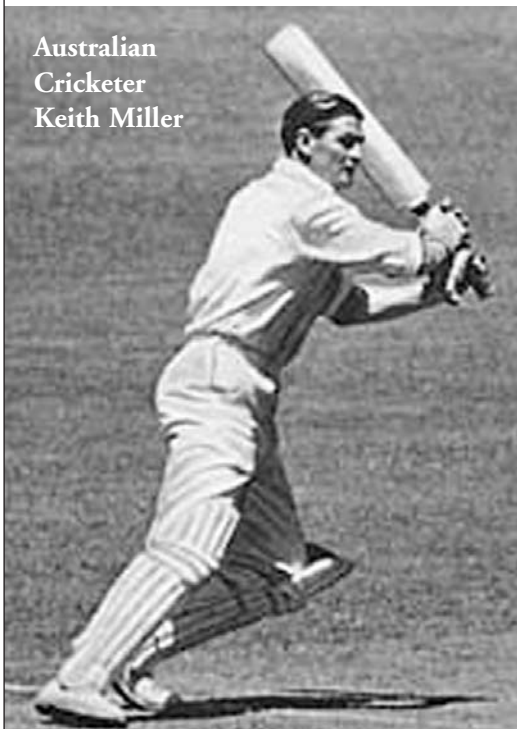


NEWSLETTER

November 2005

The intelligence of an individual may be measured by the speed with which he orients himself to new situations – British neurologist Sir C.S. Sherrington, 1926

Australian
Cricketer
Keith Miller



I had a very busy day ahead of me with many treatments to give. I began to feel concerned that I would “run myself ragged”, probably ending up very tired and perhaps causing myself stress, strain or even injury. Realizing I needed to respond constructively to the expected high demands, I reminded

myself of familiar strategies which have helped me sail happily through many a busy day before this. This article aims to share some of these strategies with you, dear reader. They are strategies of action with awareness, so that you are able to work and be active with a maximum of efficiency and effectiveness and a minimum of strain, fatigue and injury. They are keys to Masterful Action.

Ralph Hadden

5 Key Strategies for Masterful Action

Continued inside on page 2.

Ralph Hadden Body Mind Learning with the Feldenkrais Method (details page 3)

- Weekly classes
- Individual consultations
- Clinical skills seminars for health professionals
- Special workshops
- Class lessons on audiotape

5 Key Strategies for Masterful Action *Continued*

Masterful Action

When I say “masterful action” I’m firstly thinking of body therapists at work – the skilled practitioners of Feldenkrais functional integration, massage therapy, rolfing or Alexander technique for example. But the same thinking applies to any field of human activity where we can observe skill in action – the pianist in recital, the surgeon operating, the potter at his/her wheel, the chef in a crowded restaurant, the secretary in a busy office, or, as illustrated, Keith Miller executing a late cut, elegantly yet powerfully.

In all such endeavours we can observe high level performers who are somehow able to carry out a task, sometimes subject to demanding stresses, while still retaining poise, grace, efficiency and effectiveness. This is “masterful action.”

5 Strategies for Efficiency and Effectiveness in Action

1. BREATHE EASILY

Your posture, while you work, should permit you to breathe easily. From time to time observe your breathing. If you notice a restriction, try shifting your position to reduce the restriction. This does not mean, by the way, that you must breathe *deeply*. Depending on circumstances you may be taking shallow or deep breaths and you may be breathing slowly or rapidly – it doesn’t matter. What does matter is that your breath can come easily and is not restricted by your posture.

What is the correct posture then? There is no *correct* posture – just whichever position lets you feel the most free to breathe while you’re doing what you’re doing. Shift and experiment- you will find that the position that frees your breathing is usually an open, comfortable position with a softened chest. Practising this strategy will mean that the fundamentally important activity of respiration will occur without unnecessary effort.

2. LENGTHEN

A frequent response to stress is to contract –

shortening muscles and pulling in protectively. This limits range of movement and reduces freedom and efficiency. Obviously muscles must contract to carry out an action, but as they contract the corresponding antagonist muscles need to lengthen. In stressed, inefficient action the antagonist muscles also contract, or release insufficiently, so that more effort is required to perform the action.

Think, instead, of *lengthening*, particularly along the spine, from head to tail bone. Think of the head floating upwards and the back of the neck lengthening while the whole spine spreads and lengthens. At the same time feel a sense of length and width along your front, through the ribcage and abdomen. Adjust your position, if need be, to make it easier for you to lengthen.

