

EXCHANGE

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From the Chair: To Cry a Universal Halt

Jamee Culbertson

Chair, Alexander Technique International

While the ATI Board was searching to find words to express our response to the tragic events of September 11th that would be appropriate to the Alexander Technique, our new Assistant Chair Cathy Madden sent me the following quotes from F.M. Alexander:

It has become essential to cry a universal halt; this, in order that a change can be made in human reactions and in the relations of human beings with each other, based as these are on a way of living that has become unbalanced, and is becoming more so, with increasing rapidity the world over.

The outrageous acts of imbalance that occurred on September 11th have caused many different reactions in people around the world. While some people felt a need to retreat, others wanted to retaliate. Some chose to reach out and lend a hand wherever they could and were comforted by giving. Others were not even aware of the attacks for some time, if they live in an area without any media access. Many people now are on a new journey of meaning, trying to make sense of each new day. The needs of many of my students have been different these last few months. A few of them say they feel as if they have to put a shield up around themselves when they get up in the morning for fear of the unknown in an increasingly violent world. They have been startled by world events and don't feel safe; things are not the same.

One of my students, whom I hadn't seen for nearly a year, returned for lessons again in early October. She didn't quite know where to "find herself" in all of this chaos and thought that she could learn how to deal with her reactions to September 11th and the sense of displacement she felt with the help of lessons in the Alexander Technique. She told me how

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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

Andrea Matthews, Editor

Space is at a premium in this issue, so I'll just add a few comments: First, you may have noticed a Change (as it were) in our title. This simply restores the original form which was lost early on, and better reflects our mission: to effect change through exchange—of ideas, dreams, and experiences of the Technique.

Second, I hope to receive articles about the AGM workshops and events to include in the next issue, along with an AGM summary being put together by Rick Brennan (rickbrennan@eircom.net) from attendee input. *ExChange's* next copy deadline is May 1. That gives you some time to collect your thoughts, but I've been noticing it flies by quickly, so don't delay!

Third, the inclusion of the article by Kevin McEvenue on the synergy of Alexander Technique and Focusing in his teaching and life is prompted in part by my own interest in processing emotions as they arise in teaching and in part by the events of September 11, which has moved many to seek out new tools for coping with powerful emotions and trauma. Emotional matters have traditionally been downplayed by AT teachers (to varying degrees), but there seems to be a growing perception that the

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From the Chair

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she'd grown up in New York, used to work at the Pentagon, and had spent the past summer making friends at a school in the mountains of Vermont where she went to learn Arabic; many of her new friends were Muslims. The lessons proved to be the just the thing to help her understand her desire to hold onto life as it was on September 10th and how to integrate the new stimulus in her life since September 11th.

He may claim to be an advocate of freedom of thought and action, and may even be a person who acts up to this theory in his daily living; but he cannot in consequence, claim to be able to put into practice that greatest of all attainments—freedom in thought and acting—until he has gained that knowledge of the means whereby he can command the best use and functioning of himself in activity, which is essential to change and control of reactions in the basic sense.

As students and teachers of the Alexander Technique, what does “the work” *mean* to you *now* in today's world? How do you see yourself and your place in the changing world? I find my approach to teaching has become simpler and I have a desire to listen more quietly. Has your approach to your lessons changed for any of you? Now that you have learned and are continuing to explore what you've discovered due to your experience with the Alexander Technique, is it helping you to break down barriers to be with others with more openness and presence? ATI members from all over were connecting via email last September on our Internet forum, *Interchange*, to find out about the well-being of their friends. ATI teacher Belinda Mello expressed hope for the beginning of a new kind of alliance among teachers in New York. As we change, the world does indeed change little by little.

Who's to say that applying Alexander's principles will make everyone be more respectful toward one another? Has this been your experience? Each tribe, each cultural sect is more apt to be friendly to another person within their tribe, even within the Alexander Community, because they are living and playing by the same rules, but would they be so friendly towards another tribe with a different belief system? The appearance of our world does

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not give us proof that this is the case. But appearances are not always the greater truth with which to act upon. It's all in the significance you grant it.

Man's basic nature has not changed as it should have done during past centuries in respect of conscious direction of his use of himself or in regard to his judgment and control in human relations. Hence on every hand he is faced with the impeding effects of 'emotional gusts,' such as are associated with the too common and frustrating human failings which are manifested in prejudice, jealousy, greed, envy, hatred and the like. These are the outcome of reactions which ruin man's chances of establishing such relations in national and international affairs as could lead to a better understanding of what is essential to the engendering of goodwill and peace in a world in which changing conditions and new discoveries in the outside world make new and ever-increasing demands for increasing change in, and control of, human reaction.

These "emotional gusts" that blow to such extremes as to instill war amongst nations are happening around the world all too often. As individuals we don't always choose to respond on a global level, most of us have our hands full attempting to keep balance within our own households and neighborhoods. Maybe that's where our best practice begins, addressing our own human nature in the heart of our lives within our personal relationships, so that these winds of fury could begin to calm. Alexander's principles, the Use of the Self, Primary Control, Inhibition, etc., are within and accessible to all human beings. Can we expand our consciousness to explore that Self to include our interrelationships with all human beings and further that exploration to include all living things?

In the heart of ATI's life is its membership. We'll continue our vision to have an open means of global communication for people to discuss, apply, research, and experiment with the discoveries of F.M. Alexander and to foster what we've learned in social and environmental relationships. This year the Board would like to focus on enhancing communications amongst ATI's world offices. We'd like your help to try to find ways to translate written materials for different languages. ATI will continue to reach out internationally creating a vital global community with people of varied languages, backgrounds, and cultures for further understanding of our work and of one another.

Time has passed since September 11th and healing has begun. The insights that come through Alexander lessons are experiential and therefore can provide healing experiences of great value for learning to live with stimuli great and small.

I wish you all continued learning and goodwill and peace in action. ☺

**You must learn to be still in the midst of activity,
and to be vibrantly alive in repose.**

Indira Gandhi

The Alexander Technique and Focusing

Kevin McEvenue

I have been working for 20 years integrating Alexander Technique with Focusing, in what I call *Wholebody Focusing*. The following is an attempt to share how all this has come together for me. I want to own that this interpretation of The Alexander Technique and Focusing comes directly out of my own experience of how these two processes have been for me over the years that I have been certified as a teacher in both. I make no claims beyond my own experience.

