

EXCHANGE

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On Not Having in Order to Have More: Some Reflections on Inhibition Part II

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[Part I of this article appeared in the last issue of Exchange, *Ed.*]

The Payoff

Rounding out the list of what conscious inhibition does for us (in addition to permitting the restoration of appropriate postural balances and accurate kinesthetic appreciation), both Alexander and Feldenkrais repeatedly pointed out in their books the personal health benefits that they believed accrue from inhibition and adaptability, among them being greater efficiency and flexibility in movement and thinking, equanimity of temperament, optimal function of the organs, reduction of bodily wear and tear, increased ease and enjoyment of living, and a more secure sense of self.

Inhibition for a Change

How can we use inhibition consciously to break habits? First, it helps to know a bit about how conditioned responses are formed and broken. (For a rather nice discussion of this in animals and humans, see Feldenkrais, *Body and Mature Behavior*, pp. 41-53.) For our purposes, it is important to know that in order to extinguish conditioning, you have to receive the stimulus numerous times without reinforcing the conditioned response, i.e., without rewarding it (as with Pavlov's dogs) or, better yet, by choosing not to act on it (an option available to humans). The behavior also has a strong tendency to reappear at any time before complete extinguishment upon presentation of the stimulus—or even a part of it.

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ATI Vision and Mission

To establish an open means of global communication for people to discuss, apply, research, and experiment with the discoveries of F. M. Alexander.

To foster the use of the F. M. Alexander Technique in social and environmental interrelationships.

To create a vital organization whose structure and means of operation are consistent with the principles of the F. M. Alexander Technique.

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Editor's Page

by Dan Arsenault, editor

Change is in the air here at ExchangeE. I've taken over the webmaster duties for the ATI website, and, as a consequence, I no longer have the time to edit ExchangeE. I leave you in incredibly capable hands, however, as Andrea Matthews takes over as editor.

Many of you have commented positively on Andrea's recent article contributions, but you may not know that she has also been helping behind the scenes to get issues of ExchangeE ready for press. I am deeply in Andrea's debt on both accounts, and I know you'll continue to enjoy her work. I'm so envious of someone who can both really sing and really write!

I want to thank Jamee Culbertson for asking me to help with ExchangeE, and especially all the contributors who have made ExchangeE so memorable in the last 18 months. The caring of the Alexander Technique community is its greatest strength, and that depth of feeling will continue to inspire prospective contributors to ExchangeE.

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From the Chair



Dan Arsenault photo

by Jamee Culbertson, Chair of Alexander Technique International

I went hiking through the Redwood Forest in California last weekend. I was astounded at the mighty, mighty Redwood trees that have graced that landscape for a thousand years and more. I stood on a small hill overlooking a grove of trees. Redwood trees grow in circular groupings like a family and reach heights of 260 feet. I stood there imagining what it must be like to be such a tree as the Redwood. I stood still, more quiet than I had been in quite some time. Standing there I experienced once again the knowledge of what the Alexander Technique has awoken in my system as I became more and more unified, coordinated and free to be. Unnecessary tension fell away, my face softened and I felt as if I belonged in this great universe we live in. This happened naturally, no need to “give directions” this time. When the wind blew I swayed like the trees did. I pondered what it must be like to live here as a tree; “this is my view and I am over 1,000 years old!” I said to myself. Of course, I could not know what that existence is really like, but nonetheless, I enjoyed this communion and the opportunity to release my ordinary identity for just a little while. Nature is always the best teacher and this was my lesson for the day.

Back at home now, in thinking of ATI, I liken it to a circle of Redwoods.

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Feldenkrais related a case where a man's epileptic seizure was brought on by his mistaking a woman in a restaurant for his ex-fiancée, with whom he had had a stressful argument that precipitated a previous attack (p. 48). This is certainly an extreme example, but such remotely linked conditioned responses are the stuff of our everyday neuroses and otherwise uncontrollable—almost unfathomable—habits and reactions. Thus one sees how intimately related such seemingly rather dry and philosophical issues are with our daily lives and concerns. He did, however, hold out hope: “The human nervous system being especially fitted to the formation of personal patterns which are more labile than genetically inherited reflexes is also better fitted for inhibiting unwanted patterns and extinguishing them.” (p. 50)

He noted that for effective conditioning (and learning in general) stimuli must be unambiguous and clearly presented and repeated; conflicting rewards, or rewards for conflicting responses, seem to set off confusion and frustration in animals undergoing conditioning, leading to disorderly behavior and over-excitement. This sounds much like the “unduly excited fear reflexes” which Alexander discussed in connection with the inconsistent application of inhibition forced on most of us by “civilization” with its taboos and by our education (*CCCI*, pp. 85-86). Such responses arise when we vainly try to reconcile (however unconsciously) the conflicting orders we seem to be receiving from outside and which we are certainly transmitting within ourselves. “Unduly excited fear reflexes, uncontrolled emotions, prejudices and fixed habits,” he observed, “are retarding factors in all human development....This is particularly the case when a person endeavors to learn something calling for new experiences.” Thus, the need for a well-defined *intention* to accompany inhibition in producing effective learning (that “process by which experience changes behavior,” as Nathan puts it (p. 299)), becomes apparent; it is clearly part of what Alexander declared critical to the application of his method—“the proper mental attitude.” (*MSI*, p. 50)

