

SOMATICS

12 embodied inquiries for transforming
your experience in rope bondage

FOR ROPE

NATASHA NAWATANEKO

BOTTOMS

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I dedicate this book to Alexander—my dear partner in crime, my chosen man, my soul-mate—who took me on this journey, who was holding me after every venture into the dark together, who was encouraging me to go for my dreams, no matter how intimidating.



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Somatics for Rope Bottoms: 12 embodied inquiries for transforming your experience in rope bondage

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ing exchange we had about rope and bodywork which also influenced the ideas I present in this book.

I was lucky to have brilliant teachers in the rope bondage world as well as in somatics and sexuality.

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And once again, I wish to thank my partner Alexander, for the endless support and patience he offered me during the writing process over the past year. Without you, none of that would have happened anyway.

Foreword

When I first met Natasha I was really amazed by her incredibly beautiful expression of sadness and abandonment in ropes. Having had the chance to spend some time together in these years, both in public events and workshops but even on private occasions, I could find in her a high sensitivity towards people and emotions. Natasha is a sort of “radar:” she can read and perceive in an environment if there are good or bad vibes, she can perceive people’s feelings.

I think this comes from the fact that she lives her own emotions in a very instinctual and deep way, enabling her to connect with the ones of other people too.

I still remember her during one of our private lessons going through her first Hashira session and “flying away” in her own space like she was thrown in a different dimension. It was amazing to witness the intensity of her experience.

I think that all these features of her personality, together with her studies and background in sexuality, gives her a very interesting point of view. Her perspective on emotions, trust, surrendering could be very useful to people that want to experience and better understand the world of ropes and want to live the fact of being tied as a journey of self disclosure and awareness.

Red Sabbath
April 2020

Foreword

Wilhelm Reich, an early pioneer of the contemporary somatic movement, noticed that humans developed muscular constrictions throughout their bodies in response to life's traumas. He warned that these rope-like constrictions actually choke and strangle our aliveness, inhibiting our breathing, movement, speaking and even lovemaking. To remedy this, Reich developed a bodywork therapy to loosen and dissolve these muscular ropes that constrict and bind our human potential and our precious aliveness.

Early in my career as a somatic educator, I trained and certified professionals in Reichian bodywork. In order to introduce my students to Reich's methods of releasing these ropes or bands, I would tell them the tale I heard as a child of Gulliver who fell asleep as he traveled through a strange land. He woke up bound by hundreds of ropes.

I would ask my students to imagine they were Gulliver. "Feel yourself waking up, bound tightly by ropes. How would you get free?" I would tell them that, according to Reich, we all carry these muscular ropes within our bodies. "How can you become a bodyworker if you are being strangled? How can you ever love anyone if you are being choked by these muscular ropes?" Reichian liberation was freeing oneself of these ropes.

It is quite astonishing and even ironic that ninety years after Reich developed his theories about deliverance from our muscular ropes, Natasha NawaTaNeKo is offering an embodied path of liberation for individuals while they are bound by ropes. Her method involves constant questioning: "How can we free ourselves and live our full potential even

when bound by rope? How can we attend to the life of our own bodies while enduring considerable restraint?"

Somatics for Rope Bottoms is the brilliant result of hundreds of hours of conscious practice sessions. The wisdom of this volume was birthed while Natasha was ropebound and sometimes suspended in space. Many of her words speak to beginners who will be both comforted and excited by the journey she describes. Natasha constantly offers pearls of wisdom for those recently seduced into rope. For example, "Your safety doesn't come from knowing what comes next. Your safety comes from being present with what is."

Skilled and experienced rope bottoms will be both challenged and nourished by the multidimensional richness and depth of Natasha's somatic inquiries. She invites her peers to leave behind the familiar terrain and enter the unknown. One could spend a year exploring Natasha's intelligent reflections on surrender. She warns us that surrender is not a passive state. Rather, she says "we need to actively 'do' surrender."

Somatics for Rope Bottoms is an important book for rope enthusiasts. It is also an astonishing repository of body-based wisdom that will contribute tremendously to the exploding fields of somatic therapy and education. This is a book I will wholeheartedly recommend in my professional trainings for Somatic Sex Educators and Sexological Bodyworkers.