By practising this feeling of staying long while taking action you lessen unnecessary muscle contractions which hamper your efficiency. Moshe Feldenkrais described these unnecessary contractions as “parasitic movements”: extra muscle activity habitually and unconsciously performed which makes no contribution to the action and often actually impedes it.

3. FREE THE NECK

While in action mode turn to look side to side, gently, slowly taking the eyes and head to left and right. Does this happen easily or is it obstructed? Again, as with the breathing and lengthening, re-arrange your position to free up your neck and head.

An efficient, graceful and powerful posture goes with freedom of the neck. A cramped, inefficient and strained posture will limit movement of the head and neck. Checking your ability to look side to side is an easy, simple biofeedback on your posture.

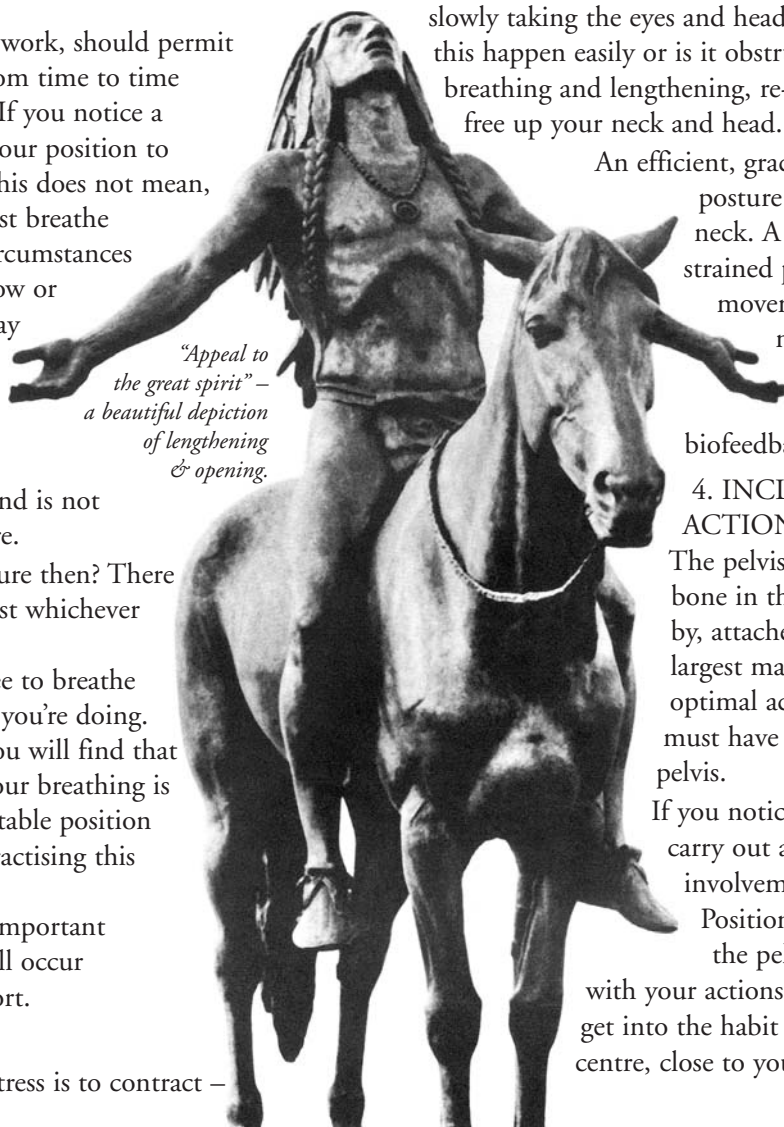
4. INCLUDE PELVIS IN THE ACTION

The pelvis has the largest mass of bone in the body and is surrounded by, attached to and moved by the largest mass of muscle tissue. For optimal action your movement must have a foundation in the pelvis.

If you notice yourself struggling to carry out an action, check the involvement of your pelvis.

Position yourself so that you feel the pelvis move in coordination with your actions. With practice you will get into the habit of utilising this power centre, close to your centre of gravity and

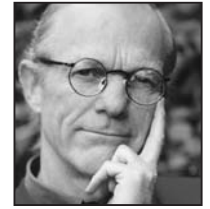
Continued page 4.



“Appeal to the great spirit” – a beautiful depiction of lengthening & opening.

