

Means-whereby

Means-whereby is a term used to describe a method from the Alexander Technique which was adopted by Hanna Somatic Education, then further expanded upon by Gentle Somatic Yoga.



Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869–1955) was an Australian singer and actor who developed his technique in an attempt to address voice loss during public speaking.*

In his trial and error search for a solution, Alexander began experimenting with various methods and techniques of muscle movement. He ultimately developed the principles of this technique — an educational process that was created to retrain habitual patterns of movement and posture. He credited his method with allowing him to continue pursuing his passion for reciting in Shakespearean theater.

By breaking down the various ways to move his neck, Alexander eventually regained control of his muscles so they could function and cooperate together. He was then able to use his voice again. For this he coined the term *means-whereby*, which refers to the coordinated anatomical processes involved in accomplishing an intended movement. *Means-whereby* is part of the main scientific methodology used in Gentle Somatic Yoga for deconstructing larger movements into their smaller aspects.

During a Somatic Movement Flow, the Soma accomplishes a movement (e.g. lifting the arm above the head) through the consciously synchronized engagement and disengagement of specifically targeted small muscle groups. The purpose of this is to refine the brain's motor control in order to erase sensory motor amnesia from that part of the body.

When a person is experiencing sensory motor amnesia, in all likelihood it first began with a minor annoyance (e.g. a back ache), then over time amounted to a full-blown condition (e.g. chronic low back pain). Sensory motor amnesia begins gradually as the involved muscle group habitually becomes fatigued and begins to recruit other muscle groups in order to maintain strength and functionality. With the onset of sensory motor amnesia, the brain begins losing control over those muscles, to an increasing degree and in an expanded area over time within the body. The body, through its pain receptors, signals that something is amiss. However, as those signals are ignored, sensory motor amnesia onsets.



Because of sensory motor amnesia, over time the brain loses conscious awareness of where the problem actually began, and also loses voluntary control of specific muscle groups. By exploring inwardly through Somatic Movement Flows (SMFs) and utilizing the technique of *means-whereby*, we break movements down into their smaller parts and pieces, in order to engage the brain's sensory motor cortex and regain control of the involved muscles.

In other words, when one explores a Somatic Movement Flow and finds an area on the body that feels discomfort or stiffness, it may likely be difficult to register exactly from where the pain is originating. If it is chronic pain it may feel as if the area is one big block of radiating discomfort, or the reverse, numbness. By exploring the SMFs (and by following along with the other GSY tips and guidelines), over time one can begin to discover how to bring awareness back to these areas by learning to move in refined ways. Then, by changing the movement angles, access to other muscle groups can be gained. Eventually freedom of movement returns though regaining control of all the muscle groups, and then by becoming coordinated and working together.

Means-whereby is Alexander's huge gift to us. As with all of the science behind Gentle Somatic Yoga, it will increasingly make sense as you practice and share it with others. As we utilize the scientific techniques that have been incorporated into the Somatic Movement Flows, we can erase sensory motor amnesia and come back into being whole and aligned within our Soma.

* Refer to Chapter 2, Module 1, Unit 1 *Pioneers of Somatic Movement* for more information on Frederick Matthias Alexander.