One revelation I had, after reading Natasha's brilliant guidebook, is that Reich was correct—metaphorically: we are all constrained by ropes. It is by maintaining our attention on our bodies that we access the deep benefits from rope bondage and from life.

We are all rope bottoms.

Joseph Kramer, Ph.D.

June 2020

Introduction



In rope bondage, what we rope bottoms bring into play is our body, our emotions, our psyche, and souls. In fact, our whole being in its entirety is known as the Greek word “soma.” We allow ourselves to be affected on many levels, exposed to playing with our emotions, enduring physical discomfort, and open to mental challenges.

What is truly remarkable about our soma is its unlimited capacity to adapt and learn. Soma is endlessly creative, always undergoing that endless cycle of life, and of change; leaving behind the familiar terrain and entering into the unknown.

This unlimited ability of our body to learn, cope, and adjust to any new circumstances is truly fascinating. Have you ever been struck seeing a green plant sprouting through the pavement? A tree growing bent in the direction of the wind? A pebble that has become smooth and round in sea waves? This is how we human beings are. We are resilient. Our soma wants to survive, so it will find a way to get along with life.

Being exposed to a new condition, our soma responds immediately by adapting to the new way of being. This is what we experience in every new situation: our minds worry, our bodies adapt. Being exposed to distress and discomfort, we develop a mechanism for coping. Learning to articulate in a foreign language properly, attempting the first steps in tango, struggling to control our awkward fingers when learning guitar, we make use of somatic learning.

I always admired my brother’s ability to master so many sports—tennis, snowboarding, windsurfing, kiting, kitesurfing—all on his own. One day, he introduced me to his latest toy—a unicycle. He told me to

climb on and make small movements back and forth, while still supporting myself on the wall. “Let your body feel it. Give it time. It will pick it up,” he said. “Just trust it.” Terrified as I was, I couldn’t help but notice that his instructions sounded very similar to how I learned to exist in a new challenging rope tie. In the end, I never did learn to uni-cycle. Well, he isn’t able to do what I do in bondage. We stick to our own areas of expertise. Trusting what you feel is, for me, the essence of somatic learning; giving the process time. Recognizing your own thoughts for what they are—only your thoughts, never reality itself. Trusting the wisdom of your body, knowing it will find a way to learn and adapt.

I felt compelled to approach rope bottoming from this perspective. I wanted to understand what is happening to us when receiving rope impact on our soma. What is happening when the rope “gets us,” when it goes deeper than our skin? Where does it go? What is being created? What is brought into existence? What do we do to enable the magic—the transformation in ropes? What is this indescribable quality that we call “surrender”? What I offer in this book is a result of five years of research into the intersection of somatics and rope bondage.

* * *

This book is for all the rope bottoms out there who fearlessly enter the world of their passion and are confronted with their shadows, difficult emotions, and pain. I know the feeling of not being good enough, the doubt or confusion, the high feeling after a very great session, and then feeling very down the day after. My great hope is that this book can support you in your rope journey and enable you to find the answers that you are looking for. My own start in rope bondage was rather bumpy. At that time in 2012, there weren’t many workshops for rope bottoms. No one talked about handling difficult emotions, avoiding back pain or improving communication with the rigger. I was confused. I wanted to enjoy the ropes, but it didn’t come naturally to me. I was comparing myself to other rope bottoms. I felt overwhelmed with all the emotions, and was impatient while anxiously expecting pain all at the same time.

Looking back with all the knowledge I have now, I can see that I was not awake in the present moment, and not at all with myself. I was wait-

ing impatiently to receive both pleasure and meaning from the improved skills of my rigger, while at the same time missing the possibility to find them within myself.

Thanks to Clover, the author of the *Rope Bottom Guide*, and then later Tanja Scot I was able to gain my first insights into what I can do to improve my experience in ropes. I eventually found my pathway learning from Red Sabbath, who demonstrated a very memorable and deeply touching personality in ropes—and who has become my greatest influence.

I’m deeply grateful for these insights.