Body Mind Learning with the Feldenkrais Method

Ralph Hadden has been a Body Therapies practitioner, teacher and trainer of teachers for 30 years. For 20 years he was founder and director of the Melbourne School of Tactile Therapies, a school which pioneered massage education in Australia. He has been teaching Feldenkrais since 1988. He teaches with clarity, respect and good humour, helping his clients and students achieve optimal performance at work and play.



WEEKLY ONGOING CLASSES

New students welcome anytime

- **City:** Tuesdays 7.30–8.30am, 37 Swanston Street (corner Flinders Lane)
- **Balwyn/Hawthorn:** Fridays 10.30–11.30am
- **Balwyn/Hawthorn:** Thursdays 8.00–9.00pm
 - 10 sessions: \$140
 - 5 sessions: \$80
 - Single session: \$25



SPECIAL WORKSHOPS 2006

Next year I'll be offering, approximately once a month, half day workshops on topics of special interest. The workshops will be suitable for beginners and continuing students. Topics planned so far include: Smart Sitting, Easy Neck and Fabulous Feet.

Details available soon.

CLINICAL SKILLS EDUCATION

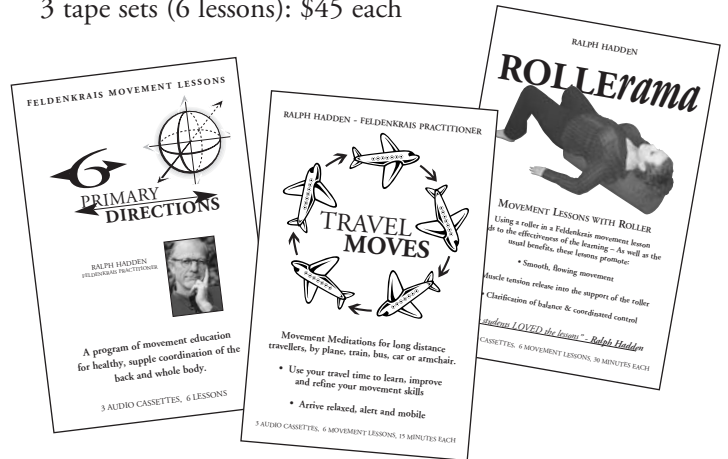
Professional development seminars for health professionals. Learn to increase the effectiveness and success of your practice and enhance your own health and satisfaction. Seminars are being planned for 2006 to be held at the Australian Institute of Natural Therapies in Box Hill. Contact Ralph or A.I.N.T. (9890 9188) for details.

FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION (INDIVIDUAL SESSIONS)

One hour consultations, by appointment:
City, Balwyn/Hawthorn
\$80

LESSONS ON TAPE

3 tape sets (6 lessons): \$45 each



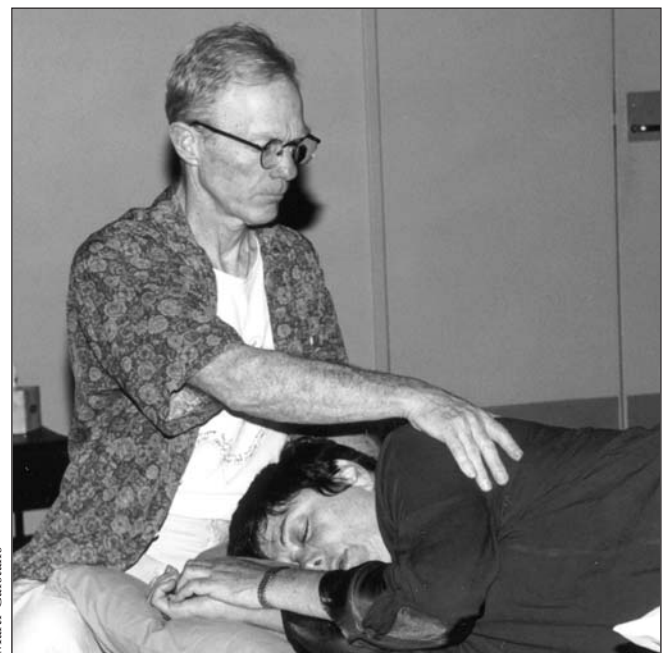
Single tapes (2 lessons): The Power Centre, North n' south, Fabulous Feet; \$14 each.

