

# Klein Technique™: An Outgrowth of Bartenieff Fundamentals

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Photo: Brittany Carmichael

In 1971, before I met Irmgard, right after I graduated from Barnard College at Columbia University, I began teaching what was then called a Stretch Class at the Farnworth and Hauer Studio, in the Ed Sullivan Building, at 53rd Street and Broadway in New York City. At that time, I was already dealing with a severe knee injury that happened in 1969. My dance teachers, May O'Donnell and Gertrude Shurr, sent me to their dance orthopedist. I thoroughly investigated the traditional orthopedic and physical therapy route in order to heal. However, years later, I was not making the progress I needed in order to return to virtuosic dancing. In fact, I was still limping a bit and my knee was still slightly swollen. Physical therapy helped in the beginning, when I was truly weak from my injuries, however, after some time, as my quadriceps got stronger and stronger, the exercises to strengthen my quadriceps seemed to backfire on me. The pain started to increase and my movement became restricted again. My limping seemed to get worse.

While teaching these early Stretch Classes at the Farnworth and Hauer Studio and at the Clark Center on 8th Avenue between 50th and 51st Streets, I started to experiment with different concepts, concepts outside the main stream, to figure out how to support and heal my knee. I started looking at anatomy books, particularly Gray's Anatomy, and realized that it was the hamstrings, not the quadriceps, that actually support the knee and determine how the knee flexes over the foot. I realized it is the hamstrings that balance the knee in movement and in stillness. Strengthening the quadriceps actually prevents movement, locks our knees, and pulls us off our legs. Strengthening the quadriceps, as an isolated muscle group, disconnects our legs from our pelvis, pulls our lower back into hyper-extension, and causes an imbalance in the body as a whole. Once this became clear to me, I began working on how the sitz bones connect down through the legs into the floor to both stretch and strengthen the hamstrings. I began working on the hamstrings and working to let go of my over-worked quadriceps.

This is when I found the sitz bones to heels connection that I was soon to learn Irmgard was already talking about. I also found the importance of pure flexion of the hip sockets, and the integral role the balance of the hamstrings plays in the health of the knee, as well as the lower back. All this, would later become the signature of Klein Technique™, "THE HANGING OVER".

Traditional physical therapy emphasizes strengthening the quadriceps for knee injuries and works on strengthening or stretching individual muscle groups. However, I discovered, both through experiential work and anatomical study, that it is not the quadriceps that govern the healthy function of the knee, but it is the hamstrings. Klein Technique™ grew out of the realization that the quadriceps also takes us off the ground, while the hamstrings are responsible for grounding. And, most importantly, I also discovered and experienced, through years of work and teaching, that everything in the body is related to everything else. Nothing exists in isolation. And, nothing can be cured in isolation. You can't find your hamstrings without releasing your quadriceps and therefore you can't access the floor.

Movement has to come from our connection to the ground, from the integration of the body working as a whole in order to heal a part and to improve movement potential both in virtuosic dancing and movement in everyday life. Without being connected to the floor we are actually leveraging off our own bodies and losing all that the ground, all that the earth freely has to offer: security, stability, and support. We live in a system of the sky and the earth, with the body being the tai chi, the ridge pole, between the two, conducting the gift of Qi from the heavens to the earth.

When I first heard Irmgard talking about the sitz bones to heal connection I knew I had to study with her, learn everything I could from her, and then continue on from there. That was my plan, to learn everything I could from her, all her principles, connections, ideas, and concepts and to then build on her work. And that's what I've done.

Irmgard was amazing, innovative, charismatic and inspiring. At the time I began studying with Irmgard she was 74 years old and I was 24. I am now almost the age she was when I began studying with her. I have embodied her work throughout my years of teaching - intensively analyzing each of her concepts and exercises in terms of the body-felt understanding I developed in my own body, the anatomical realities of the deep muscles of postural support, and Laban's effort and spatial intents of these muscles. I have also added an Eastern theoretical understanding from my studies of Zero Balancing and Worsley Style 5-Element Acupuncture. In 1980, I began studying Zero Balancing with its founder Dr. Fritz Smith, DO, MD and became a practitioner and teacher of Zero Balancing in 1982 and 1989 respectively. And in 1991, I became one of the first New York State licensed acupuncturist after studying at the Traditional Acupuncture Institute in Columbia, Maryland and the College for Classical Acupuncture in Leamington Spa, England where I did my advanced studies directly with Professor J.R. Worsley, D.Ac who brought this particular acupuncture to the west.