What made the biggest difference for me in rope bottoming was the introduction to somatics as a part of my professional training in *Sexological Bodywork* in 2015. There I learned how to attend to the life of my own body. That opened a whole new chapter in my rope bottoming journey. Learning to inhabit my body, to live inside my own skin, I rediscovered my personality as a rope bottom and my authentic desires, along with the resources I needed—and already possessed—to live out the experience that I wanted in ropes.

* * *

The somatic approach to rope bottoming that I offer promotes self-awareness and self-responsibility. It requires us to become aware of our intention, and make conscious choices, to show up in the scene and take responsibility for our experience; to grow our healthy core and learn to feel and attend to ourselves in a loving way. By developing our capability to sense ourselves and to regulate ourselves, we can have the experience we are yearning for.

This is not a practical how-to guidebook. There is no teaching of how to do things “properly” or what you “should” feel or expect. There are questions—which are the most important and relevant when engaging with rope bondage. And the opportunity for discoveries that you will make yourself as you are being guided to attend to the voice of your own body.

I share some of my answers, however, they don’t have to be true for you. My aim is to offer you a working, effective framework that will support you in finding your own answers. My only ambition is that you—

rope bottoms—gain more possibilities to have nurturing and satisfying experiences in ropes.

Here they are, my 12 questions, 12 somatic inquiries:

Why do we seek the experience of being tied?

Where do our desires come from and how can we honor them?

Where does our attention go when we are in ropes?

What can we do to let our partner know how we feel, without speaking up?

What are the ways we can use breathing to create a better experience in ropes?

What is the source of our resilience in ropes?

Where are our limits and whose responsibility is it to recognize them?

Why do we want to surrender and what allows us to do so?

What makes us feel safe in rope bondage?

Which pain can we welcome and when do we decide to stop?

Why rope bondage can be the place to embrace all of our emotions, even the difficult ones?

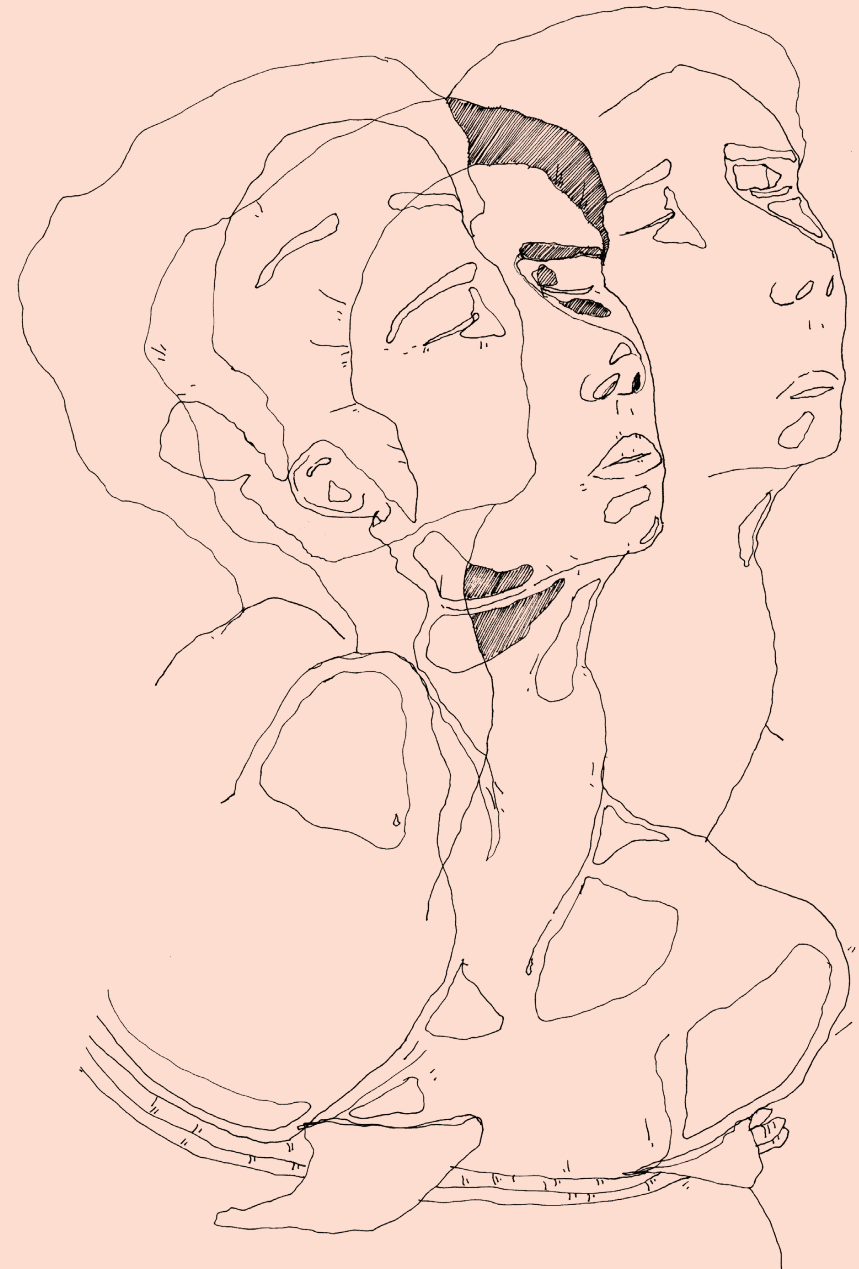
Which risk can we take, and where to stop exploring?


