Principle 10

X-Ray Anatomy
Dynamic Postural Alignment

“...If we see our so-called limitations with clarity, precision, gentleness, good-heartedness and kindness and, having seen them fully, then let go, open further, we begin to find that our world is more vast and more refreshing and fascinating than we had realized before. In other words, the key to feeling more whole and less shut off and shut down is to be able to see clearly who we are and what we are doing.”

Pema Chodron
Introduction

Nia and X-Ray Anatomy

X-Ray Anatomy is a practice that uses your eyes, imagination and intuition to “see through” to the structure and alignment of a person’s bones, muscles and ligaments. Your ability to perceive what is happening beneath the skin provides a glimpse inside your body and the bodies of everyone you see. This allows you to make conscious movement choices for realignment and self-healing, integrating your body’s way with The Body’s Way.

If you know how to look and listen, your body is always talking to you, always giving you information about what is happening inside. The sum of your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual makeup—including your attitudes, beliefs and past experiences—are all part of the way your body moves and functions in the “now.” Every moment of life has imprinted you with information, which is revealed in the way you move. With X-Ray Anatomy, we look at this information objectively, without judgement or projection, and use it to lovingly realign and heal our bodies. We also study the design of the body itself, including the names, actions and arrangement of all its parts, so we can make informed movement choices, based on our current and ideal alignment.

Create a relationship with your body. Touch your body to learn from it. Where are the muscles that move each bone? How are they shaped? Where do they begin and end? Study a variety of anatomical references to become more familiar with the body and with your body. Eventually you will be able to see, sense and perceive the details of everything happening inside you as naturally as you perceive the outside world.
Voice of

Body
To the physical part of you, I offer eyes to see the unseen by sensing and feeling the Self in space and time—the Self in a body. I speak to you through the language of gravity, responding to the call of down and up, on and off balance. My lines of communication are direct—short and long, even and irregular. My doors open and close, moving energy through and around you. I am a sensory messenger, here to keep you vertically aligned, stable and mobile.

Mind
To the mental part of you, I offer structure and form. I am exact—and I can be counted on to be the same for everyone. I share my innate wisdom to help you overcome powerful internal and external forces through movement. Let me do the thinking while your muscles take a ride of motion; let me keep them quick on the draw, yet relaxed and waiting.

Emotions
To the emotional part of you, I offer a safe haven for being still and quiet—for being aggressive and empowered. Deep in my marrow you will find strength, guts and grace. Look directly into my alignment; I will tell you exactly what you are feeling and thinking about yourself and the world around you.

Spirit
To the spirit part of you, I offer lightness of being. I am a matrix of illumination, clarity and freedom. I am made from the most porous and powerful substances: love and light. I am the one who gives you physical shape. I am the one who defines you as a child, as an adolescent, as an adult, an elder, a wise one. I am the one who makes birth and death visible. All life hinges on me, dancing into eternity.
Science

Bones

Bones are the support structure for your body—
together, they create your amazing, movable frame.
Like conductors, your bones direct energy along
specific lines, in specific directions. The size and
placement of each bone reveals its function. Look
at the bones in your body objectively. Examine the
shape of each bone to understand how it is designed
to function. By exploring your amazing skeleton
with your eyes and hands, you can better sense the
support it provides as you move.

Ligaments

Ligaments connect bones at joints, the places where
two bones meet. Like long, sturdy rubberbands, your
ligaments keep your structure stable, while allowing
for a broad range of movement. By examining the
design of each joint, it is easy to see what kind of
movement the joint is designed for. For example,
the hip joint is made of a “ball” (at the top of the
thighbone), which sits comfortably in a “socket”
(a rounded, hollow area of the pelvis). This “ball
and socket” design allows your thighbone to move
forward, backward and to the side in many angles.
It also allows your leg to rotate inward and outward.
All of this movement relies on the pliability of the
ligaments that connect your thighbone to your pelvis,
which are kept healthy through movement. Become
familiar with your ligaments to explore your joints
and your body’s endless movement possibilities.