Alexander Technique is concerned with unconscious automatic body functioning, and the way these “habitual” responses interfere with the natural flow and functioning of the organism as a whole. Alexander realized early on how difficult it was for one to change these deeply embedded physical response patterns. His life work was to find a way to change unconscious physical habits that undermine healthy bodily well-being.

Alexander teachers focus on change at the level of automatic spontaneous bodily function. We attempt to replace bad habits by becoming aware of and stopping the old physical response patterns from being acted upon as a first step. We then consciously “inhibit” the desire to correct, fix, or change the pattern ourselves, thereby avoiding what Alexander described as the desire to “end gain.” By “inhibiting” the desire to do anything, and giving ourselves a set of orders to further prevent some form of efforting, we make room as, Alexander says, “for the right thing to do itself.”

In my own story these new response patterns often seemed to be imposed on the organism from outside, either from the hands of an Alexander Teacher or some internal thought of how I should be without making room for my own inner voice. The technique did not address the story of why the habit was there in the first place. It only addressed the fact that the habit was destructive and that the teacher knew a better way. I concluded that the object of the teaching is for me as the student to learn to take on this better way of functioning as if it were my own. This was done through a conscious giving a set of orders or directions to the body as a way of overriding the old response patterns, and at the same time inhibiting the desire to end gain, as the teacher adjusted my body to give it a better experience.

I was never fully comfortable with this approach, as my “inner voice” never felt fully heard or appreciated. One day, through a powerful physical experience with a Shiatsu teacher, combined with my own inner teacher, I experienced that *change could happen out of my body's own inner wisdom*. In fact, change of functioning that came out of my body's own wisdom not only embraced all that I knew from Alexander, but so much more, as there was life in it that I could identify as my own. I began to move spontaneously while at the same time having a sensed vision of where I came from and where I might be going. Both inner-directed spontaneous movement and inner knowing were happening at the same time. As often happens in Focusing, I seemed to get in touch with my own inner blueprint of how I can be in a very physically alive way. I realized in that moment that what Alexander imposed from without could be awakened from within, in a form even better than Alexander or I could have imagined.

Alexander also saw that the body had to come alive as a whole in order for change to happen in a part at the level of automatic functioning. He observed that change happened out of a conscious relationship between an activated wholebody self and a part and by making room for something new to happen rather acting upon some kind of agenda of how that should be. He observed that any attempt to fix or make better through one's own efforts only made it worse and defeated the very thing one wants to happen.

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The Focusing process gives us a way to access the body's awareness of its own wholeness as a physical experience with a sense of inner direction and purpose all its own. The body seems to be energized from within.

Some of the ingredients necessary for a poorly functioning part to change are:

- ◆ An activation of the embodied blueprint of how I could be if all the blocks were out of the way, starting as a physical experience of the self in movement.
- ◆ The presence of the kind of energy that is able to move the body forward.
- ◆ The continual presence of the whole in relationship to a part that is searching for something more.

Alexander would call this an awakening of the body's "action potential." But there is a big shift in attitude at this point that separates Wholebody Focusing from the Alexander Technique, although the issue remains the same (change in functioning). Rather than saying that the habit is faulty and destructive and I know a better way, *we can help the client embrace the habit and give it all the space it needs to reveal itself* in how it has served our lives up until now. We get a *body felt sense* of what we do and discover we have been doing it for very good reasons. At the same time, because it is in context of the whole body, the resonating between the two opens up the part to new possibilities it had forgotten or didn't know were possible.

I am working with a man who snores so badly that the snoring is interfering with his relationship with his wife and deprives him of a good night's sleep. I invite him to get a body felt sense of what he does the moment he begins to nod off. Because he knows Focusing, he is able to go back and be with what happens and describe it: when he relaxes and lets go, his jaw drops forward and down and becomes a heavy weight on his windpipe. This causes deep snoring and then a choking off of his breathing, so that he wakes up and then the process starts all over again. The question is, can we stop this pattern without medical intervention?

These are the steps we follow:

- ◆ I invite him to get a body felt sense of what happens and he is encouraged to embrace it, befriend it, get to know it well. We both know from other experiences that change happens out of our unconditional acceptance of what is there.
- ◆ This is not easy, as the survival pattern is essential to his breathing. We had to create a safe way to be with this pattern.
- ◆ I asked him to stand and I placed a hand on his jaw so it wouldn't do what it normally does as soon as he relaxes. Now we could invite the windpipe to sense how it is and more.
- ◆ What came was that the windpipe was very tense, waiting for the next blow.
- ◆ Feeling heard in that, the windpipe relaxed a little knowing that my hand was preventing the expected from happening. And then more came: the windpipe began to remember how it would like to be if it could. In doing so, it connected up with the neck and shoulders and there was a feeling he called "assertive" which he liked. It is part of a new edge to his life that is unfolding, to become more self-assertive.

What Is Focusing?

reprinted by permission from the Focusing Institute website at www.focusing.org

Focusing is a mode of inward bodily attention that most people don't know about yet. It is more than being in touch with your feelings and different from bodywork.

Focusing occurs exactly at the interface of body-mind. It consists of specific steps for getting a body sense of how you are in a particular life situation. The body sense is unclear and vague at first, but if you pay attention it will open up into words or images and you experience a felt shift in your body.

In the process of Focusing, one experiences a physical change in the way that the issue is being lived in the body. We learn to live in a deeper place than just thoughts or feelings. The whole issue looks different and new solutions arise.

What Are the Benefits of Focusing?

Focusing helps to change where our lives are stuck. The **felt shift** that occurs during Focusing is good for the body, and is correlated with better immune functioning. More than 100 research studies have shown that Focusing is teachable and effective in many settings. Focusing decreases depression and anxiety and improves the relation to the body.

Who Can Learn Focusing? What Is a Focusing Partnership?

Focusing can be taught to anyone! Most people learn best in Focusing Partnerships.

First, one is guided through the process. **Second**, some didactic understanding of the process is given. Because Focusing is not a set of ideas, but an experiential process, it is best discussed after experiencing it. **Third**, people practice with each other, using listening skills, Focusing guiding instructions, and Focusing partnerships.