“Unduly excited fear reflexes, uncontrolled emotions, prejudices and fixed habits are retarding factors in all human development... .This is particularly the case when a person endeavors to learn something calling for new experiences.” (F.M. Alexander)

Feldenkrais, too, was always attentive to his student's mental state, as he noted in *Body Awareness as Healing Therapy*: “I always wait, when undertaking nonverbal work [using his hands-on technique which he called Functional Integration], until the body pattern, or more correctly the motor cortex pattern connected with anxiety is resolved. This happens when the pupil thinks of a way of doing something he did not do for many years or maybe never did at all.” (p. 47)

I have found that people sometimes confuse inhibition with a predetermined choice. Following that idea would be just like deciding what needs to be done and trying to do it, precisely the procedure that Alexander said needed to be abandoned. Such a formulation of inhibition sounds new to people, but of course it's just a new way of saying what we already "know." Alexander was always finding his students trying to put his new wine in their old bottles. So clearly, whether you demand a certain result or are instead willing to be surprised by the outcome of preventing "a response/activity that would otherwise occur," (as I put it at the beginning of this paper) is a crucial distinction (the latter approach being another aspect of "the proper mental attitude" necessary for Alexander's method to be effective).

The autonomic nervous system, which innervates the organs and controls such "involuntary" or "vegetative" processes as circulation and digestion, is made up of two branches: the sympathetic (excitatory; stemming from the central, or thoracico-lumbar, spinal cord) and the parasympathetic (inhibitory; stemming from the extreme, or cranio-sacral, ends of the spinal cord). (I'm sure the respective origins of these branches must be highly significant, but of what?) Perhaps conscious inhibition works by enlisting the support of the parasympathetic system to inhibit (lower the excitability) of the nervous system generally, eliciting the beneficial, "wakeful, hypometabolic state" cited by Juhan (p. 294) as being associated with meditation. This coincides with Alexander's observation (quoted above) that there "can be little doubt that the process of reasoning tends to develop more quickly and to reach a higher standard in a person whose attitude towards life might be described as calm and collected." (*CCCI*, p. 85) Such a person could be said to have a lower "set point." When one stops to reflect, it becomes clear that a "virtuous circle" is implied here—the calm person becomes more able to utilize inhibition and the person who exercises this skill becomes more calm.

Conviction or Delusion

Besides being in an open-ended and calm frame of mind, the student must become convinced of the need to let go of, to actively inhibit, his habit before he will be able to change it. Alexander stressed this need to give up one's fixed habits of thought in order to amend one's behavior. He pointed out that the medical profession tends to completely overlook the question of the patient's mental attitude (*MSI*, p. 20); it is, however, critical to the efficacy of his method. We must give up the belief that we can come out right simply by doing what we think needs to be done (relying on our existing standard of kinaesthetic appreciation to guide us and to gauge the result). As he discovered in the course of developing his method, the "*belief is very generally held that if only we are told what to do in order to correct a wrong way of doing*

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something, we can do it, and that if we feel we are doing it, all is well. All my experience, however, goes to show that this belief is a delusion.” (The Use of the Self, p. 10)

Obviously, a student will not be persuaded to practice the skill of inhibition until he becomes convinced of its necessity. Of course, how can one become convinced of that necessity without experiencing it in operation? With such a “Catch-22” in mind, one can better appreciate the relief (bordering on triumph) Alexander must have felt when he discovered he could use his hands to impart that experience to his students (as I’ve heard he said) “in spite of themselves.” This opened up a whole new area of application for the conscious use of inhibition. Though I have yet to see a neurological explanation for the apparent overriding of the student’s nervous impulses by the teacher’s (as communicated through touch), I suspect it has something to do with the phenomenon described above where a second (important or novel) stimulus inhibits a first (repetitive) one, particularly as the student’s attention is usually engaged, either by the contact itself or by the teacher’s request that he do nothing to interfere. Such attention (at the least) confers a new importance on incoming sensory impulses; it may even be significant in such cases that there are neurons in the cerebral cortex that only react when one is paying attention (Nathan, p. 130). The mechanism by which a relatively disordered nervous system can be influenced for the better by a more balanced one deserves extensive investigation.

“...But Thinking Makes it So”

Feldenkrais also made the fascinating, and otherwise little explored, observation that man’s faculty of imagination is intimately involved in the formation and subsequent triggering of conditioned responses (pp. 50-51); this in fact makes us vulnerable to a different class of stimuli (such as emotional threats and promises), and to a very extended time-frame for conditioning responses (e.g., the possibility of reward or punishment at any time, even beyond death). As we see from the case of the epileptic gentleman mentioned above, even what humans *imagine* the stimulus to be can make all the difference in response. In *Body Awareness as Healing Therapy*, Feldenkrais showed himself to be prepared to make use of this as well. He points out that a teacher can avoid approaches that evoke anxiety by redefining tasks; with his stroke patient, rather than calling the task he was presenting “writing” (which distressed her, because she found herself incapable of remembering how to do it), he simply put the paper in front of her, made some marks and asked her to draw what she saw. This was a request she could comply with, particularly as it did not trigger a distressing (and now habitual) response. With regard to our habits, we are all to some degree like a stroke victim, having lost access

to any way to accomplish a task other than our habitual and less than optimal one—we can't even imagine another. Here we see that labeling a task in a familiar way can evoke the conditioned response; thus, changing or even omitting the label can circumvent the student's imagination, his ideas about what he can and cannot do.

