

INTRODUCTION:

Seeking Authentic and Intelligent Alignment

When I started my career as a fitness professional in downtown Chicago during the early 1980s, I taught high impact aerobic dance classes. If you were in the fitness industry at that time, perhaps you remember hearing the joke that “aerobic dance instructors are nothing more than frustrated ballet dancers.” In my case, and though I hate to admit it, I think that there might have been a kernel of truth in that statement. During my early years as a young group fitness instructor, many of my friends were ballet dancers. I liked hanging around with the dancer crowd, and occasionally I took an ‘open level’ dance class at a downtown studio that had received national acclaim for its amazing dance troupe. Though I knew that I wasn’t equal to the ‘real dancers’ in terms of technique, I always felt like I matched them in terms of physical fitness and physique. My body was firm, muscular and healthy. I had high energy and good posture. Though I wasn’t a ‘real dancer,’ I felt pretty good about my body.

On the other hand, none of my dancer friends were ever satisfied with their bodies. It seemed like there was always one thing or another that needed to be corrected or improved. They relentlessly analyzed and studied their bodies in an ongoing attempt to become better dancers. They worried about their bodies. They worried about their alignment. They worried about their movement patterns. They desperately wanted to find the perfect combination of techniques that would produce a strong, flexible, symmetrically-balanced, aesthetically-pleasing, efficient and able body. Even though they were amazing athletes and had beautiful physiques, they seemed to be neurotically driven in their pursuit of *perfection*.

I wondered if this was another type of addiction, because so many dancers had eating disorders, body image disorders, or suffered from low self-esteem. Or maybe they obsessed over their bodies because they were afraid that a bad injury could curtail their career. After all, they were always nursing a minor injury or two. Or maybe they were simply trying to find relief from the constant aches, pains, and fatigue of too much physical exertion. Whatever the reason, I assumed that ballet dancers were all chasing an unattainable standard of anatomical perfection.

Time passed. A lot of time passed. After more than twenty years had passed, I was becoming all too aware that my body wasn’t quite as forgiving as it had been when I was in my early 20s. Even though I’d practiced and taught yoga for many years, my hips seemed to be getting tighter. As I got into my late 40s, I began to experience assorted aches and pains and some early symptoms of arthritis and bursitis.

Sometimes late at night I secretly worried that when all was said and done it would turn out that my parents were right when they kept telling me (for the past 25 years) that “all of that exercise isn’t good for you.” This thought made me cringe. After all, fitness is my job. It’s my career. It’s a large part of my identity. I hated thinking that as I got into my 50s I might have to settle for a lesser degree of physical activity, energy, and body potential. I hated thinking that as a supposedly natural part of aging I would need to reduce or limit my activities because my body could no longer keep up. Maybe I could accept the fact that there would be some bodily limitations when I was in my 80s or 90s, but *please*, not in my 50s!

I worried about my body. I worried about my alignment. I worried about my movement patterns. More than anything, I wanted a strong, flexible, symmetrically-balanced, aesthetically-pleasing, efficient and able body. Suddenly I remembered how my young dancer friends had spent so much time, energy, and money chasing the dream of a perfectly aligned body, and I began to understand. It wasn't just their career as a dancer that fueled their obsession. It was something much more profound, though maybe they didn't even recognize it at the time. I realized that this characteristic 'dancer mentality' was actually very insightful, for they were instinctively pursuing health and well-being through the vehicle of a structurally sound body. This realization produced a renewed commitment to my body and my health, and I redoubled my efforts to search for a solution.

The main problem was that postural misalignments do not fit neatly into a one-size-fits-all package. Though all anatomically-based misalignments either originate from or eventually result in spinal compression, pelvic obliquity, or a minor degree of idiopathic scoliosis, the specific details of exactly how and why a particular misalignment manifests are varied, inconsistent, and often unexpected. Early symptoms include tight hips, low back pain, fatigue in certain muscles or general fatigue, uneven gait (a slight limp), problems with digestion or elimination, poor respiration, aching feet, and a variety of other problems that may seem to be totally unrelated to the spine or pelvis.

Though the problems associated with re-posturing work are often complex and enigmatic, it was becoming clear to me that the only way that we can possibly achieve a permanent improvement is to rehabilitate the body's structural core by rebalancing the pelvis in posture and in movement. The adjunct concept is to remove as much bodily tension as possible, so that the correct and natural integrated alignment may emerge.

As a fitness educator, my lifelong mission has been to create a therapeutic fitness program that could potentially address a broad spectrum of postural misalignments. I wanted to create a program that would be applicable to the vast majority of participants, and that could be replicated as an established protocol so that other teachers could be trained. Thus I saw the need to develop a theoretical model based on an organized framework or sequential pattern that could be learned, replicated and taught by others. I wanted the program to be generic enough so that it could be presented in group fitness classes or used by personal trainers. Finally, I wanted it to be a highly accessible and affordable program that would not require props, apparatus, or an investment in expensive equipment. This course, which includes the comprehensive **PPR Instructor Training Manual**, is the culmination of that intent.