From the Focusing Manual (Chapter 4 of Focusing, by Eugene Gendlin): The inner act of focusing can be broken down into six main subacts or movements. As you gain more practice, you won't need to think of these as six separate parts of the process. To think of them as separate movements makes the process seem more mechanical than it is—or will be, for you, later. I have subdivided the process in this way because I've learned from years of experimenting that this is one of the effective ways to teach focusing to people who have never tried it before.

Think of this as only the basics. As you progress and learn more about focusing you will add to these basic instructions, clarify them, approach them from other angles. Eventually—perhaps not the first time you go through it—you will have the experience of something shifting inside.

So here are the focusing instructions in brief form, manual style. If you want to try them out, do so easily, gently. If you find difficulty in one step or another, don't push too hard, just move on to the next one. You can always come back.

Clearing a space

What I will ask you to do will be silent, just to yourself. Take a moment just to relax . . . All right—now, inside you, I would like you to pay attention inwardly, in your body, perhaps in your stomach or chest. Now see what

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comes *there* when you ask, “How is my life going? What is the main thing for me right now?” Sense within your body. Let the answers come slowly from this sensing. When some concern comes, *do not go inside it*. Stand back, say “Yes, that’s there. I can feel that, there.” Let there be a little space between you and that. Then ask what else you feel. Wait again, and sense. Usually there are several things.

Felt Sense

From among what came, select one personal problem to focus on. *Do not go inside it*. Stand back from it. Of course, there are many parts to that one thing you are thinking about – too many to think of each one alone. But you can *feel* all of these things together. Pay attention there where you usually feel things, and in there you can get a sense of what *all of the problem* feels like. Let yourself feel the unclear sense of *all of that*.

Handle

What is the quality of this unclear felt sense? Let a word, a phrase, or an image come up from the felt sense itself. It might be a quality-word, like *tight, sticky, scary, stuck, heavy, jumpy* or a phrase, or an image. Stay with the quality of the felt sense till something fits it just right.

Resonating

Go back and forth between the felt sense and the word (phrase, or image). Check how they resonate with each other. See if there is a little bodily signal that lets you know there is a fit. To do it, you have to have the felt sense there again, as well as the word. Let the felt sense change, if it does, and also the word or picture, until they feel just right in capturing the quality of the felt sense.

Asking

Now ask: what is it, about this whole problem, that makes this quality (which you have just named or pictured)? Make sure the quality is sensed again, freshly, vividly (not just remembered from before). When it is here again, tap it, touch it, be with it, asking, “What makes the whole problem so _____?” Or you ask, “What is in *this* sense?”

If you get a quick answer without a shift in the felt sense, just let that kind of answer go by. Return your attention to your body and freshly find the felt sense again. Then ask it again.

Be with the felt sense till something comes along with a shift, a slight “give” or release.

Receiving

Receive whatever comes with a shift in a friendly way. Stay with it a while, even if it is only a slight release. Whatever comes, this is only one shift; there will be others. You will probably continue after a little while, but stay here for a few moments.

If during these instructions somewhere you have spent a little while sensing and touching an unclear holistic body sense of this problem, then you have focused. It doesn’t matter whether the body-shift came or not. It comes on its own. We don’t control that.

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This seemed to be enough for now, although what also came was a sense of the larger story, of how from childhood he has always held himself in check this way. During waking hours he tightens his jaw to such an extent that when he relaxes, as in sleep, the muscles let go and collapse because of the tension that they have been under all day.

We both knew that this experience needed to be repeated and reinforced and the story heard more fully. We were looking for a change in the way the windpipe functions as well as the way the jaw responds in daily life. As they come more into their own we hoped that the snoring would become less and less an issue and it did!

Here we have an example of a maladaptive survival skill becoming a destructive force in a person's life. And our question is, can we access the body's own wisdom to change this deeply embodied habit? This experience shows us that the windpipe has its own knowing of how it would like to be if it could, and that it has its own way of asserting itself towards this end. At the same time it is clear that the larger story needs to be explored of why the jaw is the way it is. There is a story, a story of how the young boy kept himself safe by not speaking. He learned to control his responses by holding back and tightening his jaw. What kept him safe in early life has now become a destructive force when he relaxes and lets go of control as in sleep.

Focusing brings the whole thing to life. By embracing what we do with a Focusing attitude and just sitting with it, wanting to get to know it better, it shows us what it does and at the same time shows us what is possible. I believe that change happens when functioning is brought to full consciousness in this way.

I am attempting to bridge two worlds using what has been gifted to me from both. Focusing works well in conjunction with another discipline like this. In Wholebody Focusing, a sense of "Me Here" seems to be reinforced and strengthened at the very core of this process. It is like the "me here" muscle gets exercised!

In Everyday Life: The Story of a Man in Conflict

I am a man who has always been in conflict with himself and this conflict affects everything I do, the way I function in the world physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. As I get older I realize what a toll my life struggle has taken on my organism as the signs of wear and tear painfully emerge. I begin to realize the way in which I use myself affects the way I function at so many levels. Knowing this makes me wonder if change can happen, given that much of this is unconscious?

The reality hits home in scary ways when I begin to see how chronic patterns of behavior have really damaged the way the body works. I have become more aware how parts of me have been overworked and worked in ways they weren't designed to function. Other parts are not functioning at all. I become aware how some parts over-compensate for other parts that are frozen or unable to function as they were meant to.

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However we may think about it, what we do in focusing is possible, since we do it. But to conceive of a world in which focusing is possible requires thinking of the body as part of A SINGLE PROCESS which also encompasses language and situations. ☺

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Now I see the problem that my life's conflicts have caused. I see how these conflicts have prevented me from living my life to its fullest potential. I sense my limitations. I sense how I function in partial paralysis. What can I do about this?

Wholebody Focusing Can Help

Wholebody Focusing gives me a safe structure to become aware of how the body acts as a "container." Parts of me suffer the experience of what is happening. It gives me the opportunity to be aware of what it is I am doing now, and at the same time to become aware of what is possible. It is holding both at the same time that opens me up for a new experience that is more life-supporting. There seems to be no other way to effect change.

Wholebody Focusing invites a whole new way of thinking in activity. The real shift in consciousness for me is to accept myself just the way I am in this moment. The doorway into change is the ability to be able to sit compassionately and empathetically with what is happening. The ability to be with something that seems to want my attention without knowing why. That's the starting point.

