel with your fingers all the different places that are vibrating with sound.
- Touch your lips, cheeks, nose, forehead, top of the skull, back of your neck, throat, and chest.
- Take enough time to explore fully, both with your fingertips and your awareness, how the vibrations feel in the different places.

You will notice that the vibrations are much stronger in some places than in others, but don't be prejudiced in favor of the strong ones. Get to know the quality of the lighter, weaker vibrations as well as the rich, strong ones.

With the added awareness of all the places you have explored tactilely:

- Again, roll your head and neck on a hum. Sigh the hum out.

- Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmm
- Remind your throat to stay open.
- Let awareness replace the touch of your fingers, and with awareness register the vibration in your lips, your face, your skull, your throat, and your chest.
- △
- Roll your head in the other direction humming on a new pitch. Notice the emphasis of vibration shifting according to whether your head is dropped forward or backward.
- Picture the vibrations like ball bearings inside a big ball, shifting and rolling as the ball rolls.
- △
- Repeat several times in alternating directions.

#### STEP 8

- Then, standing, with an awareness of your head balanced lightly on top of your neck, repeat the “huh-hummmmmuhs” as practiced in Step 3, with the physical awareness of all the vibrations that you felt in your head now pouring into your speaking voice.

Indulge the feeling of sound and realize that this is your voice.

- Feel and picture the vibrations flowing out from all sides of your head.



Keep reminding yourself that you are not just doing vocal exercises; you are aiming to free your natural speaking voice. Beyond that, the aim is to free yourself through your voice. Although I can give clues as to how to achieve those aims physiologically, only you know what they might mean for you psychologically. After each exercise, find a perfectly simple, personal thing to say and say it out loud, with an awareness of what you have just been doing “technically.”

Sigh with relief through the touch of sound “huh-huh.”

- Wallow in vibration on “mmmmmm.” Let the vibrations escape into the air on “uh.”
- Let the breath replace and then:

Sigh out “that feels good” with the same physical awareness that you had on “huh-hummmmmuh.”

- Or sigh out “I wish I knew what I was doing” or “I’m hungry and I want my dinner” or anything that expresses the feeling you have at this moment.
- Relax, shake yourself, move about, jump up and down, and stop concentrating.

You have loosened the lips in order to free vibrations from them; you have loosened your head and neck in order to free vibrations from them; you have been checking to see that there are no tension-murdering vibrations in the area of your lips and neck and head.

#### Freeing the Vibrations: Body

In Step 9 you will be loosening the whole body to free more vibrations from an even larger area. The progression of exercises from lips to head to body moves logically from small awarenesses to larger to large. Vibrations thrive and multiply as attention is paid them. As specific tensions are noticed and removed the conditions are enhanced for releasing vibrations that can amplify basic sound.

## STEP 9

- Stand easily with your spine long and your head floating up off the topmost vertebra.
- Relax your stomach muscles so that the natural rhythm of breathing takes over.
- Choose an easy, mid-register pitch and sigh a big, easy hum on to your lips.
- As you hum let your head and neck drop heavily forward and immediately give in to the weight of your head and drop down through the spine.
- Hang from your tailbone with your head down.
- Let your breath replace.
- $\Delta$
- Breathe naturally as you hang upside down.

Make sure your neck is relaxed and your knees are bent, so that you are comfortably balanced.

- Sigh a new hum as you hang upside down and notice how the vibrations behave in this position.
- $\Delta$
- Hum again as you hang there and gently shake your body loose.

Where do the vibrations predominate?

- Let the breath replace.
- Sigh a new hum (on another note) and build up your spine to a standing position as you hum.

Register the shifting emphasis of the vibrations as you come up to standing.

- $\Delta$

Where do the vibrations predominate when you are upside down?

Where do they arrive when you are upright again?

Do not take too long building up the spine. If the breath does not last easily, let a new breath in. If you build slowly, you should allow yourself two or three breaths; if you go faster, you can do it on one.

Do not hang upside down for too long or you will become unnecessarily dizzy. Take it easy; explore the sensations.

- Repeat the process (dropping down the spine on a hum, and building it up again) on different pitches within a low register.
- Next—drop down the spine on a hum.
- Let an easy breath come in.
- $\Delta$
- Sigh out on a new hum. Uncurl your spine quickly, and when you reach the top let your mouth drop open so that the sound can escape.

