

Seven-fold rod exercise:
Training for precision in Adults and Children
Part 1. Working as an adult

The first of the major rod exercises is the called the seven-fold exercise, because it has seven principle movements. Every direction in space has a different quality, which we normally experience unconsciously. Through this exercise, you will be able to use space to express different meanings. You will use your mastery of space in new ways, overcoming habits and awakening to new levels of artistry.

It is important that we develop a strong sense of self-movement in space. If you are a person who has a healthily developed capacity for movement, you will be able to rely on your unconscious mastery of space to move effortlessly wherever you want to go. This is made possible through the fact that you acquired basic orientation skills when you were very young, essentially under three years of age. Your confidence of space is so profound that you can scarcely realize how different the dimensions of space are.

Nonetheless, there are very many people who find movement in space to be challenging. They may find that this first exercise is especially difficult or confusing to their bodies in the beginning, because of the way the movements cross the midline of the body. If you are one of these people, don't get discouraged! You will overcome your spatial challenges simply by repeating this diligently.

We can imagine that with this exercise we build a house for ourselves, corresponding to the directions in space. This imaginary house gives you your spatial security.

Whether this is easy for you or hard, stay very awake and precise through this exercise. You must not only be precise; you must also reinforce your precision by being very present with your consciousness, from start to finish.

Begin by standing straight and tall, with your feet together, breathing fully. Be aware of yourself as the source of all your intentions and movements. Throughout this exercise, you will hold your rod with a light but firm grip. *You will not reposition your hands at any point.*

Preparation: Begin by holding the rod horizontally at your shoulder height, arms shoulder width apart.

1. Below (the floor): Lower the rod, stretching your arms long.

2. Above (the ceiling): Raise the rod high above your head. Keep your arms straight, and feel your elbows next to (or just above) your ears.

3. Right (the right wall): Swing the rod to a vertical position in front of the right side of your body. The right arm will be on top, outstretched in front of and exactly at the height of the right shoulder. This means that the right arm will be slightly rotated, and the right elbow will face outward. The left hand continues to hold the rod six to twelve inches below the right hand. Meanwhile, the trunk and neck must be relaxed and straight. Take great care not to twist to the side at your hips, you waist, your shoulder or your neck: continue to face straight forward with the rod upright. The greatest stretch is experienced in reaching the left arm across to hold the bottom of the rod without making you twist.

4. Left (the left wall): Rotate the rod to make exactly the opposite position on the left side of your body. The left arm is on top, outstretched in front of and at the height of the left shoulder, and the right arm continues to hold the rod six to twelve inches below.

5. Right: This is exactly the same as position #3.

6. Above: This is exactly the same as position #2.

7. Below: This is exactly the same as position #1.

Silent count: Raise the rod back to the beginning preparatory position.

As you do this exercise, learn to feel the difference between these positions. "Below" feels grounded and weighted, whereas "above" creates a wonderful stretch into the light filled regions above. The

movements to the sides are both tricky, but they give you a feeling for the difference between the right or will-side of the body and the left or heart-side.

I sometimes call this exercise my “coffee exercise,” because when I do it will real precision and clarity it wakes up my consciousness and is truly invigorating. The pace should be somewhat quick and very crisp.

The seven-fold exercise with walking

Once you have learned this exercise in standing, you can integrate your arm movements with leg movements by walking as you step each position.

To begin with, take one very firm threefold-walking step for each position of the rod. You can walk straight forwards eight steps, and then backwards eight steps. Alternately, you could walk (counter-clockwise) in a circle. Practice this repeatedly, until you have a wonderful coordination of your upper and lower body movements.

Next, take three steps with each position of the rod. The fun of this is to time your stepping so that it takes the same length of time to walk three steps as it does to move the arms one position!

Once you have gotten the hang of this, you can play with it further by taking different numbers of steps for each position. I like to start with one, then two, etc., continuing up to seven steps, and then decelerating back to one.

Walking in different directions

Now you can begin to move in different directions as you move the rod. As you move through the seven rod positions, step as described below.

Preparation: Stand in your “home” position

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|---------------------|--|
| 1. Below | Step forward with the right foot, and close with the left. |
| 2. Above | Step backward with the left foot, and close with the right. |
| 3. Right | Step to the right, and close with the left. |
| 4. Left | Step to the left, and close with the right. |
| 5. Right | Step to the right, and close with the left. |
| 6. Above | Step backward with the left, and close with the right. |
| 7. Below | Step forward with the right, and close with the left. |
| Silent count | Step to the left, and close with the right. |

You will notice that this makes an interesting and somewhat asymmetrical form. Try to draw it for yourself!

Once you are familiar with this pattern, practice doing the same exercise while doing three steps in each direction.

As you move in each direction, practice using the exercise to develop your sensitivity for the difference of moving in each direction. Front, back, right and left all *feel* different from one another for your awake consciousness.

The more you practice this exercise, the more you will enjoy its simple and elegant clarity, and the freshness that it gives to you. I suggest you add it to your daily practice for at least a month. Some of us do it every day in our practice.

Part 2. Addendum for working with Children

The seven fold exercise is appropriate for children from grade 3 onwards.

As mentioned in previous essays, when we work with children in eurythmy we need a different style, methodology and approach.

The seven fold exercise challenges us to stand upright, cross the midline (in complicated ways) and be very precise. If you have already prepared yourself to share this with your child by learning the exercise yourself, you are well aware of all the coordination and self-awareness you had to muster to do this correctly.

Your child must now learn it by imitating you. Most beginners (including adults, teenagers, and middle schoolers, and especially 3rd and 4th graders) will repeatedly make mistakes in the beginning in learning to place the rods on the right and the left side of the body.

If you know your child, you will know if you need to gently coach them to find their correct position, or if you need to pretend to be a military drill sergeant and ask them to “step up to the mark.” I use both attitudes, as needed. (It helps to be able to be a dramatist sometimes!)

It is important to have a certain amount of patience, however. Don’t be overeager to correct them. We often follow the maxim “allow a student to make 10 mistakes, and only correct 1.” Keep repeating an exercise, gently show them that they are still working on getting better, and guide them through repetitions until they discover in themselves how to do it right. We are trying to give them opportunities to self-perceive, and not simply force them to do things “correctly” to “please us.” This is part of the art of teaching eurythmy: giving the right kind of opportunities to learn!

With young children, I ask them to imagine that they are building a house, and establishing the floor, the ceiling, the right wall, the left wall, the right wall, the ceiling and the floor. This is a wonderful complement to begin using in 3rd grade when the children are beginning to do their building assignments.

With grades 4-8 I may use this simple verse:

The earth is firm beneath my feet	(below)
The sky is bright above me	(above)
And here stand I	(right)
So straight	(left)
And tall	(right)
All things to know	(above)
And love	(below)

So it will be time to start walking with the rod exercise in the different patterns. You will notice that they will have as many problems with it as you had. Laugh, giggle, enjoy the process of learning how to move in space with beauty, grace and style.

I suggest that you do this exercise daily (or 3 times a week) for 7 weeks to constitute one “block.” Do three such “blocks” during the year---in fall, winter and spring.

The Journal Box

Things to watch as your child learns the seven-fold rod exercise. Could s/he move in space easily? Could s/he express and experience the crisp precision that this exercise needs? Was s/he straight and exacting? Could s/he find an inner compass? How was it to integrate the legs with this? Could s/he stay straight and draw the legs together in each position? How can you help him/her improve?