When I make more room for whatever needs my attention I often become aware of an inner stirring inside me that seems to be inner-directed and actually moves me with a purpose all its own. It is then that I know something new is happening. Sometimes it feels like a silent inner guide who gently nudges me towards another way of being with myself beyond what I know. And then I seem to be able to hold in consciousness both a part of me that needs attention (my sense of what is happening now), and a sense of the "more" in new possibilities.

For example, I sometimes find I am being moved in ways I know are beyond my usual limitations. My mind is saying "I can't do this" and at the same time my body is doing it! It is the movement itself that seems to take me from a place that is all too familiar to a place I don't know. This new place may feel a little uncomfortable as it is unfamiliar, but it also feels just right.

Understanding Is Not Enough

For much of my life I have tried to understand myself in all kinds of different ways. Why am I the way I am? A lot of knowing has come. But it never seems to touch on the dynamics of what I am "doing to myself" in a way that brings change. I might know that I am in conflict, but I can't actually get a handle on the conflict itself. I need to find a safe way to bring it into my full awareness, to see it for what it is and name it. Change seems to follow from this kind of attention.

It is my ability to notice how I function physically when in conflict, that enables the body both to show me "what I am doing to myself" and at the same time to offer me ways of moving through this conflict that are more self-supportive. Experience tells me that change can't happen unless the body has a handle on a better way of being!

"You've Got Glaucoma, Mr. McEvenue!"

That's what I thought I heard the doctor say that day that I sat in her office, getting the results back from a battery of eye tests. Next thing you know, I am drowning in full-blown panic. What she actually said was, "You are a candidate for glaucoma." In my panic, I hear through the filter of other times and other places. I remember

when I heard a doctor say a long time ago, “You have degenerating discs, Mr. McEvenue. After you recover from these operations, there will be more.”

Once again, I feel I have been given a life sentence with all the helplessness that has gone with it born of past experiences. And this time, I hear myself say, “I am getting old, I am going to die, I am going blind. I’m powerless to change here. Help me. Take care of me. You do it. I can’t. I don’t want to know!...”

Is there a familiar ring in all of this?

Wholebody Focusing—An Action Step

I know I don’t want to have to take the medication. I know that if I start to take the drops for glaucoma I will be taking them for the rest of my life, probably in increasing dosages as I age. I don’t want to, it feels like a life sentence. The reality is loud and clear. This part of me is beginning to wear out, beginning to stop working as it is meant to. My back was the first sign of this, years ago, and now it is my eyes. And this time it is about pressure. The effect of pressure buildup in my right eye is leading to a serious situation that could end in blindness. What to do?

What I can do is Listen to myself. I can listen to that part of me, the right eye that seems to be suffering some kind of eye pressure that could develop into glaucoma. The Wholebody Focusing Listening Process has really helped me to begin to uncover how I carry the experience of being under pressure. I was aware that I am wee bit tense at times. And when I felt under pressure, I would just have a drink or two and some great food. That usually helped me get back to my old self again.

This time I decided to do something different. I spent some time getting in touch with my right eye, saying hello to it, sensing into it. And then suddenly my attention was drawn down to my throat. There’s the pressure! It’s in my throat! And then I notice my neck is stiff and how tight my jaw is too. As I sit with all of that I get a real sense of how I cut myself off at the neck. No wonder there is pressure building up in the head, especially in the eyes. I am choking off the natural flow of energy and everything that goes with it. And I think: I have got to know more about this thing I do. That’s the issue here. It is what I am doing to myself that is causing the pressure buildup in the eyes. It is a surprise that it begins in the throat.

Over time, I become aware of the whole posture of “What it is I am doing that is so Preventing.” It is a wholebody experience. It is also a piece of my life story and it is as rich as it is informing. It connects me more with me in who I am and why. And then one day the unexpected happens. It shifts. It lets go. The choking-off posture suddenly eases and a gentle flow begins to happen all through me once again, moving right through the whole body. I don’t understand it. It just happens. And it happens in ways I couldn’t possibly describe. It seems to happen all over and all at once. And then I feel in sync with myself again.

What Happened to Stop Me from Choking Myself?

I don’t really know. I allowed myself to become aware of the posture and of that sense of what I am doing to limit the flow of energy throughout my body. Maybe it is that simple. I just became aware of the posture itself. I do so in a way I call wholebody because it is as though every cell in me registers this. Maybe it was the awareness that enabled some kind of shift to happen. And then the body itself seemed to show me a whole other way

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of being and functioning beyond this habitual need to control that is so familiar. Maybe it was because I began to accept myself just the way I am and to trust that change happens directly out of what is there.

I noticed that when the shift happened, and the choking off posture eased, I felt more alive, more full of life and energy. I felt more whole. I sensed the whole of me. I could even feel the flow of energy moving right through me. And that felt so good, as it felt light and easy and effortless. It is something I have always wanted for myself and didn't even know I wanted it until I experienced it. And the biggest surprise of all is that I felt so loving towards myself and at the same time I felt loved!

What Did I Do That Was So Different?

This is my story of a life crisis, of a physical dysfunction that was really beginning to get me down. Rather than turn my back on it, cut it off from my consciousness even more, I embraced it. I allowed it to be there even more. That's what made all the difference. I did something contrary to what I would normally do instinctively. Instead of pushing it away, I welcomed it into my life even more. I invited it to become even more present in my body just the way it was, with an attitude of unconditional acceptance of where it is, how it is, how it needs to be, right now. That was the starting point for more to happen. This was the new step. I made friends with a part of me that wasn't living up to the way I wanted it to be. I accepted it with compassion just the way it was. And then I was gifted.

Just a Beginning!

This was just the beginning of an empathetic relationship between me and my eyes and a life story around pressure and control in my life. The good news is that the deeper I get into the story, the more the pressure releases and all kinds of changes happen in my life that seem to be for the better. That's exciting.

Some Personal Observations

The need for a good listener

I want to say this right away. It is not easy to spend time with myself like this on my own. I need a good listener to keep me company and help me stay with what is there and prevent me from trying to interfere with it.

Putting the focus of attention into the movement

I put my attention into what is moving me rather than in the pain itself. It is as though the movement gives me something positive to hold on to. It keeps me safe as I move through and beyond what is familiar to a whole new place inside that I don't know.