Here we see that labeling a task in a familiar way can evoke the conditioned response; thus, changing or even omitting the label can circumvent the student's imagination, his ideas about what he can and cannot do.

On a brighter note, Feldenkrais' method makes extensive constructive use of imagination in the group lessons called Awareness Through Movement (ATMs), such as imagining making movements just performed with one side of the body

on the other side, as a means of transferring and speeding learning. Though I would love to see an explanation of the physiology of such processes, I haven't yet come across any. I would speculate that the fact that numerous areas of the brain are activated, apparently simultaneously, in the split second *before* a movement actually starts, while patterns for response are being accessed via the cerebral cortex's various "associative" areas (*Mind and Brain*, pp. 39, 119) is somehow relevant to this question. Does this use of imagination somehow call up those patterns for emendation by new experience? There is clearly a certain analogy here to the Alexandrian procedure of considering a movement but not doing it as a means of exploring inhibition and habit; perhaps we could extend our use of "considering" to the means whereby, as Feldenkrais' work seems to suggest. At the same time, I find my experience of ATM lessons enhanced by conscious inhibition, awareness (especially of support and lengthening) and direction, which involve imagination, at least to some degree. Clearly, there is much to explore in the relationship of imagination to Alexandrian non-doing.

Obstacles and Aims

Feldenkrais, in giving what is clearly a rationale (though not explicitly stated) for why Functional Integration is done lying down, as are most ATM lessons at least in part, has provided a powerful theoretical support for tablework in AT as well. (See below, where Frank Ottiwell cites Alexander's referring to tablework as "inhibition work.") "It is obvious that the subject must not be called upon to do anything that involves his habitual response to gravity." (Feldenkrais, p. 120) As any part of a stimulus or similar stimulus tends strongly toward eliciting the entire conditioned response, he felt that conscious attention (presumably, as usually applied) increases that stimulus. By the same token, he stressed the critical need for kinaesthetic re-education in order to persuade the overriding conscious control to grant consent to new

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means of doing (pp. 108-112). Otherwise, the student's emotional state, with its associated "personal conditioned pattern of muscular contraction" will produce interference with erect posture and good use (p. 93). For the same reasons, Alexander also emphasized the importance of leading the student away from his reliance upon his faulty sensory appreciation (and in particular his sense of what feels "right"). "Until his powers of muscular appreciation infallibly recognize the new muscular coordinations, he must be guided *solely by his teacher*.... For the time being, the pupil places his entire muscular system under the control of his conscious will, directing himself solely according to the suggestion afforded by the orders of the teacher." (MSI, p. 64)

One could say Feldenkrais' goal in such re-education was to bring a student as close to his current full operating capabilities as possible (which in practice includes a new awareness of available patterns of movement not explicitly a focus of Alexandrian exploration). In support of such aims, tablework and floor-based ATMs enhance the possibility of reducing the "set point" of the student's nervous system (the chronic and usually excessive level of excitation discussed above) by removing as much as possible the stimulus of gravity, thus de-activating the reflexive fear of falling, so that the student's ability to inhibit habitual reactions and movements can be calmly called into increasing (and increasingly) conscious use.

In essence, the Alexander Technique asserts that any student has the potential to become what Feldenkrais calls... "a highly gifted personality."

Alexander, by contrast, set his sights (and perhaps his heart) on a somewhat grander, even evolutionary target, and thus placed greater hope on the possibilities of mankind's ultimately developing "constructive conscious control." In essence, the Alexander Technique asserts that any student has the potential to become what Feldenkrais calls, as I emphasized above, "a highly gifted personality." Nonetheless, Alexander acknowledged the necessity of the student's reliance on the teacher's control and initiative in movement until he has developed an awareness of his habits of activity and thinking and especially the absolutely crucial skill of inhibition. Over and over in his books, Alexander stressed the primacy of the student's developing and applying this ability: "With a pupil who is mentally receptive, and who adequately employs his power of inhibition prior to the correct rehearsal of the orders [that establish the optimal means whereby the activity may be accomplished], a skillful teacher may almost perform miracles." (MSI, p. 64)

He was certainly sensitive to the kinds of issues that led Feldenkrais to stick with his highly sophisticated and effective tablework and the more indirect

approach of Awareness Through Movement. “These preconceptions and habits of thought, therefore, must be broken down, and since the reactions of mind on body and body on mind are so intimate, it is often necessary to break down these preconceptions of mind by performing muscular acts vicariously, that is to say, the instructor must move the parts in question while the subject attends to the inhibition of all muscular movements.” (*MSI*, p. 83) In other words, as Feldenkrais agreed, response must be separated from stimulus, until the conditioned response is extinguished. In order to get around the problem of the tendency of any aspect of the stimulus to elicit the whole response, however, Alexander’s method proposes to enlist the aid of the student’s consciousness, something that cannot be done with lab rats. A daring gamble—but then he *was* a gambling man.