I invite you to explore these questions with me and to discover your own truth.

My other intention with this book is to outline a possibility of growing as a rope bottom that is not about taking rope into our hands nor about increasing our flexibility and “edginess.” There is a lot of value that we bring into rope play by deepening our self-knowledge, self-awareness, emotional capacity and—not the least—our ability to offer space for our partners and thus be able to embrace them as human beings in their complexity.

I love to see authentic and mature rope bottoms bringing out their unique features and qualities, expressing the depth and beauty of Kinbaku, Japanese rope bondage.

01 Intention





People get involved with rope bondage for many different reasons. Some are searching for the thrilling experience of being restrained and held captive, others for enhanced intimacy and connection with their partners. Some seek liberation by giving away responsibility, some like to enjoy testing their physical limits in a very intense way. Others seek a ritualistic space to live out their devotion, and some are just curious.

Regardless of the reasons for getting involved with rope, it all starts with intention. Since there is such a multifaceted and colorful universe of personal preferences and desires, your personal intention will be a major key to your decisions when it comes to the choice of rope partners, what you do—or do not—consent to, and what experiences you will have. And what knowledge and skills you might need as a rope bottom.

This is just common sense, right? In practice however, when I ask rope bottoms who come to our workshops what their intention with ropes is, I often hear confused answers. People with a strong masochistic streak are often the ones with the clearest vision. Some people think that it's enough for them to share the passion of their partner. Some people are looking to have particular experiences and they seek a partner accordingly. Ultimately, the question of intention is not as obvious as it might seem.

I believe that the question of your personal intention, of your “*Why?*” is one of the most important aspects that needs to be dealt with to discover *your personality* as a rope bottom. This is essential to find your authentic expression, to find what nurtures you and what you can bring

to a rope scene with your partner. It is, perhaps, the most important question you will ask yourself and keep asking yourself throughout your whole journey as a rope bottom. If you were to read just one chapter from this book, I would offer you this one. In my experience, exploring the question *Why?* has the greatest potential to enrich you as a rope bottom and as a person.

Intention grows from the inside, from our inner landscape. From getting real with ourselves and facing the truth about our true desires and needs.

When we ask ourselves why we do what we do, we are shining the light of awareness onto our inner landscape, onto hidden feelings, forgotten memories, thoughts and beliefs, prejudices, old wounds and hopes. You might find yourself being challenged. You might sense the presence of something ugly that you don't want to look at. Maybe there is even shame hiding there. This is exactly where looking at your deeper reasons for your behavior and intention will take you. When you get to "the real thing" you will feel emotional about it. Try to meet these emotions, whatever they are, with love and not fear. We heal shame by looking at it, not looking away. By doing this work, we have the possibility to move past our fears, limitations, addictions and the feelings of unwholeness that haunt many of us. When you look into yourself and give these newly discovered emotions space and acknowledgment, that becomes the source of your inner power, the source of your inner strength to be in ropes, to create *your story*. This is what will enable you to be in ropes in a powerful way, in a conscious and transformative way.