Muscles

Muscles are incredible fibers; they pump fluid,
squeeze out toxins and create movement in your
whole body by relaxing and contracting. When
your muscles contract, they pull on your bones
to draw them in specific directions. This is why
when your muscles are too loose or too tight, they
can cause misalignment in your skeletal structure.
Muscles function best when they are in an optimal
balance of dynamic tension—relaxed but ready.
Explore your muscles with your eyes, your hands,
and through sensation. Sense for tightness or
looseness. Sense areas where you could use more
strength (more contraction) or more flexibility (more
looseness). The information you gather allows you
to initiate conscious movements that facilitate better
functioning and alignment.
200/700

One of the Nia tools we use to support X-Ray Anatomy is the concept of “200/700,” which refers to the 200+ bones and 700+ muscles in the body. Exploring our bodies with the awareness of 200/700 reveals an endless world of movement possibilities, and gives Nia teachers a larger lens through which to observe their students and themselves. Witnessing with “200/700” helps teachers understand the mechanics of each person’s movement, so they can best direct choreography to support healing and conditioning for everybody.

Recall

1. What is the triad for Principle 10?
2. What is the catch phrase for Principle 10?
3. What does 200/700 refer to in Principle 10?
Craft

This principle introduces you to the practice of observing and sensing for body alignment. Begin by witnessing what is happening beneath your skin, first paying attention to your bones. Do not judge, manipulate or interfere. Simply observe, and sense for the vertical, horizontal and rotational lines in the bone alignment you see. Next, look and sense for ligaments. Remember: ligaments connect bone to bone. When observing ligaments, sense for the range of motion available within your joints. Health and alignment in your ligaments is sensed as stability. Finally, look and sense for your muscles, which attach to your bones and create movement by contracting and releasing. Sense muscular alignment as dynamic tension, the perfect balance between loose and tight.

After gathering information through X-Ray Anatomy, consciously direct your movements to loosen or tighten areas of your body in ways that create optimal dynamic alignment. Keep in mind: With over 200 bones and more than 700 muscles in your body, you have access to an unlimited range movement possibilities! Play with movement variety to keep your bones, ligaments and muscles healthy, stimulated and aligned.

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Embodiment

For these exercises, refer to the book: The Nia Technique: The High-Powered Energizing Workout that Gives You a New Body and a New Life.**

**Exercise 1: Practice the 52 Moves while focusing on X-Ray Anatomy**

Using your Nia Technique book and Nia 52 Moves DVDs, practice all 52 moves while focusing on X-Ray Anatomy. Witness your bone alignment as it compares to the models in the book or DVD. Do not judge or interfere—just observe. After you have gathered information about your body, you may choose to make changes to improve your technique, alignment and overall comfort. Repeat this exercise regularly to continually refine your posture and movement skills.

**Exercise 2: Practice a Nia routine while focusing on X-Ray Anatomy**

Practice X-Ray Anatomy as you watch any Nia routine DVD, and focus on observing your bone alignment as it compares to the alignment of Debbie or Carlos. Without judging or interfering with your movement, witness what is happening beneath your skin. Simply observe. After you have gathered information about your body, you may choose to make changes to improve your technique, alignment and overall comfort. Repeat this exercise regularly to continually refine your posture and movement skills.

**Exercise 3: Zorro**

Zorro is a Nia technique that trains your eye to quickly analyze a person’s bones in relationship to vertical, horizontal and rotational lines. To “Zorro” is to draw quick (“Zorro-like”) stick figures as you observe bodies in motion, which represent the bones you are “X-Raying.” The idea is to create fast, simple lines which help you track a person’s alignment and flow of movement. To refine your Zorro skills, practice in a public place and/or while watching TV. As a person walks by or changes shape, quickly draw lines to represent the bones of his or her base, core and upper extremities. Once you have finished “Zorro-ing” one person, move onto another.