As an acupuncturist and dancer, integrating Eastern theories of energy and structure into the deep exploration of Irmgard's Fundamentals, I brought Klein Technique™ beyond the body, to deeply effect and integrate the mind and the spirit. Klein Technique™ aims to improve the functioning of the body and to reduce injuries. It works on the level of the body's mind, on the intelligence of the body, on the body-felt understanding of how the body functions in stillness and in motion. And, on a deeper level, with much practice, Klein Technique™ eventually goes to the spirit of the mind of the body, quiets the restless mind, and activates the spirit. Klein Technique™ goes to the place where art is made and felt, the spirit.

Unlike Irmgard, I was approaching her work as an injured dancer, a severely injured dancer. Irmgard used to talk about how she developed the Fundamentals to re-educate her body and how this re-education allowed her to move well, with strength and coordination throughout her life. For me, it was more than that. I needed and wanted to re-educate my body to heal, to literally learn how to move again at a highly virtuosic level as a professional dancer, and to find and correct the real cause, the underlying cause, of my injury. In acupuncture school, I learned that crisis also represents an opportunity. For me, the crisis of devastatingly injuring my knee, not ever becoming a full-time professional dancer, turned into the defining moment of my professional life. I began to learn how the body works in stillness and in motion. I became a Zero Balancer, an Acupuncturist, and I learned how to teach others to improve their movement potential and to heal themselves. I became a teacher and a healer. I danced again. I danced until I was 40 when I had my daughter and it was only then that I voluntarily stopped performing. I didn't dance in the high-powered professional company of my dreams, but instead, I discovered the downtown experimental postmodern dance world at a pivotal time of change in the dance community. Eventually I taught and worked with people like Trisha Brown and members of the Grand Union and Judson Church movement.



Photo: Dance Notation Bureau

Someone suggested Irmgard, and I can still remember my first class with her. She was talking about the concept of coordination and connection throughout the body. She was explaining that strength was not a matter of individual muscle strength, but rather connection throughout the entire body from the floor. I distinctly remember rolling my eyes, thinking that I had gotten myself into another situation that wasn't going to help me at all. It seems that Irmgard actually caught me rolling my eyes and called me up to demonstrate the concept with her. So, there I am. I was 24 years old. At the time, I had no idea how old she was. She was thin and looked frail to me and was certainly a lot older than I was. She could have been my grandmother! She asked me to push her. We were set up in a lunging position, with our hands in contact with one another. I looked at her with our difference in age, muscle mass, and what I thought was strength, so I pushed her fairly gently. She resisted me and I actually could hardly move her. She then said, "now resist me" and she pushed me. To my great surprise I couldn't hold her back. Immediately she pushed me all the way down the length of the studio and literally slammed me into the wall. I remember my eyes blinking in amazement. I couldn't stop her, the entire way down the studio, I couldn't stop her. And there I was smashed into the wall with my entire world-view of the body and movement changing in a flash. I had been dancing since I was 5 years old, working hard to get strong, grabbing every muscle I could to get stronger and stronger, and here, in that instant, I learned that it was coordination and connection and the use of the floor that makes you strong, not isolated muscle strength.

Irmgard taught very differently than I do. Classes moved quickly and with great variety. Irmgard taught with an indirect effort, and although I prefer a direct effort approach in teaching, I somehow was able to follow her as if I had jumped inside her mind. Irmgard was not detail-oriented. She taught through broad profound concepts and was interested in getting people to MOVE. She wanted people to expand their movement qualities and abilities. Her classes moved quickly and always ended with some improvisation. I was enthralled with her

mind, with her concepts and with her brilliance. In 1975 she invited me to join the Certification Program which I did and at the same time I opened my own studio for dancers with Collette Barry at 56th Street and Broadway in New York City. There, I really began teaching my Stretch and Placement class, using and exploring concepts and exercises I was learning from Irmgard along with all I had just recently discovered on my own as a result of my severe knee injury.