The posture set is the "handle"

The full posture set that appears (i.e., the thing that I am doing in order to protect myself or defend myself) becomes the "handle." I resonate between the body sense of the posture with a sense of the whole of me. And then something more happens between the two of them.

And that's all that is needed!

It is the spending time in the experience, the physical experience of myself coming more alive and moving in new ways that seems to be what is wanted here, nothing more is needed.

Understanding is something else

Understanding, knowing, and insights may come, but they are the secondary not the primary focus. The primary focus is being in the experience itself. Nothing more is needed. Any agenda beyond a willingness to just be in the experience seems to get in the way of what the experience itself can bring.

The Inner Guide often says nothing

This inner-directed experience itself is often nonverbal or even preverbal and precognitive. The only sign of anything happening is often just subtle movements that seem to have a mind of their own. It is not easy to stay in this kind of place because the mind wants something to get its teeth into. It may feel very uncomfortable being in an unclear place of not knowing or not understanding. This is what the mind does for us, it wants to know, understand, and figure out in order to feel safe and to keep us alive. It needs to check with past experience and compare that with now. If there isn't a match it feels very uncomfortable. The mind likes to be with what it already knows. So it takes courage to stay with this preverbal, precognitive experiencing that is still unclear and not yet knowing.

The attention is on bodily functioning as the threshold into more

Wholebody Focusing is about changes in functioning toward ways that are better or more natural. It is not about knowing that leads to more knowing, although that can be a part of it. This process sits with the context, stays in the part of us that experiences, that responds physically to what is happening in us. And as we sit with and notice what is there, we become more aware of how we respond to life situations specifically and also how we could respond differently.

The Experience of Others

I think of Paul and how he sat one day, paying attention to his wrists, which had suffered from carpal tunnel syndrome for several years. I remember how they suddenly changed, and how he felt so much better afterward. He doesn't know why or how. But, they just did, they just changed themselves.

And then I remember Kay and how difficult it was for her to just allow movement to happen in her body and not know why or where it was going. With a scientifically trained mind like hers, it wasn't easy to just allow movement. It was hard for her mind to simply stay with the movement without knowing the reason why. It wasn't easy for her to walk away and be satisfied with just having spent time with herself like this without expectation. And I remember how she felt so much more in sync with herself a short time later.

And I remember the story of Teruko too. I recall how during her first Wholebody Focusing experience, she touched down into the very essence of herself and discovered that she is a part of so much more. It was a very rich spiritual experience for her and it came directly out of her own body.

The Alexander Technique and Focusing

A Time for Self-Loving

One day when I spent time with myself like this what came was a deep self-loving experience that in words might have said: “When a part of me feels loved it awakens to its own healing.”

One More Thing: The Value in Listening Empathetically

I have discovered that if I can listen empathetically to another person’s experience, I can open up to new possibilities in myself that I couldn’t have known without this experience.

For example, how could I know what it is to be “open-minded” unless I have had a bodysense of someone who is very open-minded in a way I have never been? I want to work with others, to share truth, and share empathic moments with others who have the quality of “open mind” or other qualities I don’t have—in abundance! This seems to be a gift that comes in healthy empathic relationships. And the more empathic I become, the more I am able to expand and enrich my own experiences of what it is to be human.

Once I have learned to be empathic to the experience of others I can begin to become empathic with my own. I can begin to have an empathic relationship with parts of me that need special help or special attention. I can begin to listen to these parts and learn how they are. When I can do this something changes. There is a kind of shift and the part in question seems to find its rightful place in the whole of me once more.

Or, I can ask a part of me how it might perform a certain action even better than I normally do. For example, I can go for a walk and ask my legs and feet to walk me. They do and it feels very different, so much lighter and freer than my usual walk. What I notice is that there is something in me that is walking me. At the same time there is a “me” that is able to observe this happening. When I do it this way I can choose and even fine-tune what is happening. I also realize that this mind-body connection doesn’t happen when I am too caught up in expectation of how it should be, or how I want it to be.

This is about me being the observer of what is happening and at the same time recognizing there is something in me that can carry out my desire effortlessly. And more. It is about me being in relationship with something in me that knows how to function naturally beyond my own imagining. What a great companion to have inside of me!

Kevin McEvenue is a certifying Coordinator of the International Focusing Institute as well as an Alexander teacher. He trained with Walter Carrington and himself served as a trainer in London from 1974-1979 with Pat McDonald and Paul and Betty Collins. He recently conducted a workshop on Alexander Technique and Focusing in New York City. He can be reached by email at mcevenue@ica.net. ☺

Everything in life that we really accept undergoes a change.

Katherine Mansfield

From ATI's *Interchange*: Two Responses to September 11



Forwarded to the Interchange, from Jennifer Kellow:

Many miracles have surrounded me and those I know and I am extremely grateful. However all New Yorkers have been traumatized and I know many throughout the world too. I go in and out of it. Belinda just called and found they are using AT teachers as volunteers to give work to the cops and waiting families and firemen and medical examiners. I can't tell you how happy I am that I now have a job I can do that will help. My clients were eyewitnesses too and escaped the building, and I've been able to help them too with AT, but it is all scary. Plus we all were in the Trade Center daily some of us and everyone saw it from their view and we miss that too. People just keep telling their horror stories and I guess that is healing. The love here however matches the horror, it is as awesome in its power.

From Belinda Mello:

On Thursday evening, Sept. 20, I organized an evening for AT teachers living in Brooklyn to meet with each other and to offer free lessons to anyone in need. Nine teachers were able to make it that evening: (Belinda Mello), Amy Ward Brimmer, Joan Arnold, Sandra Bernard, Sakiko Ishitsubo, Lenita Silveira, Alan Katz, Gregg Seel, Kim Jessor. We spent an hour together just speaking and listening to each other and then opened the doors to the public. There was something wonderful about being in one big room, teaching near to each other. Sometimes a word echoed all around the room, spoken by one teacher and then another and another. We exchanged lessons with each other. I worked with a teacher whose training was different from mine and learned something new. By the end of the evening, I think we all looked a little more peaceful and open and it was agreed that we want to meet again. My hope is that this could be the beginning of a new kind of alliance between teachers here in New York.