Mmmmmmm-u-u-uh

Imagine, that in the course of dropping down your spine—which was established as a relaxation exercise for the whole body—you are freeing vibrations from your whole torso. Imagine that when you reach the upright position again, all those free, loose vibrations are thriving inside your body but are trapped by your lips and longing to be free of you. When you open your lips you allow all the vibrations that were imprisoned inside you to escape into the air.

- Play with the whole process again, dropping down your spine on the hum, relaxing for a new breath, coming up on the hum, and releasing the vibrations through open lips when you are upright.



Develop an interest in the vibrations and what they feel like, as though they had a life of their own that you can encourage with relaxation or diminish with effort and tension.

- Personalize the vibrations so that you may be pleasurably involved with them—let them warm you up, or cool you down; let them tickle you in surprising parts of your body; give them colors; let them pick up your moods, thus producing a feeling that can underlie the exercise. From this simple game of connection between imagination and vibration, you can practice freeing your feelings through your voice.

The introduction of the word “feelings” into a supposedly technical exercise for vibrations leads me to underline the premise that this voice technique uses the imagination to unify in one place within the body, mind, feeling, breath, and sound. It is an economical way of looking at the process of communication. Feelings are an integral part of the technique.

#### ■ COMMENTARY ON VIBRATIONS, CONNECTION, AND THE INNER ABDOMINAL BREATHING MUSCLES

I suggest that vibrations can travel through all the bones of your body—if you want them to. Cartilage and bone are made of perfect material for conducting vibrations. If you imagine vibrations flowing through the bones of your body you open your mind to a sensory and imagistic connection that can then automatically translate the content of a text into the experience of that text in physical, emotional, and sensory terms. These psychophysical voice experiences form a vibrant foundation for the actor's craft.

I am now going to invite you to connect the humming exercises to the diagonal stretch experiences introduced in Workday Three.

The involuntary breathing mechanisms of the body are comprised of three distinct muscle behaviors: diaphragmatic, intercostal, and inner abdominal. The inner abdominal muscles are knit into the under floor of the diaphragm and run diagonally down into the lower spine and then

connect with the muscles of the pelvic floor. Part of the structure of these inner abdominal breathing muscles is formed by tendon/muscles called crura. “There are crura in various parts of the body: for example, a crura of the diaphragm, crura cerebri, crura of corpora cavernosa, crura fornicis, etc. In the respiratory system the diaphragm is connected to the spine by two pillars or crura—tendonous musculature that connects the diaphragm to the lumbar vertebrae. They can be subdivided into the right and left crus. Their major function is to connect the diaphragm to the spine. The right crus has a more extensive origin than the left. This is because the liver is right sided and a key action of the right crus is to aid the descent of the liver with inspiration.”

Now the thing that is of deep interest in the experiential wisdom of how the voice works is that the diaphragm houses the great nerve center of the solar plexus and that the inner abdominal muscles weave themselves around the smaller but arguably even more powerful nerve center whose home is in the beautiful triangular bone at the base of the spine called the “sacrum.”

*Solar* means “of the sun.” *Sacrum* means “holy place.” Western empiricism tells us that our emotions are palpably registered in the solar plexus—suggesting that our emotions are to us the equivalent of the life-giving force of the sun to the earth. It is also an inescapably experiential fact that the creative force of sexual energies emerges from the sacral nerve center. The sacrum houses many of our deepest, most instinctive urges. The sacral nerve center is the practical, autonomic home of instinct, intuition, and creativity. It seems clear that both sexual and the deepest artistic impulses spring from the sacral nerve center. Creativity is procreative however expressed.

The breathing muscles that are connected to the sacrum relay instinctive, intuitive, creative messages from brain to body to voice. These are the inner abdominal breathing muscles, which include the crura. The breathing muscle that is connected to the solar plexus relays emotional messages from brain to body to voice. This is the diaphragm breathing muscle. The breathing muscles connected most directly and extensively to the lungs provide capacity and power that serve the larger needs

of the instincts and the emotions. These are the intercostal breathing muscles. Experientially, one or another of the areas may predominate according to the nature of the communication, and the responses in the volume of breath will be larger or smaller according to the stimulus. But free, impulse-connected breathing involves all these muscle-groups in simultaneous reflexive responses. This dissection of function is too neat to describe the complexities of the breathing process but will perhaps contribute to a partial road map of the geography of mind, body, and voice.

While external abdominal muscles can control breathing, either consciously or through habitual tension, our goal in this work is to stimulate and connect with the inner involuntary systems.

