

Keen Tissue Tension Sense

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“Keen tissue tension sense” – we see the phrase throughout the Bowen literature. It is implied that all good Bowen practitioners have it – a key skill separating a novice practitioner from an experienced one. It is said that keen tissue tension sense helps practitioners identify which muscles are tense so that they can select the appropriate moves to perform. I have read the phrase many times and understood that it literally means ‘having a keen ability to sense the tension level in the tissue being palpated or observed.’ Until 18 months or so ago however, I didn’t really know if I had keen tissue tension sense – the phrase, on its own, wasn’t explanatory enough for me. Looking back, I can see that on many occasions I had performed my Bowen moves in response to what I had intuitively ‘picked up’ with my keen tissue tension sense. However, as I was not yet confident that my responses were appropriate to what I was sensing on these occasions, at other times I had just ignored my keen tissue tension sense. These days I *consistently* tune in to my keen tissue tension sense as I have learned the benefits of doing so for each of my clients.

My experience of keen tissue tension sense is that I open up to a deeper level within that can sense the need of my client. The way I perform my moves then flows spontaneously from that place. It may mean adjusting one move or several during a session. In this article I explore the experience of keen tissue tension sense and how to build trust with a client. I also emphasise the importance of *how* to perform the moves we select based on keen tissue tension sense.

It was while treating a woman with fibromyalgia that I first made the connection between the way I was practising, and keen tissue tension sense. I had been slowing down my moves naturally and taking greater care with many of my clients; being patient, present and sometimes more gentle in response to what I was sensing in the tissues. For this particular client, because her soft tissue was so disorganised I could not perform good, full moves; so I performed the moves much more slowly, fully present, allowing her body and all of her senses to fully register the Bowenwork. She was drawn deeply into her body during each session – deeper than she might have experienced had I not taken such care. I believe this allowed her to more *consciously* experience a “preferred, relaxed, balanced way of wellbeing” which is what Bowen can achieve. After three treatments, my client was much more grounded. She told me that some of the symptoms had cleared up, she was in a better place within and more able to cope with her condition.

I had a further confirmation of the importance of keen tissue tension sense a few months later while performing BRM3 move 5 on a client who had been suffering from migraines for many years. This client had a very tight neck and virtually no skin slack available. Being patient and present, with my middle finger applied to her upper trapezius, I realised that my presence and my connection with her, was profoundly more important than trying to achieve a perfect move. After a few moments, gently applying pressure against the first layer of resistance I encountered, the adhesions in her neck began to melt away and she had a wonderful and beautiful release. This might not have been possible if I had neglected to establish trust with her or had forced the move. The following week my client commented that her neck felt better than it had in a long time and her migraines had reduced.

Since that session I have seen over and over again the importance of acknowledging the first layer of resistance and not forcing or pushing through it. Bowen, being the amazing technique it is, may benefit an individual even if moves are forced or hurried, but forced moves do not nurture our client's subconscious trust in us. More often than not the tissues will contract and tighten when forced, rather than softening and relaxing. Trust is essential if the client is to lower their physiological and/or psychological guard and permit us into a deeper level of their body/psyche. Trust allows truly meaningful change and healing to take place. At these times adhesions can be felt to melt away, psychic/emotional releases can occur, or palpitations and heat may be felt. It is at these times that the value of being present and developing our keen tissue tension sense is confirmed.

Bowen is an amazing modality which works wonders even at the hands of a new practitioner. But because Bowen is so effective there lies the possibility of not fully developing our keen tissue tension sense. Keen tissue tension sense is invaluable when dealing with resistant tissue and psychological guarding. It behoves us to be present with our clients, and in so doing, open to our keen tissue tension sense. If we practise with awareness of our keen tissue tension sense we may find that we have graduated from average practitioners to extraordinary ones.

This article is also available on my [Bowen Technique website](#).

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