Yesterday I spent the morning in the massage booth at Pier 94. The pier has been set up as a Red Cross facility for families of victims and service providers. We worked with many police officers, survivors and grieving family members. Death certificates are now being issued. The enormity of the loss is overwhelming. As an Alexander Teacher, it was a relief to be able to offer some hands on work to these people. One of the police officers let me hold his holster to feel how much weight he carries on his hips. Most have only had one day off and are still reluctant to leave. It was also necessary for me to be flexible about describing what I do in order to quickly break the ice and get some work happening. It does seem to be another healing aspect of this crisis—to be working side by side with massage therapists, shiatsu practitioners, and Reiki people after all the crap that went on here about licensing last year. I plan to go back tomorrow and next week.

Like most people, I feel more at peace with myself and with the world when I am engaged in meeting a challenge. I would like to know how other AT teachers are dealing with this time of healing while anticipating the next disaster. Hearing about what other people are doing is also helpful/inspiring. What changes have you had to make in your practice? What do you see as our role down the road? ☺

Editor's Page

Continued from page 2

time has come to acknowledge and address them and to integrate effective means to do so into our teaching. A number of New York teachers recently attended a workshop given by Mr. McEvenue on "Wholebody Focusing" and plans are afoot (as of this writing) to offer another workshop here in Cambridge in April. For more details, you can contact me at newsletter@ati-net.com.

Fourth, Kri Ackers' article was submitted, in part, as a response to the review of and excerpt from Galen Craz's *The Chair* in our last issue. As always we are excited to provoke new thinking and writing on Technique-related issues, and we're eager to hear your views, too.

A few regular features that have been omitted from this issue due to space considerations (such as the opening reprintable AT introductory article, book reviews, and the "In Practice" column) will return next time, as material comes in. Let us hear from you! ☺

2002 AGM in Maryland, USA

Jim Froelich writes: Planning has already started for the 2002 AGM at Bon Secours, near Baltimore, Maryland, USA, from Saturday, November 9, to Wednesday, November 13, 2002! Put the dates in your calendar, and please note: there is a shuttle from the Baltimore Washington International Airport (BWI) to Bon Secours. Plan to fly into BWI if possible, as ground travel from Dulles and Reagan Airports and the Washington D.C. area is very expensive, up to \$100. Further information will be coming as spring approaches. Please contact Jim with your suggestions for future sites, at agm-site@ati-net.com. ☺

Alexander Technique on the Internet

The Performance School's new website, The Performance School Online at www.performanceschool.org, is an interactive resource for pupils and teachers. It offers many useful features for independent learners, including Catherine Kettrick's complete study guide to Alexander's four books, and guided experiments in the Learning Lab. Please visit us!

New items are always appearing on ATI's website 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 website and on the "Ask Dr. Weil" website at www.drweil.com.

To join ATI's internet mail group, Interchange, send an empty email to ATI-Interchange-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. To access these features you need to join yahoogroups (at no cost!). Log onto <http://www.yahoo.com/> and join!

You can send email 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. If you launch your own website, or find anything Alexander-related on the Web, let us know at: newsletter@ati-net.com! ☺

Sit Happens: Talking About Sitting

Christine Ackers
ATI Teaching Member, Australia



We do a lot of it. We generally do it very badly, as is evidenced by the growing lists of damaged parts we develop through sitting for long periods. Nor is it entirely due to our increased longevity that these lists are lengthening. Complainants of neck pain and sore knees include an increasing number of children—some as young as three years.

We have advanced in strides to protect our health from invasive attack; but when it comes to recognizing the importance of good carriage and well coordinated movement for the healthy maintenance of the systems and structures of our bodies, we have less awareness today of the effects of use on function than in pre-industrial ages, when we were the machines we used. Even my 19th century Encyclopedia of Embroidery opens with a paragraph entitled “How To Sit To Sew.” It warns of the importance of ‘bringing the work up to the face, and not the face down to the work,’ and it goes on to enumerate some of the terrible things that can happen to the neck, back, and eyes of a seamstress if good sitting habits are not adopted from the start.

Before the 20th century, in both our leisure and work activities we paid attention to using appropriate postures and appliances to do a job or pursue a hobby. Nowadays we see children playing sports which, with their poor coordination, can only harm them. We wait until our own bodies are so badly damaged that replacement of their parts becomes necessary.

Nor do medicine or its auxiliary professions come up with preventives or cures for musculoskeletal disorders. Although much is now recognized within the health professions about the effects of poor posture, we still have no reliable mainstream source of knowledge and practice with which to address them. Some health practitioners assume that their knowledge of human anatomy gives them a means of bringing about postural change. But this is not so. A proper understanding of use is only acquired through the development of one’s own coordination to a high standard by means of training in the Alexander Technique. Without help from the Alexander teacher’s uniquely trained hands, the essential process of length-



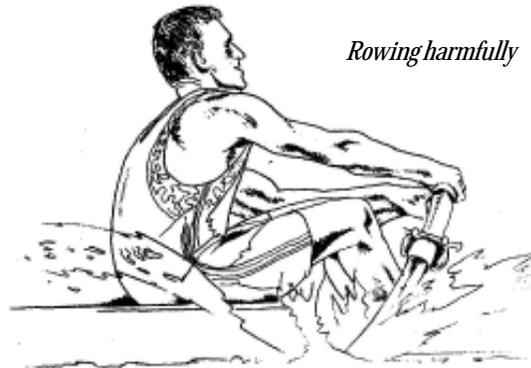
A poorly distributed load



Well-distributed loads

Sit Happens

ening and widening the body to facilitate beneficial movement is inadequately understood. The usual shallow understanding lends itself to the designing of endless posture-training systems which are added to the supermarket of confusing and contradictory gadgets and gizmos such as the “orthotic insole,” the “posture bra,” the “neck pillow,” variously angled “back supports” and “harnesses,” and the pervasive and increasingly uncomfortable “ergonomic chair.” Currently under scrutiny is the design of the school bag. Not before time—but also a complete waste of it, unless the child is simultaneously going to be taught *how to carry it*.



The continuing failure to repair damage caused by poor use leads the despairing health professionals with their scant knowledge of our evolutionary history to claim that “we are not designed for sitting.” So what are we designed for? And if we’re not “designed for” ballet dancing, should we therefore be doing it? I suspect that neither are we “designed” to do yoga, although it is touted as a healthful practice—especially its postures that aim to extend our parts beyond their natural limitations.