Single tape (1 lesson): Eyes & Elephants; \$10

Complete set of tapes: \$163 (save \$18)

Mail order, send cheque or money order with your details and add postage and handling:

1 tape \$4	2 tapes \$4.50	3-5 tapes \$5.50
6-9 tapes \$7.00	10 or more \$8.00	



Marri Carstairs

5 Key Strategies for Masterful Action *Continued*

organising your legs, trunk and arms so that they draw on the weight and power of the pelvic area, hence maximising your effectiveness and minimising any strain. Even when simply sitting, having an awareness of the pelvis will make for an efficient, comfortable sitting posture.

This strategy enables you to use the pelvis to give stability and power while you exert force such as lifting something heavy or pushing or pulling strongly.

5. BE HERE NOW

Be present, giving your full attention to the here and now. Buddhist monk and teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, says it beautifully in this passage on dishwashing (which I saw pinned to the wall above the kitchen sink at the Buddhist Society of Victoria in East Malvern):

If we think only of the cup of tea that awaits us when we are done and hurry to get the dishes out of the way as if they were a nuisance, then we are not alive during the time we are washing dishes. We are incapable of realizing the miracle of life while standing at the sink. If we can't be present when we wash the dishes, the chances are that we won't be able to be present when we drink our tea later. When drinking the cup of tea, we will likely be thinking of other things and barely aware of the cup in our hands. In this way we are sucked into the future and we are unable to be at peace in the present moment.

This strategy applies not only to slow, thoughtful activities but also to high speed action, in sport for example. Every sportsperson knows they need to give their full attention to the play that is happening **now**, not to what happened a few minutes ago, or to what might happen a few minutes in the future or to the last time they faced this opponent (this information must be absorbed and used, but at the instant of action it needs to be in the background, not foreground). The Australian Test cricket opening batsman, captain and coach, Bob Simpson used to let his mind wander between deliveries but as soon as he took up his stance, and the bowler commenced running in he said to himself (fiercely I imagine, from what I know of him) "CONCENTRATE" and gave his full attention to the here and now.

By staying in the here and now we are able to act appropriately, responding effectively to the reality of this moment and so increasing the chances of a successful outcome.

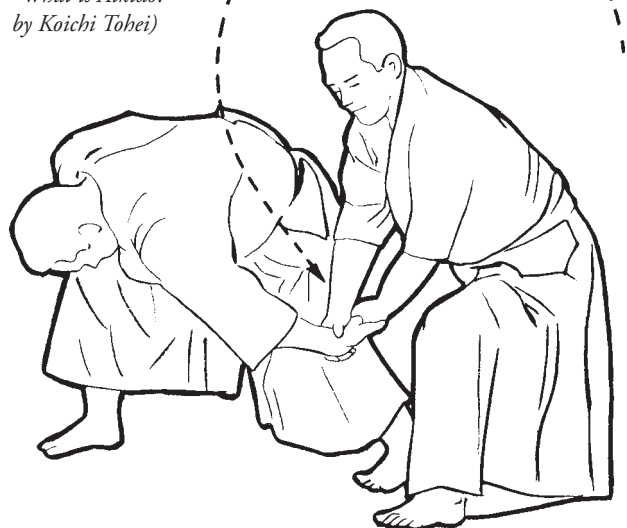
Applying the 5 key strategies

As I worked through my busy day I reminded myself, from time to time, of one or other of the strategies. For example there was a moment, as I began to move a client's leg, that I felt the first signs of strain in my back. Immediately I put my attention to acting from my pelvis and was able to continue moving the leg without strain and with a feeling of easy power. And so I continued through the day, doing my required tasks and reminding myself here and there to breathe easily, or to lengthen or whichever strategy seemed appropriate.

This is how I recommend utilising the strategies if you are, like me, doing work (such as Feldenkrais or massage therapy) which proceeds steadily through the day. You do your work and regularly, from time to time, remind yourself of one or other strategy and feel yourself become a little more comfortable, a little less effortful. You may be reminded by a twinge in your neck or a feeling of effort and can then adjust your position, using one or two of the strategies and then continue, feeling stronger yet lighter.

If you are involved in a high speed activity, however, you would utilise the strategies slightly differently. When playing cricket, for example, the moment you are receiving a high speed delivery from Brett Lee is not the time to be thinking about lengthening or freeing the neck etc. Instead would do this in your practice time **beforehand** – when you are carefully analysing your technique, rehearsing where to place your feet for the cover drive, where your head goes, when the hands flow through and so on. As you work out your correct technique you ask yourself in each position

Action from the power centre (from "What is Aikido?" by Koichi Tohei)



“can I breathe easily? How does this connect to my pelvis?” etc. Practising this way you develop a powerful, efficient technique and embed it in your body memory so that later, in actual competition, the well coordinated action happens in the instant, without any conscious thought.