The Master Speaks

Alexander described in his books how he discovered (*UoS*, p. 15), used, and taught the principle of inhibition (*MSI*, pp. 18, 83), as well as how it ties in with volition (*MSI*, p. 63; *CCCI*, pp. 68, 77) to create “thinking in activity” (*UoS*, p. 16; *The Universal Constant in Living*, p. 112), and works against end-gaining (*CCCI*, pp. 77-78). He also made great efforts to define it (*CCCI*, p. 58), and to distinguish it from the popular conceptions of inhibition and relaxation (*MSI*, p. 24), and from any notion of “doing” (*MSI*, p. 82; *UCL*, pp. 130, 132). He discussed the effect of the work on life beyond the studio (*CCCI*, p. 79). He even restated the process in terms of directing energy (*UoS*, p. 47) “from the known to the unknown.” Such quotations are too lengthy to cite here; simply put, he defined inhibition as making “the experience of receiving the stimulus and refusing to do anything immediately in response.” (*UoS*, p. 27) In the evolution of his technique, he confirmed for himself that the directions he devised as his “means whereby” also worked to inhibit his habitual and otherwise immediate response to a stimulus (*UoS*, pp. 18-20, discussed above). What did he feel was necessary for the conscious use of inhibition to prevent and eradicate faulty use? In respect to re-education in general, and respiratory re-education specifically, he insisted on “...the proper mental attitude...together with a proper knowledge and practical employment of the true primary movement [later referred to as “primary control,” by which is meant the dynamic relationship of the head to neck that guides movement and determines the quality of coordination].” (*MSI*, p. 50)

How crucial is the faculty of inhibition to the ability to change one’s habits of use? “All those who wish to change something in themselves,” he states, “must learn to make it a principle of life to inhibit their immediate reaction to any stimulus to gain a desired end, and, in order to give themselves the

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opportunity of refusing to fall back upon the familiar sensory experiences of their old habitual use in order to gain it, *they must continue this inhibition* whilst they employ the new direction of their use. By adhering to this principle they will find that this conscious direction of their use will gradually come to be associated with a sensory criterion upon which they can rely as a more accurate register of impressions.” (*UoS*, p. 63)⁶

Inhibition “As It Is Spoke”

So how can we describe inhibition “as it is spoke” in the field nowadays? For that I’ve drawn on my notes from the 1996 Sweet Briar Workshop, an arbitrary choice, except for two crucial facts: many very clarifying things were said there—and I wrote them down. Here is just a tiny sample of the ways current Alexander teachers describe, discuss, and teach the meaning of inhibition. (The comments in brackets are my own.)

Frank Ottiwell: “Don’t respond to a stimulus until you can clear your mind enough to respond calmly.”

“Inhibition is giving yourself a moment between stimulus and response—to get your brain clear.”

“F. M. called tablework ‘inhibition work’ (he had trainees do “inhibition work” with his students after lessons).”

“In that moment [of inhibition], the less you do, the more will happen.”

“The teacher has to recover from the stimulus of the idea, too.”

[A teaching scenario:] “In a minute, I’m going to ask you to (sit, stand, walk, imagine the phone ringing, etc.); I’d like you to inhibit responding to it.’ This teaches her that her thinking is the control. [This work is] teaching people to teach themselves.” [Thus, “I’d like you to inhibit responding” equals “I’d like you to consider but not do ...” Considering but not doing is inhibition.]

“Getting enthusiastic can be a trap.”

“Remember after stimulus, inhibition, and direction, direction upward continues as you move into activity.”

“...the importance of staying somewhere long enough so your nervous system sorts it out for least effort.”

Saura Bartner: “At the start, get grounded; take your time; realize you’re sup-

ported from the ground up.” [Inhibition is an opportunity to take in more (literally, supporting) information]

“What happens [to your use] before you speak? And as you’re going onstage?” [It takes inhibition to be able to observe that]

Michael Frederick: “4 steps to improve where you are:

1. observation
2. inhibition
3. direction
4. movement (application/activity)”

“2 temptations:

1. to bypass inhibition, which leads to endgaining, pushiness (a downward spiral)
2. after application, trying to hang on to the feeling or trying to recreate it”

[quoting **Marj Barstow:**] “Inhibition is actually movement.”

“[Inhibition is]...letting go of the fruits of your actions.”

“Inhibition is actually movement.” (Marj Barstow)

Leverage and Learning

Archimedes said, “Give me a place to stand and a lever long enough, and I will move the world.” In dislodging a habit, inhibition provides your standing place, with enough distance from your habit for leverage, and the combination of your attention, awareness, intention, and (if necessary) direction form the lever you need. The more developed these tools of inhibition and volition, the firmer your footing and the greater your leverage. And, unlike Archimedes, you have help from underneath the rock of habit—the body’s built-in mechanism of support that is always striving to throw off its distorting burden.

We are, in fact, *potentially* capable of learning an indefinite number of new appropriate responses—because we can learn to inhibit and extinguish the old. In order to adapt to changing conditions, we must be able to inhibit the habitual response that is otherwise set into motion *en bloc* by the appearance of any portion of (or resemblance to) the original stimulus to which one became conditioned. This inhibition requires a conscious choice, the choice of withholding consent to an immediate response, which allows us to take in more information; only then do we have the opportunity to make a more

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appropriate response. Inhibition is the “not having” that allows us to have something better; rather than having one fish, we learn how to fish. We have the capacity, if we will use it, to learn how to learn—and keep on learning.

