

## Ep. #346 - Why Awareness Outperforms Finding the Perfect Cue



Full Episode Transcript

With your host:

Susi Hately

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hately

## Introduction (00:00.00)

You are listening to From Pain To Possibility with Susi Hatley. You'll hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain, and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hatley.

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## Susi (00:22.95)

Welcome and welcome back. I'm so glad that you're here today because we are now in part three of this three-part mini series on choreography and awareness and the hidden limitation that I think really prevents yoga teachers from really, really excelling in their craft. If you've been following along, you know that the series really is about becoming the yoga teacher who goes beyond shapes and cues, who's able to help people make real measurable gains in strength, mobility, and pain reduction.

In part one, we looked at why choreography, while helpful, can unintentionally limit what you see. In part two, I showed you how to use choreography as a bridge into awareness so you can help people feel instead of force. And now in part three, we're taking the next step. Today is about becoming the teacher whose awareness-based work becomes the standard. The teacher people talk about.

The teacher whose students credit for their gains. The teacher who consistently helps people reduce pain, move better, get stronger, even when nothing else has worked. And here's the key. This isn't about better cues, more anatomy, or more complicated sequencing. It's about understanding what actually changes a body – neurologically, motor control, and fascial mechanisms that shift when awareness leads the way.

So in today's episode, I'm gonna show you exactly why awareness-first teaching can create better strength, better mobility, and less pain. Before we get into all the details, I wanna name something every yoga teacher has seen in the room, where some students follow every cue you give, they place their foot exactly where you ask, and they lift, lengthen, align, stabilize rate according to cue, and yet they still brace.

You see their jaw tight, their breath shallow, and while something is clearly off, it looks right. And then you have the other group, the ones who don't follow the queue at all, not because they're not listening, but because there is an element of their body not being able to do what the words are asking.

## Susi (03:00.21)

You say *soften*, they grip harder. You say *lift*, and they twist. You say *open* and they collapse. Two very different presentations between these groups of students. But really, at the root,

there's something very similar going on. The body, in a sense, is protecting itself. Not consciously, not intentionally, but through bracing, gripping, and old compensation patterns.

And this is where cue-based teaching can really hit its limit because cues can direct movement, but they can't override a nervous system that doesn't feel safe, coordinated, or clear. It's why a perfect cue that works for one person might not work at all for another, or why one student can follow every cue flawlessly, and yet still there is strain compensation and they still feel pain.

The issue here isn't the cue. **It's what's happening with awareness, interoception, proprioception.** It's the coordination patterns. Those are what determine how someone moves, not just what they do. This is where awareness-based teaching becomes essential. Awareness is what reveals bracing, reduces gripping.

It's what allows the body to reorganize itself in a way where queuing alone just can't do it. And this is the foundation for what we're about to get into, and why awareness can lead to better strength, mobility, and *real* pain reduction. Not because it's gentle or mindful – those words are fine – but really, it's what we're doing to facilitate change in the nervous system and how the motor control systems operate.

Susi (04:50.45)

So let's get into it now.

Let's begin by talking about strength, and not 'gym strength' or 'hold the pose longer strength'. I mean like *real strength*. The ability to generate force in a coordinated, efficient way without the need to brace or grip. What most people don't realize is that strength improves first through the nervous system and not muscles.

If you look at the research on early strength gains, the first four to six weeks of any training, almost all of it comes from neuromuscular adaptation, not hypertrophy. In simple terms, the brain and the body are working together better. When you layer awareness onto movement, three things happen that directly improve strength: first, the muscle noise drops. Second, recruitment improves. Third, compensations stop draining force.

Let's begin with the first one. When someone is bracing or gripping, their body is firing muscles that they don't need. This creates background noise in the system. When awareness increases, that muscle noise drops, the nervous system becomes more efficient, and when you start removing inefficient patterns, the muscles that should be working can actually do their job.

In other words, less noise equals more usable strength, and it's why someone can suddenly lift their arms with ease or step into a power. Even though you didn't strengthen anything per se, you were moving better. The second was recruitment improving. Awareness improves proprioception – the ability to sense joint position and movement, and better proprioceptions means better brain-body connection, better coordination, and this coordination is a huge part of strength.

This is why someone can appear weaker than somebody else, but in fact is stronger, because their muscle firing patterns are better than the other, which leads us into the third. Anytime a muscle is doing the job of a different muscle, force, you could say, is being leaked. To mix my metaphors, but still to make the point, it's like trying to run with the brakes on. Awareness shines a light on this.