I would now like to lead you through some mental-physical exercises that are particularly aimed at a reconditioned connection between you and your sacral breathing, which means between you and your instinctive life.

#### **Floor work: Connecting Voice With the Inner Abdominal Breathing Muscles**

My students enjoy these exercises as much for sheer pleasure and sensuality as for the vocal results. To begin with, the aim is to connect the experience of vibrations on the lips with the visualizations of the diagonal stretch, hip sockets, and the pelvic floor. The lips are the portal to the outside world. They lead to extroversion. The mind must be able to hold in awareness, the internal source point, and the externalizing arrival point to achieve the maximum power of communication.

Preparation:

- Lie down on the floor.
- Use the picture of the Marionettist in the Sky to achieve the most economical execution of the diagonal stretch: knees to the right, head to the left.

- Then let the thought of a long sigh of vibratory relief spark sound in the right hip-socket and flow through the long, broad river channel from hip socket to shoulder socket. As the vibrations reach the mouth—close the lips and feel the vibrations on the lips and in the head, and then open the lips and let the vibrations escape.
- Hu-u-u-hummmmmm-u-u-uh
- △
- Let the sigh impulse reconnect down to the hip socket.
- Repeat this several times on different pitches (still in a low register).
- Let the Marionettist bring you over to the other diagonal stretch.

Re-create the experience of sound starting in the hip socket and sighing through on to the lips and out.

- Hu-u-u-hummmmmm-u-u-uh
- Try it on different pitches.
- Float the knees to the middle (over the belly, feet off the floor) and drop the feet to the floor.
- Float the right knee up over the belly.
- Clasp your hands over the front of the knee, fingers laced.
- Picture clearly the place where the top of your thighbone goes into your hip socket.
- Feed a sigh of relief—*without sound*—down into the hip socket and as it releases shake your knee with your hands so that the top of your thighbone shakes the breath from the hip socket out through your mouth.

If your hands directly influence your knee and thighbone, the breath will loosely shudder throughout the length of the body and out into the air in

the front of your face.

The movement in your hands is more a vibration than a violent shake. The shoulders must stay loose and uninvolved.

As you do this you are committing your mind to a causal impulse that starts deep in the inner abdominal breathing musculature and meets no blockage on the way out through the length of the body.

- Drop the right foot to the floor.
- Float the left knee up over the belly. Hands clasped over the front of the knee, repeat the sighing, vibrating breath experience.
- Drop the left foot to the floor.
- Again float the right knee up over the belly and drop the clasped hands over the knee.
- Feed in the sigh to the hip socket and find the vibrations of *sound*. With your hands, shake/vibrate the sound from the hip socket all the way out through the long inner channels of the torso—onto the lips—and out.
- Hu-hummmmm-u-u-uh

This exercise shakes the “hum” from your hip socket to your lips and then out into the space beyond your lips.

This ensures that there are no blockages anywhere to be encountered between hip socket and lips because the vibrations jiggle, wobble, shudder, or shake as they escape under the influence of the shuddering thighbone.

- Drop the right foot to the floor and repeat with the left knee, thighbone, and hip socket.
- Repeat several times on each side going down on pitch, then up, then down again as you change legs.
- Then drop both feet to the floor.

Then focus into a picture of your whole bony pelvic structure.

- With your feet flat on the floor, knees up, float your pelvis two inches up off the floor. Picture your pelvis as if it were an old-fashioned garden swing, hanging from the supporting struts of your thigh-bones. Gently bounce the pelvic swing up and down.
- Lay the pelvic swing back down on the ground.
- Let the sigh impulse go all the way down into the pelvic floor where it turns into the vibrations of sound
- Hu-u-u-uh
- Close your lips on a hum that floats the pelvic garden-swing up two inches off the floor and gently bounce the pelvic swing up and down, bouncing the vibrations as pleasurably as one might bounce small children on a swing
- Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm—u-uh
- Then, as you return the pelvic swing to the ground, a new breath impulse enters with a new pitch, and the sound is again bounced gently from the pelvic swing onto the lips and out.

Repeat several times with new pitches every time.

- Relax back onto the floor, retaining a clear picture of sound-impulse penetrating down to the pelvic floor and release a sighing
- Huhummmuh
- Feel the resultant vibratory flow of voice arriving clearly on the lips and moving from there out into the air.

Slowly roll over onto your hands and knees, and from there find your way back to standing with as economical a use of muscular effort as possible, your head coming up last.

