



# SAFletter

Newsletter of the Sensory Awareness Foundation

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## Finding Our Stature

*This article is an excerpt from Charles Brooks' book Sensory Awareness - The Rediscovery of Experiencing. Originally published in 1974, it has been out of print for some years now. We are in the final stages of reprinting the book and hope to use the same on-demand procedure which enabled us to publish Waking Up. But because the original artwork has disappeared we are finding it hard to reprint the many pictures in a manner that does not compromise their quality. This seems to take more time than expected. Many of you have contributed to the reprinting of this book. The Institute of General Semantics has been especially generous. We thank you for your patience and want to assure you that Sensory Awareness will soon be available again, reprinted with the care this beautiful book deserves.*



British Museum, London

*And left only the living being. (From Charles Brooks' book Sensory Awareness.)*

The difference between standing and sitting [...] lies almost entirely in the activity of the legs. In both cases head and trunk, or the totality of organs and organic functioning, are fully involved, either in discovering and coming to their own well-being, under the influence of gravity, air exchange, and the support below, or

*(continued on page 7)*

Our two most recent publications:

### Waking Up

#### The Work of Charlotte Selver

by William C. Littlewood with Mary Alice Roche.

Talks about Sensory Awareness, Reports, Experiments, and Exchanges with Her Students.

### Every Moment is a Moment

A Journal with Words of Charlotte Selver from her 102 years of living and over 75 years of offering the work of Sensory Awareness.

*(For ordering information see page 9.)*

## Exploration of Sensory Awareness and the Marks of Time

*by Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt*

*From the very beginnings of what we today call Sensory Awareness, many of its proponents have taken a great interest in social issues. When I first started working on this text for the opening of the 2004 conference Sensory Awareness: Exploring the Roots of Peace, I wanted to review the history of Sensory Awareness in that light. But I soon realized that this is an ambitious project and would require a lot of research. Still, I decided to take at least a glimpse at this topic that deserves much more attention. As I was getting deeper into the subject matter, I started to see that along with the commitment to social justice came other time-bound dispositions. Sensory Awareness is conditioned by the historical and cultural circumstances in which its originators found themselves some eighty years ago. Some of those traits are certainly still beneficial but others might "not be needed" anymore. The following article poses ques-*

*(continued on page 4)*

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## FINDING OUR STATURE (continued)

in obedience to the numberless inhibitive or distracting elements of one's conditioning. We work that we may gradually admit more of all these factors into consciousness, where conditioning begins to lose its grip on us and to dissolve, leaving room for the objective realities. These realities, far from dissolving in the light of consciousness, become ever clearer and stronger.

The first part of this book will end with a study of sitting, which is the mode in which most of us Americans now spend the greater part of our lives. In the meantime, very much of our work with standing will be equally pertinent as a study of what can breathe life into that wasteland which usually passes among us for sitting, and of what brings such majesty and peace to the sitting figures of ancient Egypt and of both the ancient and modern worlds of Buddhism.

[...]

It is the unique character of the spinal column that its many vertebrae make possible that union of flexibility with structure and gentleness with strength, which the great statues of the Orient represent. But the specialization of modern civilized man has brought a kind of premature arthritis to very many of us. In our loss of flexibility the most natural act, like dancing and love-making, must often be performed by force of will. Force tends to rule our lives rather than strength, and letting go rather than yielding. But it is the tree that has nothing to let go and merely yields that displays such grace in the gale and has the resilience to survive.

Anything that can help sensitize the musculature and restore the natural mobility of our backs will do much to add to our sense of freedom and aliveness. A very simple and useful experiment to this end is that of coming from standing to a state of hanging over, in which the flexibility of the whole length of the spine becomes involved.

[...]

This gives the chance for very fine distinctions between achieving, allowing, and letting go. What is allowed feels good and right in itself; what is achieved feels good in spite of itself; what is let go simply feels limp and heavy. The allowing is when the person reacts as a totality; the achieving is when the person obliges himself, against his own resistance; the letting go is when he abdicates.

[...]

But the real delight that may be found in this experiment is in the slow return from hanging to standing, when at last standing is not produced but *discovered*. It does not come at once. Many attempts may be needed before the subtle and often deeply rooted tendencies to effort can be sensed and

abandoned. At first it may seem that one does not have the strength for it to happen by itself; one has to make efforts to produce it. At every stage on the way up, as on the way down, one may need to pause, go back a little to where it still feels easy and start rising anew – gradually feeling out in what phase of the process more energy is needed, or where this or that region is not fully involved in the activity and must be allowed to join in. It requires a strong interest, but offers rich rewards.

[...]



Charlotte Selver and Charles Brooks in their house on Monhegan Island.

After a while, one may become so fully alerted throughout that a fresh distribution of space and energy occurs which allows real inner freedom and a sense of total functioning. Then, when the work of rising is shared equally among all the tissues concerned, and is sustained by breathing and by the sure support beneath one, it can seem no work at all, but instead simply a yielding to one's own vitality, whose native energies tend naturally upward toward freedom and balance. As back and shoulders, belly, chest, and finally neck and head come gradually into what feel their right and natural relationships, allowing the inner channels to open easily for fluids and air, it seems like the response of a thirsty plant when given water, whose tissues fill until the whole organism stands erect and fresh. [...]

Another frequently made discovery, as vertebra after vertebra and mass after mass finds its rightful place in the general unfolding, is that the moment when one feels *now I am standing* is always new. One comes to the recognition that there is

no "standing position" for a person in the sense that there is for a building. The positions that people assume, when not in reaction to a specific situation, are assumed in order to conform to some external model, or to some inner image or idea. The moment of arrival at standing, when we are occupied with our sensations, is never frozen into immobility or statuesqueness but remains in perpetual, subtle involuntary readjustment.

The sculptors of antiquity, in those enduring works where the ideational content is the least, cut away from their blocks of limestone and marble everything that might have landed in a fixed position and left only the living being. The same happens to each of us when our minds come to enough quiet so that we can sense our needs.