People feel when they're gripping their hamstrings or clenching their jaw or collapsing into the lower back. And as these compensations begin to shift, force moves in a cleaner line through the body. Strength increases, not because they're trying harder, but because the movement became more efficient.

Susi (07:44.37)

And this is why students may often say things like, my hips feel stronger. I didn't wobble this time. I didn't need as much effort to lift. You didn't add any load. You didn't add reps. You didn't strengthen them in the traditional sense, but you did improve their neuromuscular efficiency using their awareness.

And that can create real measurable strength gains. Strength that doesn't require bracing, gripping, or forcing. Strength that's much more efficient. Strength that's sustainable. So let's take this idea into mobility now, because it works through the same system, just with a different effect.

When I talk about mobility, I don't mean flexibility in this context. I mean *usable mobility*, the kind of range that feels available, smooth, coordinated, and strong. The idea here is that mobility doesn't improve because someone stretches more. It's because there's a resistance that stops. See, people think tightness is a tissue problem. But more of the time we're learning, it's a protection issue, and protection is a creative response. It's not a problem.

When we bring awareness into the mix, there's an opportunity to dissolve that protection, and here are some of the key mechanisms. Awareness reduces involuntary co-contraction. A lot of what people can call tightness is actually the nervous system, co-contracting muscles around a joint to protect it. When we bring awareness into the mix, the brain and the body can be more accurate at sensing what's actually happening. And when perception becomes clearer, the need for protection drops, leading to less guarding and more available range. It's why so often in the classes that I run, people are surprised about how their range of motion improves in a coordinated, very connected way very quickly. Like within 15 minutes.

We didn't stretch anything, but we did bring awareness into the mix. And this leads into really the power of interoception. When someone pays attention to sensation in a non enforcing way, when we can tune in in that interoceptive process, it gives our system a chance to downshift the body's threat meter, and this reduces sympathetic tone, which reduces subtle bracing patterns of lock mobility.

Susi (10:29.06)

We're not stretching more, we're not forcing improvement – that rarely works – but through our awareness, feeding our interoceptive guidance change can happen. This leads to the idea that mobility isn't about how far a limb can go. It's about how much movement can the system organize without needing to protect itself.

Awareness improves coordination between stabilizers, prime movers, synergists, fascia breath, and coordinated movement is always freer movement. When stabilizers do their job, prime movers don't have to tighten so hard. When breath becomes available, the rib cage doesn't have to lock down. When fascia glides more smoothly, joints don't have to necessarily jam. These are just some ideas. It's not an exhaustive list. The point being is that mobility increases not by pushing into range, by driving through your edge, but it's rather removing those blocks to range. And awareness is a key fuel source for that to happen.

So when people are saying, my hips are looser, my back isn't grabbing, or my stride feels smoother. You know what they're really saying? *My nervous system has stopped guarding, my coordination has improved, my tissue is responding to better input.* This is mobility from the inside out, and it's so much more sustainable than any, like, forcing stretch.

Susi (12:14.30)

So now, let's take the awareness conversation into pain reduction. When I talk about pain reduction, what I'm noticing time and time and time again is the change in how a nervous system relates and produces pain. Because pain is not just a tissue signal. Pain is also a perception, a protective output created by the brain when it believes that something needs protecting. So when awareness improves in very specific ways, pain often decreases.

The first way we can look at is that awareness can reduce prediction errors. The idea here is this: the brain is highly predictive. It predicts what will happen next, and if there's a mismatch between the prediction and the incoming sensory information, that error signal can sometimes show up as pain.

Our ability to improve our awareness can change this because that awareness can improve our sensory accuracy. People feel more clearly, their brain gets better information, better input. So there's less of a mismatch, less error, and less need to protect. So pain goes down not because you fixed anything, but because the nervous system was able to stop bringing the alarm because of this better coordinating pattern between brain and body. We can come back to interoception again as people tune into your sensation without forcing.

The parts of the brain that are heavily involved in pain modulation and emotional regulation start to improve. Better interoception equals better regulation. Better regulation equals lower threat perception. Lower threat perception equals less pain. Pain's not necessarily reducing in this context, then, because someone relaxes, **it's reducing because the nervous system is feeling safe.**

Susi (14:35.67)

Awareness is also a huge component to reducing muscle guarding, and it plays a huge part in pain. Sometimes, pain can come from an over recruitment of musculature. I see over and over again that when people reduce compensation patterns, their pain goes down. It's in part that when someone braces or tightens around a joint, the tissue compresses, blood flow decreases, fascia can get sticky, movement can become jerky or labored. So in the process of reducing compensatory patterns, which requires awareness, there's a guarding that begins to unwind. People stop doing the thing that was making them hurt without you ever having to fix alignment. Because they're simply moving better.