- Keeping your sense of self and impulse source as deep in the body as possible, repeat the touch of sound and the amplification of vibrations standing:
- Hu-u-hummmm-uh
- Try it on several different pitches.
- Shake the vibrations out through your whole body, bouncing your knees and then your shoulders.
- Notice what fresh, new, or different experiences of sound have occurred.
- Speak them.
- Speak a few lines of text.
- Write down in your journal the new physical experiences of your voice.
- Draw a new picture of your voice.

### PRACTICE

A combination of all the exercises learned on Days One through Four for a week. You may make use of the Intermission Warm-Up outlined next.

### INTERMISSION WARM-UP

I will now arrange a short warm-up comprised of the exercises explored up to this point. This will be a suggested pattern of work combining the movements and sounds that must be repeated regularly if they are to reprogram the communicative channels, with accompanying reminders as to where the attention should focus at any particular moment.

#### Workout for Relaxation, the Spine, the Head, Breathing, Touch of Sound, Humming:

Lie on your back on the floor.

- Choose, from your memory, a place that gives you a particularly good sense of peace, tranquility, and relaxation: lying on a beach, in a green meadow in the sun, on a boat, but not in your bed. Imagine you are lying in that place and can give your limbs up and let your muscles relax. It helps to have the sun or a warm fire in your picture.

Take time to let your mind move slowly through your body from your toes to the top of your head undoing any tiny pockets of tension that you find in the course of the journey. If you do this in the context of a clearly visualized and remembered place that you like, the process of specific relaxation will probably be accompanied by feelings of pleasure.

- Allow these feelings to color as much of the subsequent work as possible.
- Turn your attention to the tiny involuntary rise and fall of natural, relaxed breathing deep in the center of your body. Let your lips fall apart and feel the outgoing breath escape over the front of your mouth making a small "fff" as it leaves your body. Wait for the breath to replace in its own time. Continue your awareness of the natural breathing rhythm until it seems genuinely to have found its own pace and place deep inside.
- Introduce the picture of the Marionettist in the Sky and let him float your knees up over your belly and over to the right in a comfortable

diagonal stretch. Feel and picture a sigh impulse going deep down into the right hip socket and release the sigh on breath (no sound).

- Let the next sigh impulse connect the feeling of relief with the vibrations of sound, starting in the hip socket and flowing through the long diagonal river channel through the torso and out through the mouth.
- Hu-u-u-u-h
- Repeat in the left diagonal stretch.
- Float the legs back over to the right diagonal and let the thought of a long sigh of vibratory relief start in the right hip socket and flow through the long, broad river channel from hip socket to shoulder socket and as the vibrations reach the mouth, close the lips and feel the vibrations on the lips and in the head, and then open the lips and let the vibrations escape.
- Hu-u-u-hummmmm-u-u-h
- $\Delta$
- Then let the sigh impulse reconnect down to the hip socket.
- Repeat this experience several times on different pitches (in a low register).
- Let the Marionettist bring you over to the other diagonal stretch.
- Re-create the experience of sound starting in the hip socket and sighing on to the lips and out.
- Hu-u-u-hummmmm-u-u-h
- Try it on different pitches.
- Float the knees to the middle (over the belly, feet off the floor) and drop the feet to the floor.

- Float the right knee up over the belly.
- Clasp your hands over the front of the knee, fingers laced.
- Feed a sigh of relief—*without sound*—down into the hip socket and as it releases, shake your knee with your hands so that the top of your thighbone shakes the breath from the hip socket out through your mouth.
- Drop your right foot to the floor.
- Float the left knee up over the belly. Hands clasped over the front of the knee, repeat the sighing, vibrating breath experience.
- Drop the left foot to the floor.
- Again float the right knee up over the belly and drop your clasped hands over the knee.
- Feed in the sigh to the hip socket and find the vibrations of *sound*. With your hands, shake/vibrate the *sound* from the hip socket all the way out through the long inner channels of the torso—onto the lips—and out.
- Hu-hummmmm-u-u-h

Repeat.