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Endnote

⁶A little anthropological whimsy: One of our ancestors has been dubbed *Homo habilis* (skillful, able Man). (Interestingly enough, “habile” (fr. *habilis*) and “able” both come from that same root as “inhibition” and “habit”: *habere*.) If Alexander is right and constructive conscious control, made possible through the agency of inhibition, is the next step in evolution, perhaps we may someday earn the name Adaptable—*Homo labilis!* ☺

Eyesight and the Alexander Technique

by Peter Grunwald

Alexander Technique teacher and member, STAT

Perhaps you or your spouse or one of your children, your parents, or a friend depends on them—that is, on a pair of spectacles or contact lenses. Australian statistics show that nearly half of the adult population is behind glasses, and that about 80% will experience some form of visual malfunction during their lifetimes. *Time Magazine's* recent report showed that a staggering 90% of Asian school children are affected by shortsightedness alone.

Being fed up with wearing glasses was enough of an incentive for me to ask this question several years ago: Is it really necessary to wear glasses, even with a very high degree of myopia and astigmatism (-10.5 degrees)? Out of this simple question gradually came my work of applying the Alexander principles to improving eyesight and vision naturally.

The Physiology of Vision

The power of eyesight lies in the visual brain (visual cortex). The eyeballs are receivers of light particles that enter through the cornea and the lens. This light passes through the body of the eyeball onto the retina. Here we find about 137 million receptors or nerve endings, 5% of which are available for clear sight (fovea centralis), and 95% available for peripheral vision. The visual information then passes through the optic nerve into the brainstem, and from there it radiates into the visual cortex that lies in front of the occipital bone. It is in this part of the brain that vision occurs, in either perceiving outside objects or visualizing in our “mind’s eye.”

How Eyesight Affects Body Use

The physiology of myopia, presbyopia, and astigmatism are similar in many ways, and are the most common visual problems in our Western world. The excessive use of only a small part of the visual cortex means that only 5% of our total vision capability is used. This implies that a major part of the visual cortex lies dormant, eventually affecting parts of the visual system and the suboccipital muscles, so that the head tilts back and down. How we use our entire visual system affects the function of the eyes and the rest of the body.

In 1992 I discovered a patterned association between my eyes and the rest of my body. I found that every area of the eye, the internal visual pathway, and the visual cortex respond to an associated area in the body. Specific vision malfunction, such as short or farsightedness, astigmatism, middle-aged vision (presbyopia), squints, and lack of binocular vision have been seen to

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correspond with specific analogous tensions and contractions in the body. We can aid our vision by connecting it with related parts of the body, and we can learn to enhance our visual function through the increased kinesthetic awareness that is gained through study of the Alexander Technique. Discoveries learned through my Eye-Body Movement Method create a bridge between the Alexander Technique and the Bates Method for vision improvement.

We can aid our vision by connecting it with related parts of the body, and we can learn to enhance our visual function through the increased kinesthetic awareness that is gained through study of the Alexander Technique.

Directions in the Process of Seeing

Over several years' time I have developed visual directions to include generally and specifically the eyes and the visual pathway. The directions are based primarily on the interrelationship between the active function of the visual cortex and the subtle movements within the organs of seeing, and secondarily on visual physiology. Applying those directions during day-to-day activities increases good use of the visual system. They can be applied specifically during reading small print close up, or shortsighted people can apply them when looking in the far distance.

How Prescription Lenses Influence the Body

Prescription lenses focus the light only onto the fovea centralis, where we receive information for clear sight. This way of seeing excludes light from the all-important peripheral vision. Wearing glasses reduces mobility of the extrinsic eye muscles and numbs the intrinsic subtle movements of the rest of the visual system. Often the person who starts wearing glasses for the first time experiences his/her vision very soon becoming much poorer, which results in using glasses or contacts on a regular basis.

Each January since 1998, a group of enthusiastic and experienced Alexander teachers from around the world have explored the AT principles applied to vision and eyesight, coming together in Auckland, NZ. This year we found that glasses had a dramatic effect on our overall posture. Specifically we noticed an automatic slumping when putting on our glasses, even though we were directing our use as well as we could. The occipital bone and the lower back were particularly affected by the shortening and narrowing of the entire visual pathway.

Walter Carrington tells this story in an interview recently published in *Direction Magazine* (Vol. 2, No. 7, p. 30):

Then there was the case of Alexander himself. After his stroke in 1947 he lost the co-ordination of his eyes, which is very common I believe, and this was corrected by him being prescribed prisms because of the loss of vision. This was a story he told himself. He said that a few years later he began to get very worried about his eyes. We didn't know he was getting worried about them, but he was.

He said that his vision was getting worse and worse and he wasn't even able to see with his binoculars and he was very worried about it because he thought this meant that there was deterioration after the stroke. So he eventually plucked up courage and went to see Andrew Rugg Gunn FRCS, the ophthalmic surgeon, who was an old friend and pupil of his and who, I think, had originally prescribed the prisms.