Again, **less guardian equals less compression, and that can equal less pain.** It's both mechanical and neurological. Let's come back to this idea of coordination and how coordination can improve load distribution. Pain can frequently show up where load accumulates – the lower back, taking on too much, the neck taking on too much, or the knee taking on too much. Not because these areas are weak, but because the coordination around them is inefficient. They become the place where things pile up, and as we bring awareness into the context, we can clean up our coordinating patterns. We can spread the load more evenly and hotspots start to cool down, pain then can decrease because the system is no longer overloaded.

What's also curious that I see time and time again is that pain reduces when effort reduces, and this can often surprise people. Pain is so closely tied to excessive effort. When people try hard, they brace. When they brace, the nervous system perceives a threat, and if that threat increases, pain can increase.

So again, we bring awareness into the mix. We can help people do less, but not just to do less. **They actually get more out of doing less.** As the body moves through space without triggering protective responses, they're able to do more. Right? So, pain continues to go down. Because they're doing less and they're doing it better.

Susi (17:07.34)

So when you have a student that might say, *hey, my back's not catching anymore, or my shoulder doesn't burn anymore, or my knee feels more normal*, these are not miracles. They're predictable outcomes of a nervous system that's receiving better information, moving with better coordination, and no longer needing to protect itself.

It changes the pain because awareness changes how the body organizes itself. That's at the heart of all this. So with all of that said, between strength, mobility, pain reduction, there's a lot of similar threads. So let's take those similar threads and let's integrate them so it can become a way that you teach every day in every class with every student.

Susi (18:06.91)

At this point, you can see the many different ways that awareness-based teaching can work really well. It's not soft, it's not gentle for the sake of being gentle or mindful for the sake of being mindful. It's not a lighter version of strengthening or mobility work. It's the mechanism that allows for everything else to work better.

So the natural question that might be running around in your mind is, well, *how do I become the teacher for whom this is the standard? The teacher people talk about because they make real gains? The teacher students seek out because the things finally make sense in their body?* And here is a key truth.

It's not about doing more. It's not about building the perfect sequence, and truly, it's not about memorizing more anatomy or cue lists. It's about how you see, how you listen, and how you respond. Awareness-based teaching becomes your standard when you consistently look for bracing instead of alignment.

When you notice what someone feels rather than how they perform. When you're paying attention to movement, through the whole dynamic of movement from start to finish, not just the finishing of the shape. When you allow the nervous system to lead rather than forcing precision. When you allow people to reduce a strain before increasing challenge, and in fact, keeping that strain reduced as they increase challenge. When you begin to teach from this place, something really shifts both in you and your students.

You stop chasing the perfect cue. You stop overcorrecting, and you stop pushing people into positions their body can't organize. Instead, your teaching becomes clearer, quieter, and more effective. Your students start experiencing changes faster, they get stronger, move better, feel less pain because the work is happening at a level where change is actually possible.

And that's when you become that teacher – that teacher whose students name for what gains they've made. The teacher that people tell their friends about. The teacher who creates real change consistently.

Susi (20:29.40)

So let's bring this episode home and wrap up this three part miniseries. Choreography gives you structure. Awareness gives you clarity. And when you combine the two, you help people change for real, strength improves because the nervous system becomes more efficient. Mobility improves because the body stops protecting itself. Pain reduces because the system isn't overwhelmed, confused, or guarding anymore. This is how you become the teacher who isn't just queuing shapes, but helping people actually feel better, move better, and live better.

Susi (21:14.76)

If you wanna deepen this work, if you wanna be highly skilled in understanding how to bring awareness into the fold, while also learning about and digging into the depths of biomechanics and how these pieces work together to help your clients reduce and eliminate physical pain, I have a new program coming up. It is the **Synergy Lab** where we connect shoulders and hips. It runs from **January 8th to March 19th**, and it's specifically for yoga teachers who meet these five criteria:

You are a yoga teacher and you have a student base. You've got a deep desire to become very skilled at helping your clients out of pain. And you're ready. You're ready to learn from me,

between January 8th and March 19th. You've got 1.5 hours per week to dedicate to learning. And you can set aside \$4.99 to invest in your growth.

If that resonates with you and you're ready to go, then send me a note over at **[functionalsynergy.com/contact](https://functionalsynergy.com/contact)** and I will email you all the details. All right, looking forward to hearing from you and we will see you next time.