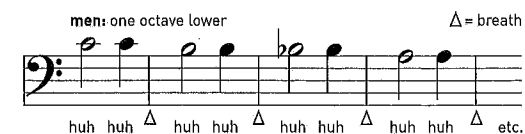
- Then drop the right foot to the floor and repeat with the left knee, thighbone, and hip socket.
- Repeat several times on each side.
- Then drop both feet to the floor.
- Next focus into a picture of your whole bony pelvic structure.
- Feet flat on the floor, knees up, let the sigh impulse go all the way down into the pelvic floor where it turns to the vibrations of sound

- Hu-u-u-uh
- Close your lips on a hum that floats the pelvic garden-swing up two inches off the floor and gently bounce the pelvic swing up and down, bouncing the vibrations out
- Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm—u-uh
- Then, as you return the pelvic swing to the ground, a new breath impulse enters with a new pitch, and the sound is again bounced gently from the pelvic swing onto the lips and out.
- Repeat several times with new pitches every time.
- Relax the pelvis down onto the floor.
- Now move your mind's eye from the pelvic floor to the center of the diaphragm. Be aware of the tiny movement of the natural rhythm of breathing in that center. Notice that the movement of the diaphragm is horizontal within the body and that it is reflected in an up and down movement on the external abdominal wall.
- Now let the thought-impulse of an unformed, neutral sound enter the breathing center so that the outgoing breath is turned into vibration.
- Huh-huh
- $\Delta$
- Repeat the thought-impulse on each outgoing breath in the rhythm of your natural breathing.
- Huh-huh  $\Delta$  huh-huh  $\Delta$  huh-huh  $\Delta$
- Alternate "huh-huh" and "fff" to see how close you can stay to the sensation of just breathing when you add sound.

Make sure the "huh-huh" is a pure sound, and the "fff" is a pure breath. It sometimes helps to think of sound as black, breath as white, and a breathy, mixed sound as gray. All that is needed to achieve a "black" sound while

releasing the breath is a really clear thought. If your sounds are "gray," you are probably concentrating too much on relaxation for its own sake and not enough on what you want to do through that relaxation.

- Now introduce the thought of descending pitches. Start on a comfortable mid-register note and gradually drop down, if possible, semitone by semitone, or tone by tone and so on, until the sound is so low and loose that it almost gargles.



See how low you can go without pushing down. Relax deeper and deeper inside your body for the deeper sounds; as soon as you feel you have to strain at all, start moving up in pitch again. Stay within the natural breathing rhythm.

- Speak the sound again.
- Huh-huh.
- Then slowly begin to get up from the floor, economically, rolling first onto your hands and knees and uncurling up the spine, maintaining as much relaxation as possible and leaving your head till last.

Stand, feet just apart.

- Yawn and stretch throughout your body.
- Stretch up to the ceiling—elbows, wrists, and hands.
- Then let your hands drop till they hang from your wrists; wrists and forearms drop till they hang from your elbows; upper arms drop till they hang from your shoulders; your head drops; the top of the spine gives in to the weight of the shoulders; and the head drags on the spine, vertebra by vertebra, until the whole torso drops, hanging head downward from the tailbone.

- Feed a deep sigh into your back, then let your diaphragm give in to gravity as the breath releases.
- Then build your spine up, vertebra by vertebra.
- Head floats up on top.
- Stomach muscles stay loose.
- Knees are free.
- Spine is long.
- Breathe easily, giving into the involuntary rhythm.

Induce small "fff"s.

Introduce the touch of sound

- Huh-huh
- $\Delta$
- Huh-hummmmmuh.
- Blow out through the lips without sound to loosen them.
- Move all the face muscles around.
- Blow out through the lips on sound
- $\approx$  mmmmmmmuh.
- $\Delta$
- Repeat on descending pitches.
- Now, *spea*k it
- Huh-hummmmmuh

- Do it with the same physical awareness as when you sustained the pitch.
- Relax for a new breath.
- $\Delta$
- Now speak it again
- Huh-hummmmmuh

Do it with conversational inflection.

- $\Delta$

Ask a question through:

- Huh-hummmmmuh
- $\Delta$
- As if a friend had asked, "How was your day today?" describe your day entirely on "huh-hummuh"s with a new breath impulse for each new thought impulse.
- Once again
- Huh-hummmmmuh
- $\Delta$

As soon as you think about "speaking," your focus tends to move up into your face. Clearly send the "question" impulse down to the feeling/breathing center, and let the question/breath/vibration response flow up and out through the torso, throat, and mouth. Add surprise, urgency, doubt, or amusement to the question, and the central connection will be pinpointed by the feeling content.

- Drop your neck and head heavily forward, and then roll them loosely around in a wide circle to relax the neck and throat muscles.

