

## Hands on table

This procedure – going into ‘monkey’ (i.e. semi-flex or folding at the joints) and being four-footed involves all the essentials you need for being a teacher with “good hands” – rather like Alexander’s claim for HOBC (*CCCI*, Chapter IV. ‘Illustration’, pp 112-125).

Stand facing fairly close to a waist-high table. Take yourself into monkey as you have learned to do following Alexander’s 1910 instructions for the Door (i.e. ‘Wall’) Exercise in *Articles and Lectures* (pp.104–5). We did this in November, 2022. Before doing anything else, take your time to think ‘up’ and ask your leg muscles to ‘undo’ (In 1910, Alexander writes “relax”). This is “in order that” (see below\*) as your hips go back slightly and your torso inclines forward (Alexander writes 20-30 degrees), the legs do not stiffen but, rather, the knees freely go forward and away from one another – roughly in the same directions that your big toes are pointing.

For giving the directions, Marjory Barlow uses the formula:

\*Let the neck be free “in order that” (Latin *ut*) the head goes forward and up, “in order that” the back lengthens and widens, “in order that” knees go forward and away (Barlow 2002, p.145).

[AD] *We all use the shoulders as if they were part of the arms, or part of the neck.*

[MB] Well they aren’t.

They are part of the whole trunk. . . . Mostly we use the shoulders as if they were part of the neck or part of the upper arms. You’ve got to get peace and calm in that area – so that the shoulders are associated with the upper end of the trunk. Just like your pelvis is the other end of our trunk. Same problem. A lot of people use their legs as if they were part of the trunk, as if they had no hip joints.

I’m addressing the joint at the top of the arm and the shoulder, not the joint at the clavicle and sternum. A freedom of the joint above the bicep allows freedom of the arm. This doesn’t preclude freedom of the movement of the collarbone from the sternum, of course it doesn’t. But when I move my arm I don’t want my neck creeping into it. . . . [Most] of the problems I’ve had to work with have been to do with inarticulacy of the joint between the arm and the shoulder carriage (collar bone and shoulder blade), and that’s why I’m concerned that people see the primacy of that articulation. Marjory Barlow (2002). *An Examined Life*. Time Mornum, p.163. (Mouritz has published a paperback edition, 2022.)

## Placing hands on table

As you allow yourself to go into monkey (facing the table), think through the arms to the finger tips. Think of lengthening along the collar bones (widening across the upper chest) and along the upper arms to the elbows whilst directing (pointing) your fingers towards the floor.

One arm at a time, move the elbow slightly away from the side of the ribcage so that you get a very subtle inward rotation of the upper arm *at the shoulder joint*. Then, by supinating the hand and forearm, bring the back of the hand onto the table surface. The fingers will be sloping inwards towards the centre line.

Repeat with the other arm.

Note, there is no need to stiffen the arms as they are not weight-bearing at this stage. They are what T.D.M. Roberts called 'paddles'.<sup>1</sup> Now, one at a time, pronate the forearm noticing how the thumb lengthens and you retain slight 'ulna deviation' at the wrist. Place the palm of the hand on the table and notice that the fingers are now pointing *away* from the centre line in a similar fashion as your feet and toes. Your hand is preparing to become a 'foot' so keep the fingers together rather than splayed apart.

Repeat with the other arm.

You are now, in effect, four-footed but your front 'feet' are not yet weight-bearing.

Give your directions, and allow your balance to shift forward slightly, letting your eyes lead. The movement is from the ankles. If you are not stiffening your legs, then some of your weight will be supported automatically by your arms and you will now be FOUR-FOOTED. Your arms will be acting as 'props' (Roberts) rather than paddles as the muscle tone will have adjusted so that the arms are supporting your upper body (as in HOBC).



"DIRECT [THE ELBOWS] OUTWARDS AND SLIGHTLY DOWNWARDS" for the sensory experiences required in "DIRECTING THE UPPER PARTS OF THE ARMS (ABOVE THE ELBOW) AWAY FROM ONE ANOTHER (THE RIGHT ARM TOWARDS THE RIGHT AND THE LEFT ARM TOWARDS THE LEFT), IN SUCH A WAY THAT [YOU] WILL BE SUPPORTING THE TORSO WITH [YOUR] ARMS." (CCCI, p. 120)

Take full advantage of being four-footed to ask for extra 'undoing' of leg tension and to get extra widening in your back. Maybe do a few whispered 'ahs' while you're at it!

Now, bring yourself back into balance over your feet and, *most importantly*, allow the arms to 'undo' so that they return to their non-weight-bearing 'paddle' state. Remember the image of the space for an egg in the armpit (Sally Swift, *Centered Riding* mentioned in Barlow, p.123).

Once back in balance, stand up taking your hands away from the table as you do so and making sure that you "maintain your top line" and do not let the arms go 'heavy' from the shoulder.

"When you're successful, do less." – F. M. Alexander (Barlow, p.157)

- Judith Kleinman told me an exercise ('Semi-supine Plus') they do at the RCM to bring greater awareness to the shoulder joint and to move the arm independently of any unnecessary tension in the shoulder or neck. Lying in semi-supine, point your hand and forearm up to the ceiling and then raise your elbow off the supporting surface. Continue to point the fingers upwards and, as the arm straightens, lift your shoulder. Continue to direct the fingers upward as you slowly relax the shoulder down onto the supporting surface. 'Draw' small circles on the ceiling noticing the movement of the arm is from the shoulder joint with the absence of any habitual involvement of the neck or shoulder. Lower the arm, and do the same with the other arm.

MATTS 2 Feb 2023; EATS 1 Apr 2023.

MW 3/04/2023; 14/04/2023; 4/05/2023 etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Roberts, Tristan D. M. (1995). *Understanding Balance: The Mechanics of Balance and Locomotion*. Chapman & Hall.