Rugg Gunn gave him a very thorough examination and looked into his eyes and when he concluded he said, "that's good." Alexander said, "What do you mean, 'good?'" and he said, "Well, your eyes have practically corrected themselves. Of course you can't see with those glasses—you don't need the prisms anymore." And Alexander said it was such a relief to him because he had really been desperately worried. It had never occurred to him that his eyes had actually been rectifying themselves.

Unfortunately for us, F.M. has not written down anything on vision and eyesight during the last years of his life. It is now up to us to discover the mechanism involved that can apply Inhibition and Direction to improving eyesight and vision.

About the Writer

Peter Grunwald (M.STAT) wore glasses for myopia and astigmatism from age three. His overall "use" and eyesight deteriorated and his glasses became stronger and stronger year by year. He studied the Alexander Technique from 1984-1987 at the Sydney Alexander Teachers' Training School. From 1985-1990 he studied yearly with the late Marjorie Barstow who qualified in 1934 with F. M. in London.

It was then that he came across the Bates Method of improving vision naturally. Subsequently he trained in Australia and Germany with the late world-renowned vision instructor, Dr. Janet Goodrich. After habitually wearing glasses for 27 years, it took only eighteen months until he was absolutely free of them!

Peter then began researching and applying FM's principles to the use of eyes and vision. By chance he discovered the principles of what he termed the Eye-Body Reflex Pattern in the early 1990s. Ever since he has continued to develop and refine a learning and teaching method which is based on the Alexander Principles and the Eye-Body Reflex Patterns.

He lives with his family in Auckland, New Zealand, and can be reached via e-mail at: p.grunwald@clear.net.nz

Coming Events

RICHARD BRENNAN

Lios Dana, Co. Kerry, Ireland, July 28th - July 31st, 2000

This will be a residential 3-day course on the West Coast of Ireland at Lios Dana Holistic Centre which overlooks Dingle Bay and the beautiful mountains of Kerry. It is an opportunity to combine the beauty of the West of Ireland with the inner stillness that the Technique enhances. The course starts on Friday evening at 8 pm and finishes on Bank-holiday Monday at lunchtime. Cost £185 fully residential. **Contact:** Lios Dana, Inch, Co. Kerry, Ireland. Tel: 066 9158189

The Healthy Way Centre, Co. Kildare, Ireland, September 30th - October 1st, 2000

Weekend non-residential introductory Workshop in Leixlip, which is a small town within easy reach of Dublin City. This workshop will be useful for those new to the Technique as well as those with previous experience. The course runs approximately from 10:30 am till 4:30 pm each day. Cost £85. **Contact:** The Healthy Way, Leixlip, Co. Kildare. Tel: 01 624 4288

Kirkullen Lodge, Galway, Ireland, October 7-8, 2000

Weekend non-residential introductory Workshop for those new to the Technique as well as those with previous experience. The course runs from 10:30 am till 5 pm each day. Cost £75. **Contact:** Richard Brennan. Tel: 091 555800

Chrysalis, Co. Wicklow, Ireland, November 3-5, 2000

A weekend residential course in a quiet retreat centre near Dublin which is an opportunity to relax and be looked after. The course starts on Friday evening and finishes on 4 pm on Sunday. Cost £165. **Contact:** Chrysalis, Donard, Co., Wicklow Ireland. Tel: 045 404713

University of Limerick, Ireland, November 24-25, 2000

Weekend non-residential introductory Workshop for those new to the Technique and those with previous experience. The course runs Friday from 7 to 10 pm and Saturday from 10 am to 4 pm. Cost £50. **Contact:** Centre for Lifelong Learning. Tel: 061-202047

CATHY MADDEN

Bella Alexander: An Alexander Technique Vacation in Northern Italy, August 26-September 7 (You can attend one week or two weeks.)

Studying at Centro d'Ompio with Cathy offers a playful, practical approach to integrating the Alexander Technique into your life and work. The landscape and the life around the Orta See in Northern Italy provide space for spontaneity and silence, and give also the support to find the new possibilities in ourselves. We will meet for 3 hours each day, and then in the afternoons, you are free to roam Northern Italy. **Contact:** Schule für F.M. Alexander Technik Freiburg, Adelhauserstr. 10, 79098 Freiburg. Email: infor@alexander-technik.de; Tel: 0761-30387; Fax: 0761-287650

TOMMY THOMPSON

Two-day Intensive Workshop for Alexander Teachers and the public, September 16 and 17, 2000

Fee \$175 for the weekend. The workshop will be given at the Alexander Center, 1692 Mass. Ave., located near Harvard Square with access to both Boston and Cambridge in the evening.

Contact: Tommy Thompson: Email: TTATInt@aol.com; tel: +1 617-497-2242; fax: +1 617-497-2615

Flumserberg, Switzerland Workshop, October 5-8, 2000

Fee CHF 500/appr. 350 \$US. With Rosa Luisa Rossi and Maya Dolder. For details, **contact:** Maya Dolder: E-mail: mayadolder@datacomm.ch; tel: 0041/61/322 68 79

Galway, Ireland, Workshop following ATI Annual General Meeting, October 16-18, 2000

Monday 10 am through Wednesday 6 pm, residential course open to teachers and trainees. (Thursday and Friday are reserved for students in Richard's training course.) Fee \$200/£180. For details, **contact:** Richard Brennan: E-mail: rickbrennan@eircom.net; tel: +353 (0)91-555800

ATI Annual General Meeting, October 12-15, 2000

Armada Inn, Spanish Point, Miltown Malbay, County Clare, Ireland. E-mail: armada@iol.ie; Tel: 065 84110; Fax: 065 84632 Members are responsible for making their own registration directly with the Hotel. Details have been mailed to all ATI members, and the proposed schedule of events will follow shortly; the brochure has also been posted on the ATI website. (Please note also Tommy's workshop in Galway, listed above, following the Meeting.) Join your fellow members for our first European AGM!