We are clearly designed to engage in some activities. It’s axiomatic that to be alive we must move, to retain the fullness of our musculature, to be flesh at all. During some millennium of our several-million-year history we may serendipitously have discovered activities that we could undertake to our benefit, including some we may not have been specifically designed to perform. Sitting may be one, but which we nonetheless manage to do without harming ourselves—*provided that we do it well*.

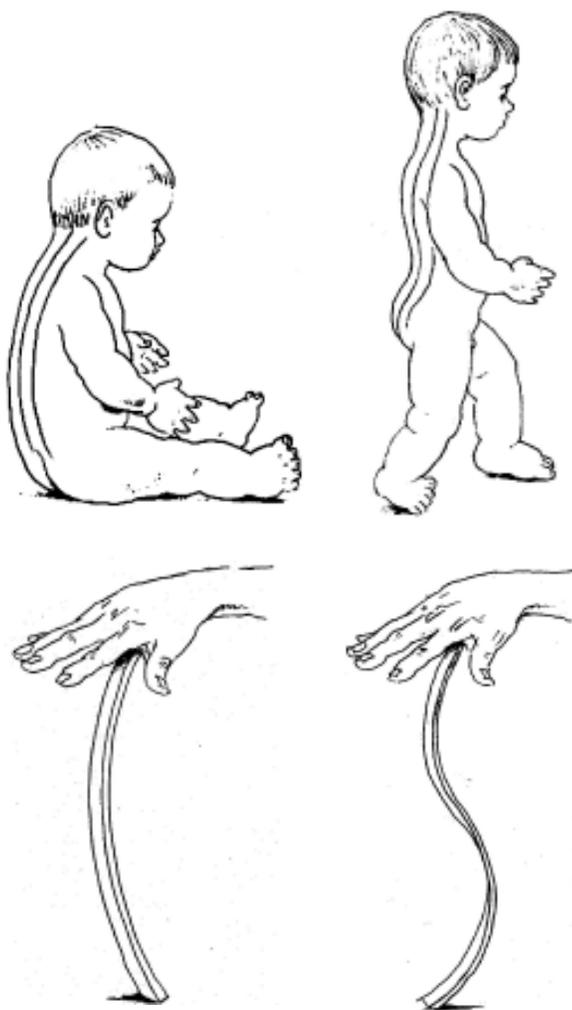
So before we move on to the question of *how* to sit well, we must first define what we think good sitting is. And in the process we can consider what sitting might be for.



It's easy

Some History

There is no question of the need for sitting as a developmental stage in the human baby on her way to standing. Her spine at birth is curved concave forwards in the thoracic and pelvic regions, and is slightly curved convex forwards in the cervical region. She has no lumbar curve at all. Her cervical curve increases as she practices holding her head up during crawling and sitting. Moving and balancing her weighty head during these developmental stages also strengthens the musculature of her trunk in preparation for her bipedal future. Although the size of her head will diminish in relation to her overall size as she grows more upright, it will still be sufficiently heavy to require a second curve in her spine. This second convex



forward curve forms in the lumbar region and brings her center of gravity over her legs. It also affords more springing and flexibility for moving her precariously balanced body lightly—that is, with minimum expenditure of energy.

To understand how strength without rigidity is achieved, take a length of cane or a green twig and push down on its top end. You will feel a little resistance as it bends to left or right.

Put another curve in the opposite direction in the same length of cane and you will feel how much more powerful the resistance is when you try to push it down. Both curves are thrusting upwards against the downward force of your applied weight. The resistance of the curves as they attempt to straighten out is what puts the counteracting force into a spring.

A benign circle of events is set in train by the weight of our large heads stimulating this resistant force from our spinal curves as they thrust against it. This anti-gravitational thrust also ensures that our heads—as long as we don't fix our neck muscles—are constantly brought to the spot where their weight can be deployed in this way to our advantage.

As a one-year-old, while her spine is still relatively straight, or before the second curve has fully developed, a baby's head will pull her off balance when it falls backwards. This is an amusing period to watch. Her trunk and neck musculature is not yet strong enough to hold it up there at all angles. From now on and for another

twenty-odd years she will continue growing taller and broader. Then she will go on through life carrying her heavy brain around on her thin neck until she's almost a hundred.

At her sitting height one curve in her spine was sufficient for the baby to manipulate her head safely. But now she has become exceptionally tall in relation to the comparatively narrow base she has on two rather than four legs. However much taller she gets she will continue to move vertically between the ground and her uppermost reach. She will need enough strength and flexibility to perform a lot of getting up and down. Infants and small children move from stand to squat so easily.

So, once we're up there why do we bother to continue sitting? Possibly by chance, in the process of making the necessary structural changes for get-



Sit Happens

ting about on two legs, early humans also became better designed for sitting than for squatting. An ape's spine hasn't evolved for standing on two legs and therefore isn't so well-adapted for sitting either. Her bits are not so neatly underneath one another and their weight puts more stress on her rather straight spine. When she stands upright she is not so vertical as humans. She sits a bit, but not for long stretches.

Some Evolution

The classic question of evolution is whether the monkey grew a tail because she needed it to swing through the trees, or whether she grew one first and then found a use for it? Did monkeys sit so that evolution favored the loss of their tail to facilitate it? Or did the primates find they could drop back onto their sitting bones from a squat because they had no tail to get in the way? Perhaps that little squatting-to-sitting discovery sparked the evolution of the spinal changes necessary for eventual bipedalism. Gibbons, meanwhile settled for the arboreal life and grew longer arms. Some changes seem to be what the environment demands and others seem as though they might be fortuitous byproducts of those changes.



Not designed for sitting

And why would those early people not have chosen to squat or lie down when they didn't need to be dashing about? What would they have wanted to sit for? Maybe the greater stability of sitting had the edge on squatting for performing delicate hand tasks. Then again, sitting—or the half-squat—may have been a byproduct of a newly-acquired lumbar curve because the now forward-tilted pelvis would be making it harder to balance in a squat. Squatting, once you have a lumbar curve, puts more strain on the spine because when the pelvis and sacrum are pushed backwards the lumbar area is forced to over-straighten. Perhaps our forebears suffered from slipped discs until someone hit on the idea of adapting the environment to their shape by creating furniture. Sitting on a log chair at a rock table would have made tool work much easier.