In the first 4 years of teaching at my 56th Street Studio, I focused on hanging over and dissecting, analyzing, and teaching Irmgard's exercises. I was particularly focused on working on letting go of the superficial muscles in the body like the abdominals, the quadriceps, and the gluteal muscles in order to access the deep muscles of postural support: the hamstrings, the psoas, the pelvic floor and the 6 external rotators. I also included Laban's spatial intents while working with these deep muscles. The psoas and the hamstrings relating to the vertical plane, to grounding and stability, the pelvic floor, connecting the coccyx to the pubic bone, initiating movement on the sagittal plane, and the six external rotators connecting the greater trochanters to the sitz bone on the horizontal plane, being responsible for side-side movement, lateral shift, and turning. We did a lot of stretching to let go of the superficial muscles in order to access and find, on a body-felt level, these deep muscles of postural support. We worked slowly and deliberately and people began to change, and their dancing and functioning began to improve. It was a dynamic and exciting time of change and community. All of us, students and teachers alike, were discovering new abilities, potentialities in our body, mind, and spirit. To this day there is a bond between all of us who were studying and teaching at the studio on 56th Street and Broadway at that time.

In 1979 I moved the studio downtown to a loft in Tribeca, on Beach Street, where I am still working to this day. This was another turning point for me. I started to become part of the downtown dance community and I took my first class in Zero Balancing with its developer Fritz Smith. In that class, as soon as Fritz started teaching, it was as if I had handed him a list of questions I had been developing about my own work and personal discoveries over the past 4 years, and he was answering them one by one. The most significant and exciting topic was the revelation that my work, Klein Technique™, works at the level of the bone. Letting go of the superficial muscles and getting down to the deepest muscles of postural support, the hallmark of Irmgard's work, in actuality, functions to change the relationship of the bones to one another through the joints. The connections Irmgard was talking about actually occur at the level of the bone and it is the deep muscles of postural support that work to change the relationship of the bones to one another and form the connections. It is through the bone that the connections are made. It is the transfer of forces through the body, through the bones, that form the connections.

In Klein Technique™ we are ultimately working on the level of the bone. Not only does the bone establish the connections in the body, they also establish the connection to the ground and the connection to the space. Bone is the tissue that enables us to let go of the superficial muscles where tension and habits are held throughout the body. The bone is the deepest, densest tissue in the body and therefore conducts the most energy. The bone is the link in the body which brings the body's energy and structure together. Structurally, the bone is a lattice of highly ordered crystals in webs of long molecular strings and it is the framework on which the muscles organize. Energetically, the lattice of crystals in the bone is vibrating, the bone is alive. As soon as we direct a force field through the bone, the crystals change in length, they shrink or stretch instantly as needed in response to the stimulus of the field. In Klein Technique™ we are sending a clear, strong, force field through the bones to rebalance the musculature throughout the body and maximize the connections through the body into the ground

and the space. The clear, strong force through the bones causes a conscious relationship to be made between the parts of the body to become a whole and the muscles become free to rebalance without holding, and they align to the stronger energetic connection that exists through the bones.

In Chinese medicine, in 5-Element Acupuncture, the water element gets its power from the season of winter and the body part of the water element is the bone. Water is the most yin element where nature and the body is quiet and lies latent and builds potency. Life developed in water and it holds our DNA, it holds our identity. The bone stands up to gravity. It is strong and courageous and its spirit is will power. Taken out of the body, the bone maintains its integrity, its identity, and is the last tissue to decompose after death. The bone carries with it who we are, our essence, not what has happened to us in life as the muscles do. Moving, dancing, and creating from the level of the bone is doing so from the purity of our true identity. Connecting through the bone gives us the opportunity to be, to be who we are from our true essence, not from the reactivity of the muscles, from the reactivity of what has happened to us in life. Muscle tissue is reactive. Bone is not. Muscle tissue contracts and releases. The bone is constant and works with the life force of the universe. The bone takes us into unity, and connects us to ourselves and to the greater whole - the greater community.

Klein Technique™ aims at dropping down to the level of the bone, finding one's essence and creating or moving from there. Klein Technique™ is a process of letting go of the superficial muscles, finding the deep muscles of postural support, and then getting down to the level of the bone where the force, the gift from the heavens to the earth, or gravity, can most clearly travel unobstructed through the body in order to create infinite movement potential and choices. Translated within choreography, movement will come from the essence of the choreographer. In dancing, movement will come from the dancer's essence and the through the unobstructed transfer of forces through their body. For the non-dancer, movement will come from the body-felt understanding of how the body optimally functions. Ultimately, Klein Technique™ is a body of work meant to improve function. On a deeper level, on the level of the spirit, Klein Technique™ goes to the ultimate discovery of that which we already are.