Non-Member Events:

JUDITH GRODOWITZ

Alexander Technique for Cancer Survivors, Ongoing class on Mondays, 5:30-6:30pm

Our focus is on changing our physical/postural responses to pain and distress using the Alexander Technique principles as our guide. We will explore how the Alexander Technique can help to reduce fatigue, improve breathing coordination, increase mobility and enhance an overall sense of well-being, internal support, and composure. Location: Integrative Medicine Outpatient Center, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Hospital, New York City, NY, USA. Open to: people living with cancer, and their families; open to the general public, space permitting.

Folegandros, Greece

Inspiration in the Aegean - Alexander Technique workshop, August 23-28, 2000 (4 hours daily)

Movement improvisation and imagery from the mythology of ancient Greece are incorporated into an experiential exploration of the Alexander Technique.

Contact (for both workshops above): Judith Grodowitz (E-mail: jkgrod@earthlink.net); Tel/Fax: +1 212-675-1094; website: www.alextech-nyc.com

PETER GRUNWALD, with associate teachers **Marjory Fern** and **Brigitte Cavadias**

Buckland Hall Retreat Centre, near Brecon, Powys, UK

Eyesight Improvement and the Alexander Technique, July 10-16, 2000

This retreat gives a unique practice how to apply the Alexander Technique to the Bates Method of eyesight and vision improvement. Participants with the desire to do without glasses/contacts can benefit, as well as those with short- and longsightedness (myopia, presbyopia), astigmatism, squints, sensitivity to light and other visual dysfunctions, as well as anyone with back/neck tensions, headaches, breathing difficulties and postural misalignment. Open to all.

Contact: Peter Grunwald: p.grunwald@clear.net.nz or Ms. Marjory Fern in the UK, phone: 01736-762 923 ☎

Editor's Page

Continued from page 2

So enough from me. Andrea...

[*Andrea continues:*] First and foremost, I'd like to thank Dan on behalf of myself and ATI for the yeoman work he has put into the publication of our journal. He's enhanced both the ExchangeE's appearance and production schedule, and made it possible for a less technically advanced (and very grateful) person to carry on in his stead. I hope you'll all help me to look almost as good by continuing to send in your excellent articles!

Secondly, I welcome your input as to what you'd like to see in the ExchangeE. Along with the usual full-length articles and listings of events, I'd like to offer a space where we can share our (and our students') experiences with the Technique, without the pressure of writing at length. Feel free to dash off as little as a line or as much as some conversational paragraphs to help us build our sense of community and conversation about the work we love so much. From time to time, I may include items from the Interchange online discussion (for details on how to sign up for the new, improved online mailing list, see the "Alexander Technique on the Net" section on page 19). I plan to call this feature "In Practice," and hope it will highlight the playfulness, curiosity, and inspiration that are hallmarks of the Alexander Technique at its best. ☺

From the Chair

Continued from page 3

Our membership, a group of tall trees growing larger and wider extending their branches up and out towards the sky reaching out to communities around the world getting bolder and stronger as we go.

Where I currently see ATI's strength needing development is in the Nominations Committee. Diana Bradley has stepped down as chair of this committee, and will chair Agenda Planning, and that vacancy creates a new opportunity for involvement. This committee can be a place of great power for person-to-person connections, with benefits both personal and communal, which I hope will appeal especially to someone who has not yet experienced volunteering to further ATI's mission.

Currently, the Nominations Committee members are Joel Kendall, Tommy Thompson, and Diana Bradley. The committee is not limited in the number of members who can participate, nor by geographic location, as its work is conducted by e-mail or conference calls at the members' convenience. The Chair coordinates and presides over the committee's meetings and outreach to the membership, and in particular, follows up on the committee's work. The time commitment is reasonable and the fellowship with other teachers is supportive and rewarding. The committee's mandate is to identify areas in which ATI needs more support and raise them to the membership; to seek out and encourage members who have the time, the talent, and the desire, to serve in ATI offices and committees; and to build a communication network among the membership to further those two purposes. The committee then presents in nomination those who are to be considered for elective office.

I'd like to see members of this committee from every country that we touch, coming together to create and strengthen a global network of friends and teachers of the Alexander Technique. It could be called the Committee of Redwoods, ha! Like these mighty trees that grow in groves, we are going to be around for a long time, so look around, who is *your* neighbor?

From the Chair

Continued from page 18

In this issue we have the pleasure of welcoming Andrea Matthews as our new editor of the Exchange and the honor of wishing Dan Arsenault adieu as he moves on in service as our new Webmaster. Dan's volunteer contribution to ATI has been and continues to be paramount towards an increase in exposure to the public worldwide.