Or consider this situation – you are working in a busy office, going at high speed with looming deadlines. In this case your attention most of the time must be given to the task at hand. But, even so, there will be occasionally a spare moment (say as you wait for something to download) when you can think of freeing your neck, or observe your breath and adjust your position appropriately. After a few moments continue on at your hectic pace, feeling a little more relaxed and with slightly improved efficiency and clarity.

So for different jobs, activities and rhythms there are different ways to apply the strategies. But however you do them, the 5 strategies can be a powerful tool to increase efficiency, effectiveness and enjoyment in your practice of masterful action. As for me, on that very busy day, I made it through quite well. I felt tired at the end but that was all – no strain, injury or excess stress. I felt satisfied with a good day’s work and knew that my last client for the day got as good as the first.

Going Further

A Feldenkrais teacher will develop your skills in all these strategies, in classes or individual sessions. Here are some other options for going further.

- **Breathe easily:** Moshe Feldenkrais’ book, *Awareness Through Movement* – lesson 4, “Differentiation of parts and function in breathing”.
In my tape set, 6 *Primary Directions* – lesson 6, “Expand/contract”.
- **Lengthen:** try a few sessions with an Alexander teacher. Alexander technique teachers are specialists in this concept and are very skilled in giving their students the feeling of lengthening (and of freeing the neck.) See Michael Gelb’s book *Body Learning*.
- **Include the pelvis:** there are many ATM lessons which encourage the inclusion of the pelvis in the organisation of movement, see for example my tape, *The Power Centre*. I also recommend the Japanese martial art, Aikido. It focuses on “the one point”, the body’s centre of gravity 2 inches below the navel rather than the pelvis, but the principle is the same (see www.aikido-takemusu.com.au).
- **Be here now:** see Thich Nhat Hanh’s book, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*.

For manual therapists these strategies are also taught in my Clinical Skills seminars.

NEWS

VENUE CHANGE

The Augustine Centre is undergoing extensive renovations so I have transferred my Hawthorn classes to Balwyn, currently at the beautiful Balwyn Community Centre.

NEW EVENING CLASS

I now have a class on Thursday evenings, 8.00–9.00pm. (Thanks to Cathy Q. and family for suggesting the idea and for encouraging people to join.)

WELLBEING MAGAZINE

An article of mine appeared in the winter issue of Wellbeing magazine (issue number 100) I’m pleased to say. Entitled *Sitting Pretty* it was based on my *Surviving Chairs* articles in this newsletter.

I also have an article in this month’s Wellbeing (November 2005). This time it appears not in the magazine, but as an ‘online bonus feature’. It’s entitled *A Lover and a Fighter* and you can read it by going to www.wellbeing.com.au

NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIPTION

I produce this newsletter for my clients, students, colleagues and other interested people and mail or email it out free of charge.

If you’re not already on my mailing list I’m happy to add your name. Email is free, ordinary mail is \$10 per annum

NEWSLETTER BACK COPIES

May 2003

FILL IN THE... GAPS
Teaching: the vital “missing” ingredient.

October 2003

SURVIVING CHAIRS Part 1,
“Sit on the ground with me”

October 2004

SURVIVING CHAIRS Part 2,
“The Chair at Work”

I can send you a copy of previous editions – by email is free, by regular mail is \$5 for each edition.

3 Minute BODY-MIND EXERCISE

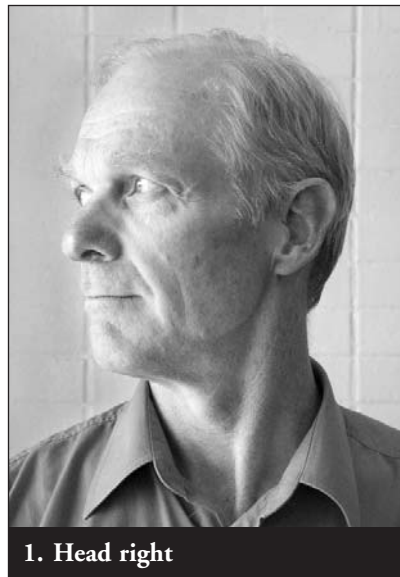
Head, eyes turn

A simple exercise which explores connections between movements of the eyes, the head and the neck. You may be very surprised at how much the eyes affect the movement of the head. And I think you'll be amazed at the improvement in the freedom of your neck after just 3 minutes.