**Exercise 4: Review the bones and muscles of the body**

Using the anatomy images from the Base, Core and Upper Extremities chapters of your White Belt Embody and Share book (Principles 6, 8, 9), examine the shape of each bone and muscle in the body. Review their names, locations and functions within the body’s whole dynamic structure.
Exercise 5: Examine your bone alignment

With an anatomy book on hand for reference, examine your body in a mirror and pay attention to your bone alignment. Look at your body from all directions—from the front, back and side. Next:

- Select one body part to focus on.
- Locate that body part in your anatomy book and compare your bone alignment with the ideal alignment shown in the book.
- If your bone alignment differs from the image in the book, explore possible reasons for this. Are some of your muscles too tight or too loose to allow for optimal alignment? What previous injuries may have affected your alignment? What movement or lifestyle habits might be contributing to your current alignment?
- Where needed, focus on consciously loosening and tightening specific muscles, with the intent to improve your bone alignment. Listen and respond to the sensations of comfort and pleasure, the voices that tell you, “This is good—this supports healthy alignment and functioning.”
Dancing Through Life With X-Ray Anatomy

To embody Principle 10, X-Ray Anatomy, pay attention to the alignment of your bones, ligaments and muscles throughout the day. Here are some examples to get started:

- As you walk, “X-Ray” the bones of your base. What direction is each foot pointing in? Keep walking and sense your ankle, knee and hip joints. Next, sense the muscles of your legs. Do any muscles feel too tight? Too loose? Keep “X-Raying” and observing your base every time you walk, run and dance.

- As you stand while waiting in line or having a conversation, “X-Ray” the bones of your base. Does one leg typically stay straight while the other bends? Is your weight evenly distributed on both feet? Do you shift to one side more than the other? Sense your knee joints—are they locked or spring-loaded with dynamic tension?

- As you sit, “X-Ray” the bones of your pelvis, chest, head and spine. Does the way you are sitting create any discomfort in your body? What can you change to make “sitting” feel better?

- As you read a book, watch TV or work on the computer, “X-Ray” the placement of your head. Is it aligned on top of your pelvis and chest? Does it rest in a way that causes strain on your neck or back muscles? Do your shoulder muscles have tension that may be affecting the placement of your head? Play with different head placements (i.e.: further forward or backward, etc.), and notice if any of them are more comfortable.

Recapitulate

Recapitulate, and then in your Nia journal, describe what you experienced while practicing Principle 10, X-Ray Anatomy.
Teaching Preparation

As you embody Principle 10, cues for X-Ray Anatomy will begin to flow naturally while you dance, regardless of the focus or routine. To prepare for teaching, practice cueing the moves and describing the concept aloud, as though you are teaching a live class. What language will you use to express the importance of sensing bones, joints and muscles, while still encouraging students to follow their body’s way?

Next, practice describing the fitness and conditioning benefits of “200/700.” Imagine a student asking, “Why do we do this?” How would you answer this question and relate it to X-Ray Anatomy? Practice sharing the answer out loud, both before class and as you dance. When you are ready, focus on X-Ray Anatomy in a real Nia class. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Focus on the vertical, horizontal and/or rotational alignment of bones
- Focus on sensing stability in the joints
- Focus on sensing the contraction of intrinsic and extrinsic muscles
- Focus on 200/700, exploring the unlimited movement possibilities available to every body
- Focus on sensing areas of the body that feel too tight or too loose

To practice X-Ray Anatomy as a teacher, “X-Ray” the alignment of your students’ bones as you lead them through class. Look at each body lovingly, simply observing vertical, horizontal and rotational lines. Do not judge or interfere. Just observe. What does each person’s alignment tell you about his or her muscles—about which muscles may be too tight or too loose?

One way to gain more information is to “try on” a student’s posture, allowing your bones to create the shape you see in someone else. How does this person’s posture feel on your body? How does it affect your comfort, mobility and flexibility? What can you do to invite more comfort into your body as you move in this alignment? After you have gained more understanding, you may invite your students to make the same changes you made.

For example, observe how a student’s skull sits over her spinal column. Notice how this alignment might be affected by her neck, back and/or shoulder muscles—does it suggest some muscles may be too tight or too loose? Tilt your head in the same direction and pay attention to how it feels. Is there an adjustment you can make to sense more comfort? If yes, invite your class to play with that adjustment too, by saying, “Everybody, [insert movement invitation here].”

**My Story**

As you read about, practice and embody Principle 10, X-Ray Anatomy, take some time to describe your personal story. How has Principle 10 affected your life?

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