The beauty of an international organization is in its global mind. The desire to link hands, hearts and minds has been alive for quite some time now for ATI. This is what's going on. As we enjoy success in our outreach efforts, we bear fruit in an increase of participation from members and non-members alike. On the Internet, for instance, we offer free links from the ATI web site to owners of other Alexander web sites—whether member or non-member—who request them and are willing to reciprocate with a link to our site from theirs. These days we have nearly 100,000 visits to our web site monthly! That's a lot of tree climbing—and it saves a lot of trees, too!

Enjoy this issue of Exchange. ☺

In Practice

[Ed.:] To start off this new column, this from my student, Richard White, whose busy life includes heading a group of computer programmers for a major corporation: "I'm learning about nothing, and how to do it." ☺

Alexander Technique on the Net

New items are always appearing on ATI's web site at www.ati-net.com. Also, at www.alexandertechnique.com/online, you'll find links to the rapidly growing number of Alexander Technique resources on the Internet. Alexander teacher listings can be found both on the ATI web site and on the Ask Dr. Weil web site at www.drweil.com.

ATI's internet mail group, Interchange, has been revived using a commercial mail-group service called egroups as ATI-Interchange. To join, send an empty e-mail to ATI-Interchange-subscribe@egroups.com. The list is growing fast, so join now! The new list has lots of great features, like common file storage and a chat room. To access these features you need to join egroups. Log into <http://www.egroups.com/> and join up!

You can send mail to the ATI board as a group at board@ati-net.com, or to individual board members at: chair@ati-net.com, assistantchair@ati-net.com, treasurer@ati-net.com, execsec@ati-net.com, or correspondsec@ati-net.com.

We have news this issue of two new web sites: Martin Finnegan, of Alexander Technique Associates in Sydney, Australia, has a site at www.atand.com.au, and the Cardiff Consultancy for the Alexander Technique is online at www.alexandertec.u-net.com. Also, Fred Oldfield tells us that PAAT web site has a new look; check it out at www.paat.org.uk. ☺

High-quality, low-cost web sites now available for Alexander Technique teachers

A growing number of Alexander Technique teachers who have their own web sites are getting the majority of new referrals from the Internet. If you've thought about taking advantage of this new medium but lack the technical expertise, or if you've been put off by the high cost of web site design, you need wait no longer.

h2onet.com Web Designs and **The Complete Guide to the Alexander Technique** web site have teamed up to make it possible to have your own customized web site designed for only \$60 and hosted as alexandertechnique.com/YOURNAME (or [YOURCITY](http://alexandertechnique.com/YOURCITY)) for only \$60/year. Your site can include your photo and whatever information you choose to include about yourself and the Technique. This is far less than you would normally pay for web page design and hosting and you do not need to know anything about computers or the Internet.

If you have access to the Internet, you can find out more about this offer and view sample web sites at www.alexandertechnique.com/websites. If not, you may contact us via email, telephone or mail:

Robert Rickover, E-mail: robert@alexandertechnique.com; Phone: 402-475-4433; Write: 2434 Ryons Street, Lincoln, Nebraska 68502 USA. Or **Nicki Silva** at h2onet.com, E-mail: webmaster@h2onet.com; Phone: 541-347-3807; Write: PO Box 831, Bandon, Oregon 97411 USA

Alexander Technique International (ATI) is a worldwide organization of teachers, students, and friends of the Alexander Technique created to promote and advance the work begun by F. Matthias Alexander.

ATI embraces the diversity of the international Alexander community and works to promote international dialogue.

About the Alexander Technique

Experience of the Technique has led to praise from George Bernard Shaw, Aldous Huxley, Prof. John Dewey, Sir Charles Sherrington, Julian Bream, John Cleese, Robertson Davies, and many others. It is taught at the Juilliard School of Performing Arts in New York, and the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, the Stratford Shakespeare Festival and the Shaw Festivals in Canada, Boston University, Brandeis University, and many other centers.

Olympic-level athletes have similarly used the Technique to improve their performance, as have leading golfers and business people. Medical studies have shown the Technique to be as effective in lowering blood pressure as the normally prescribed beta-blocking drugs. Other studies have shown significant improvement in respiratory function.

The common factor in all of these aspects of life is that how we are using ourselves—the way we do things—affects the result we get. The Alexander Technique is a means of improving that use. It has been called a “pre-technique” that people can apply to furthering their own special skills and activities. It is also essentially a preventive technique with which we can learn to improve and maintain our health.

The individual is the focus of the Alexander Technique. We are all unique, with different bodies, different experiences, and different problems. We go about the process of change in different ways and at different rates. For these reasons, what happens in an Alexander Technique lesson depends very much on the needs of the student at the time. In the basic sense, though, you will learn an attitude of not trying to gain your ends at any cost, and, at the same time, how to prevent your harmful habits that cause unnecessary stress and restrict your capabilities. Obviously, since what you are changing are patterns built up over many years, a permanent change will not be brought about overnight. However, the person who learns to stop and take time, to think constructively about how he uses himself in everyday life, will find that this simple procedure can have far-reaching results.

Further information about the Alexander Technique can perhaps best be gained from a teacher near you (see list at right for the nearest ATI office for teacher listings, or visit www.ati-net.com), as your changing experiences through lessons are the only real way to understand the nature of the work and what change is possible.

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