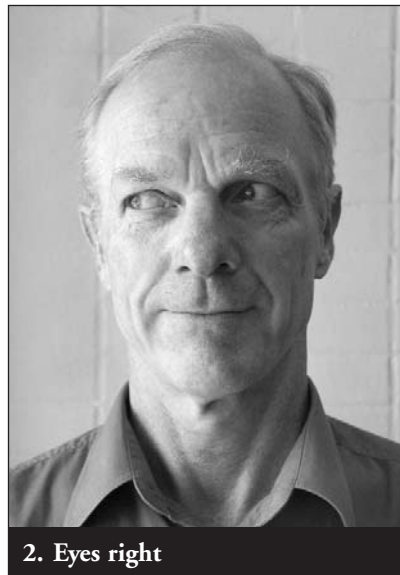
MOVEMENTS

Always move slowly and easily, only doing what feels comfortable. Do each movement several times (4 or 5 repetitions, say, as long as you are finding the experience interesting and pleasant). Pause and rest for a few breaths between each set of movements.

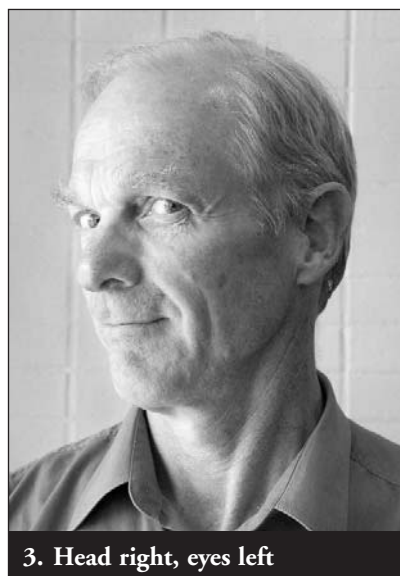
1. (TEST & OBSERVE) Turn your head side to side, gently, looking to left and right. Don't force, don't go to the maximum, do less than your maximum. Observe:
 - a. The feeling in your neck
 - b. Is it easier on one side?
 - c. Do you turn further to the left or the right?
 - d. Feel the movement of your eyes in the eye sockets
2. From now on we'll focus on improving the movement to the *right* (unless you have pain or difficulty to the right, more than on the left, in which case you should do the movements, this first time, to the *left*). Turn your head to the right, looking to the right and return to the middle- several times, slow and easy (pic 1). Make a note of how far you turn.
3. Turn just the eyes to the right and return (pic 2). Keep the head immobile (although you will notice the head wants to follow the eyes). You are moving the eyes only and not the head, looking to the right and returning to the middle.
4. Turn your head to the right and keep it there, facing to the right, and move the eyes only to the left, back towards the front, and return to the



1. Head right



2. Eyes right



3. Head right, eyes left

right (pic 3). As in step 3 you're keeping the head immobile and moving just the eyes but this time you're keeping the head turned to the right. Several times, with the head to the right, have the eyes look left (to the front) and return.

5. This time you fix the eyes in one position and move the head. Turn the eyes to the right and keep them there (your left eye will be looking at the bridge of your nose), turn your head to the right and back to the middle, repeat several times. It will feel strange, keeping the eyes fixed as you move the head and will be difficult to do at first but keep going, being gentle with yourself, trying to get the feeling of turning the head smoothly and easily to the right, and returning, while the eyes continue looking to the right the whole time.
6. Now you fix the eyes in the opposite direction while turning the head. Turn your eyes to the left, keep them turned left (your right eye will be looking at the bridge of the nose) and slowly turn your head to the right (pic 3 again). Suddenly, perhaps, it becomes more difficult to turn the head! It's as if the eyes looking left are pulling the head that way. Repeat several times, eyes fixed to the left while the head slowly turns to the right and returns to the middle. Can you soften and relax so that it becomes easier to turn the head?
7. Repeat step 2, turn to look to the right and return to the middle, letting eyes, head and neck move without restriction – do you notice any changes? Is the turning easier? Smoother? Do you go further?
8. (RE-TEST, RE-OBSERVE) Compare by turning to the left and back to the middle a few times. Then turn side to side (as in step 1) and again observe your neck, differences between left and right, movements of your eyes. Pause and rest. Whenever you feel like it, do the whole exercise on the left side. (You can listen to an extended version of this lesson in my tape set *Travel Moves*: tape 1, side B.)