Looking for your deep intention is the single aspect of your rope bottoming journey with the greatest potential for turning your inner pain into your power.

Getting in touch with your intention is about meeting your real self with love. This is what your value as a rope bottom is based upon. This is what you will be able to offer as a gift to your partner... But this is not about your partner. This is about you showing up and taking responsibility for who you are, sexually and in life. This is about you discovering your own authentic rope story. Your own story of why you are being tied. Wouldn't you rather go deep with your own story than stay on the surface?

Finding your intention will also help you with questions of consent, choice, and responsibility. It is simple: we show up in situations in life

differently when we do it for ourselves rather than for someone else. The very nature of consent, that is, agreeing to participate in this or another activity, is based on the fact that we are aware of our own intention to begin with. Without being aware of my own intention, I don't have a reference point to find out if I am compatible with a person or not. Also, the tricky thing about intention is that if you don't have your own, it will be easily replaced or provided by someone else. And we might end up putting up with a lot of inconveniences imposed upon us by someone else, for unclear reasons.

Your intention will support you through challenging experiences in ropes. I recall how once in our private class a couple was practicing a new transition that was very challenging for the rope bottom. He was sweating, moaning, and suffering and finally landed safely back on the ground. When we asked him for feedback, he appeared very thoughtful and quiet and after a long silence said: "It was very intense, very intense. I need to think, why am I doing this to myself?" That illustrates my idea about intention very well.

INTENTION VS. EXPECTATIONS

Intention is about me and my choices. Intention gives me focus and a framework for my actions. Intention is different from expectation. Expectation as defined in the Oxford Dictionary is "*a strong belief that something will happen or be the case, or a belief that someone will or should achieve something.*" Expectations are often about others: what they should do or how they should behave. Even those expectations we have towards ourselves, often create a narrative about how the future will be that can lead to disappointment instead of discovery.

When we are not in touch with our intention, we can start expecting "a reward" from our partner such as aftercare, making it up to us for what we have been through, or we blame them for negative emotions that come up in a session. This can be addressed by asking: Why do you want to be in ropes? What do you bring with you to the tatami mat? There is nothing wrong with aftercare or being there for one another through a difficult phase. However, we perceive negative outcomes in a very different way when it was our conscious choice to have this experience, and to have all of it.

Personally, I had a very long phase of frustration when I started working with ropes which was the transition from expectations to conscious intention, and it took quite a while. I was “shoulding” myself to look like other bottoms, even to feel how they feel. I was confused and frustrated because initially I couldn’t understand that my experience in ropes is not what my partner “brings” to me, from somewhere outside of myself. This is what I already have within me, and with the rope, he will “bring it out” to existence.

Once I understood my role in co-creating the scene, from that moment on I stopped “shoulding” myself to be like others because my own journey became the most interesting and fulfilling one. I started to feel that I had come into my own power as a rope bottom. And consequently, I could bring so much more into a session, and to my partner.

This is where rope play is so wonderfully versatile because there is no one like you, who has your specific, unique qualities and unique, non-repeatable way of being intimate, communicating, playing and seducing, resisting and surrendering... That comes from you as a person and from you daring to get in touch with that authentic, perhaps hidden part of you that really wants to be tied up!

CORE EROTIC THEME

During my Sexological Bodywork studies, we learned the modality called the Core Erotic Theme (CET) created by Dr. Jack Morin and featured in his book “The Erotic Mind.” I bring it here with the hope that it can serve as a framework for you to look into your own intention in ropes.

Dr. Jack Morin posits that our most compelling turn-ons are shaped by one constantly repeating scenario that he calls the Core Erotic Theme: CET. According to Dr. Morin, our CET—“an internal blueprint for arousal”—is responsible for how we think about sex, who we consider attractive, and what roles we are drawn to play in sexual interactions. Similarly, I believe, each of us got involved with rope because of the influence of our individual CET. And understanding our CET can shed light on the question of what it is that we are seeking in ropes. By addressing this question you might develop a new level of respect for your eroticism, and find a greater ability to understand and influence your sexual choices, e.g. your choices in rope bottoming.