- Circle your neck and head in the other direction.
- Sigh a hum on an easy pitch as you roll your head and neck.
- △
- With a new note, a new breath impulse, and a new hum, roll your neck and head in the other direction.
- Repeat four or five hums on different pitches, with your head rolling in alternating directions.

■ **MEMO**

Check that you are humming on a pure "Mmmmmmm."

Only the lips should be touching to form the hum. The tongue should not be touching the roof of the mouth in the middle, the sides, or the back. There should be space behind the lips, clear down to the breathing center.

- Roll your head and hum a few more times on different pitches to be aware of the above.

■ **MEMO**

Don't squeeze the breath out to the last drop; stop before getting tight inside. Induce a genuine sigh impulse under each new breath so that the exercise does not become mechanical. Have the courage to let your head really drop at the front. If you are saving your head, you are probably also tightening your jaw or throat or tongue.

- Bring your neck up so that your head finds its balance point.

Describe out loud how you feel, and what you feel—spontaneously and immediately, without censoring it. Release the sound of how you feel into your voice.

- Now again sigh the hum from your middle and this time let your head drop forward as the hum continues. Let the weight of your head take you all the way down your spine until you are hanging head downward humming.

Feel the vibrations dropping out through the top of your head.

Register whatever sensations occur.

Make sure your knees are slightly bent, weight balanced between the heels and the balls of the feet, stomach muscles relaxed.

- Let the breath replace

△

*Notice that in this position your back can respond to your breathing needs more freely than the front of your body can—take advantage of this awareness.*

- Sigh a new hum onto your lips, and build your spine up again to standing, and when upright let your lips open to allow the sound to escape.

- Relax inside to let your breath replace

△

Then on a slightly higher pitch, repeat the exercise.

- Drop down through the spine on a hum:

A new breath at the bottom  
Induce a new hum.



- Come up the spine humming.  
At the top let the mouth drop easily open, releasing the sound.

*Let what is happening to your body affect the sound. You may wish to preserve the sound in a straight, unwavering line, but that is a false sense of control. Whatever the body does should affect the sound, so let the vibrations get moved around and shaken as your body drops down.*

- Alternate the humming-and-head-rolling, and the humming-and-dropping-down-through-the-spine on changing pitches. Begin to explore slightly higher notes in the context of this exercise.
- As you open at the top:
  - Bounce your knees.
  - Bounce your shoulders.
  - Jump up and down.
  - Release more and more free energy.

Use your awareness in speaking again.

- Huh-hummmmmuh.

Finally speak a poem, a speech, or some dialogue from a play while:

- (1.) On the floor in the diagonal stretch
- (2.) Bouncing the pelvis
- (3.) Feeling the connection with the diaphragm center, hand on the abdominal wall, feeling the drop with each outgoing thought
- (4.) Bringing the connective picture into the upright, standing position
- (5.) Bouncing the knees as you speak the text
- (6.) Bouncing the shoulders as you speak the text
- (7.) Jumping up and down as you speak the text

The aim should be to find the freedom physically to express the freedom of your imagination. Your body may provide new ideas and inspiration of which your brain may not have been aware—if you give it the opportunity.

When you come back to a text, you should focus all your interest in the content and meaning of that text, and be prepared to judge whether your voice has been freed at all by the subjective criterion of your enjoyment of your work.

## The Second Four Weeks of Work Freeing the Channel. What is the Channel?

Work on the voice must fluctuate between freeing the breathing muscles that deal with the source of sound and freeing the throat, tongue, and jaw muscles that are part of the channel through which the sound travels.

We have dealt, to a certain extent, with how to release the breath more fully, thereby providing essential support for sound. There are, however, many muscles that wrongly consider their help vital as voice makes its journey through the body. As long as the muscles of the jaw, tongue, and throat provide support for sound, the breath will remain lazy in the performance of its duties. It is important, but sometimes difficult, to become aware of such false support in order to remove it and focus the work where it belongs. Work on the channel is in a sense passive; work on the source, active. Passive and active messages must be sent simultaneously: relax the channel; stimulate the source. Gradually, as the source support (the breath) becomes surer, the channel muscles can take a much-needed rest and become available for their true functions. Generally speaking, the jaw's true functions are: (a) to hold teeth and chew food, and (b) to widen the exit when some powerful emotional/vocal content needs to escape. The tongue's true function in speaking is to articulate vowels and consonants. The throat is composed of many elements that will become familiar as we progress. We will start with the jaw.