To explore your CET, Dr. Morin offers an algorithm to analyze your “peak erotic experiences.” These are among the most arousing of your entire life, your fantasies, and the pornography or erotica that you find the most appealing. When analyzing these three aspects of your inner erotic landscape, look for “thematic” similarities in storylines, characters, and plot twists; look for subtle erotic cues.

~ Questions for reflection ~

What do you already know about your intention in ropes? What do you seek to experience? What feeling do you want to evoke? Using the algorithm proposed by Dr. Morin, think about these three aspects: What do you consider your very best moments in ropes? What about your fantasies involving ropes? What imagery or stories do you find the most appealing or arousing? Do you see any connection there?

For some of you, your answers will be obvious right away, for others it will sound confusing and maybe even irritating. The time spent with these questions is time well spent, however. It will enrich your self-knowledge and empower your sexual and rope persona.

Our shared journey ends here. We have explored 12 topics and made 12 somatic inquiries into the realm of bottoming in ropes. We raised the most important question of intention. We looked into the somatic resources such as our attention, breathing, and our core—resources we already have inside of ourselves that we can build upon to make the most of our rope practice and to stay safe. We explored the process of welcoming the impact and how it allows for physical and emotional transformation.

Your personal journey will of course go on. There cannot be a final answer, because the cycle of change is as endless as the journey of life itself. You are changing and the answers—your answers!—are changing along with you. There is nothing final in the life of the body. I invite you to keep researching and ask yourself the questions again and again with an open mindset, with a “not-knowing-it-all” mindset.

What happens if you decide to trust yourself in someone else’s hands?
What is being created? What is brought into existence?
What does it do with you? Where does your mind go?
What happens if you keep your heart open at all times?

Surrender became the main topic in my book because it is what moves me the most. I have a personal story of resistance, which led me to re-search surrender. I had to come back many times; I had to exercise this capacity to surrender again and again, till I began feeling it from the inside. And the first time I did, it made my heart melt.

I encourage you to find your story. What question occupies your mind ceaselessly? What haunts you and does not leave you alone? What emotion or situation comes up repeatedly in your life? What makes you afraid and hopeful at the same time—and very emotional?

As you go on with your journey, remember: magic happens in your body. Even the best rope technique is only a means to convey the initial impulse. You are the vessel. You are marvelous. It is your trembling, your emotions, your offering that changes the temperature in the room. You can stop it, but you can also allow it to happen. You can put the defenses down and be exposed and vulnerable as you are.

I think that could be the whole meaning of Kinbaku—Japanese rope bondage.

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About the Author

I am Natasha NawaTaNeko, a truth seeker and embodiment enthusiast. Love and curiosity are my driving forces. I am Russian born and my spirituality is deeply rooted in Russian culture, which means that I like to ask existential questions and look for the essence of things.

Together with my partner, I have been practicing Kinbaku—Japanese Rope Bondage—since 2012. For me, Kinbaku is an exciting personal inquiry into the realm of what happens when people are forced out of learned patterns and automatic reactions and surrender to the flow of here and now. I am fascinated by this highly personal, creative and high-tension art of communication between two people as they come close, very close together; becoming vulnerable by showing themselves as they are and letting others see them. Practicing the art of Kinbaku has deeply influenced how I am as a person and a woman in a relationship. This inquiry can go very deep and I wish it would never end.

After studying with Joseph Kramer in 2015, I began my work as a Certified Sexological Bodyworker assisting individuals and couples to deepen their connection with their bodies and sexuality. I have been fascinated to discover the potential of embodiment as a way of living life to the fullest, integrating the body as an essential place of change, learning, and transformation.

Building on this experience, I found modalities and tools used in Sexological Bodywork relevant for rope bottoming. When being challenged in ropes, we respond the same way as when being challenged in life—with our conditioned tendencies. How do you react under stress? to pain? and power? Rope makes everything tangible. It allows you to

become aware of your reactions. And awareness is the first step to change. You can grow out of what holds you back, you can make the changes you seek. I know I did. Learning to feel myself, learning to take time to breathe and direct my attention, I learned that I have a freedom of choice... and that my past schemas are no longer so powerful. I like to share this transformation by passing it on to others.

You can find more information about me and my work
on ropesomatics.com and discoverkinbaku.com