Early woman's iliac blades evolved into a more rounded shape to help contain her intestines and babies in her upright stance. As a consequence of this structural change to her sacro-pelvic region sitting became easier than squatting. Closer to our own time, and with her bipedal pelvis well-established, she and the clan sat with their legs in front of them to draw pictures in sand. Whether they felt the impulse to draw and positioned their upright bodies on the ground, or whether they were sitting around the campfire and in an idle moment started to enjoy each other's lines, who knows? Pictures became an important medium for spreading news and sharing thoughts. It probably wasn't long before someone was delegated the role of line drawer and who would be left sitting for longer periods than the others. Even so, that person would have spent fewer hours of her day sitting than we do now. Whatever the evolutionary purpose of sitting, if there was any, we've evidently been doing it for some time. We do not imagine a Cro-Magnon family gathered around the campfire after a hard day's hunt, *standing* to gossip or gnaw bones.

Nowadays we are almost born to sit, trained to it from when we start school. And, sadly, we do it on furniture whose design ensures that our neuromuscular apparatus for maintaining a good shape is seriously compromised from the start.

Perhaps we adopt the sitting posture so much because we have become so inept at standing that our central nervous system selects sitting as the less energy-costly option.

What is not immediately apparent is that standing badly is less stressful for our lumbar spine than is sitting wrongly. So in the long run our decision to take a break by collapsing into a chair is not much good to us. But before we go on about bad sitting, we must clarify what we mean by good sitting.

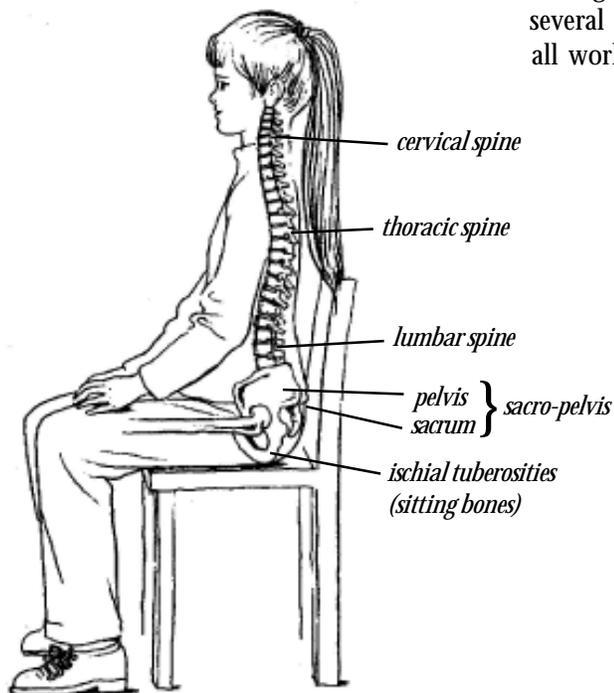


What Is Good Sitting

Good sitting is a balancing act of the head and the trunk, performed on the ischial tuberosities. Because balance is a process, good posture cannot be described purely in terms of forces and angles. Balance incurs movement, and movement is what our mammalian body is designed for. It is as fundamental to our existence as is breathing, eating, and thinking things over. Even while we keep perfectly still some movement will be taking place. Both moving and being still are achieved by a mix of procedures such as falling, contracting muscle, relaxing muscle, inhibiting response, and balancing. They are stimulated and controlled by interactivity between several discrete functional centers within the brain. When these are all working well, we stand on our legs with a feather lightness, and we sit on our ischials in delicate poise.

As in standing, when we sit we must not fix. We must release all the gripping and holding that interferes with our springing. We must balance and allow reflex muscle contraction to run freely through us. Sitting is the harder posture to perform well because the base we are poised on has narrowed to the two closely adjacent points of our sitting bones. These cannot be separated—as can our legs—to widen our base and give us more play for balancing.

In standing we cannot collapse so extremely as we can in sitting because our cerebellar motor function works at keeping the overall musculature more engaged, to ensure that we remain safely upright. It is aided in this by the plantar reflex, a powerfully reactive impulse that makes legs straighten when pressure is applied to the soles of the



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feet. The plantar reflex makes sure we don't flop to the floor in unguarded moments. It demands a certain degree of springing in the body that it is working hard to maintain upright. This muscle toning from the reflex response refreshes us when we get up from the office chair to fetch a piece of paper from another room. We benefit from the movement because it demands more extensive reflex activity throughout our body. It is the need for this that makes us hunger for exercise—and unfortunately induces us to damage ourselves with inappropriately vigorous activity, after having sat all day in harmful poor shapes.

When we sit well there is sufficient reflex muscular contraction along the spine to hold it nicely erect. The aptly named *spinae erector* muscles form part of the postural maintenance musculature which comprises muscle groups that behave reflexively, that is, we do not have direct voluntary control over them. These specialized muscles perform the more energy-conservative job of holding us upright by means of their coordination and work-distribution programs. The constant and *gentle* stimulation they need to stay strong is effected by their response to gravity when the body is erect. If they are not used frequently, they will rapidly lose bulk. If they have atrophied through poor posture to a non-functional wasted condition, the only way we can hold ourselves upright is by deliberately using alternative muscle groups that were not meant for the job. These wrongly employed substitutes let us know they are overworking by making us feel fatigued and “tense.” If someone tells you to “sit up” to improve your posture, how long can you hold the position?

To help ourselves sit well we must allow movement. Movement is predicated on release. No part of us can move unless we let go of it. Try holding your arms rigid while bending them at the elbows. To do it you must interfere with the natural process by suppressing the reflex release response. It feels absurdly hard to do. It's as hard and awkward as attempting to hold ourselves stiffly in a “good posture” with will power. Experiments have shown that reflexively activated postural musculature uses 5–10% of maximum voluntary contraction. It is clearly the easier option. Making the most of release and balance helps to make it so.

Sitting well is sitting upright, with the shape opened out to become as perpendicular as possible, and with the contents of the trunk and its appendages disposed around the spinal column to give the whole a good shape. A good shape is one that is easy to balance and to move without unduly loading any part. The feet must rest lightly on the floor, or, if you are on a raised platform or table your legs must be supported to a distance at least half-way along the thighs so their weight doesn't pull the trunk off its precarious balance on the sitting bones.

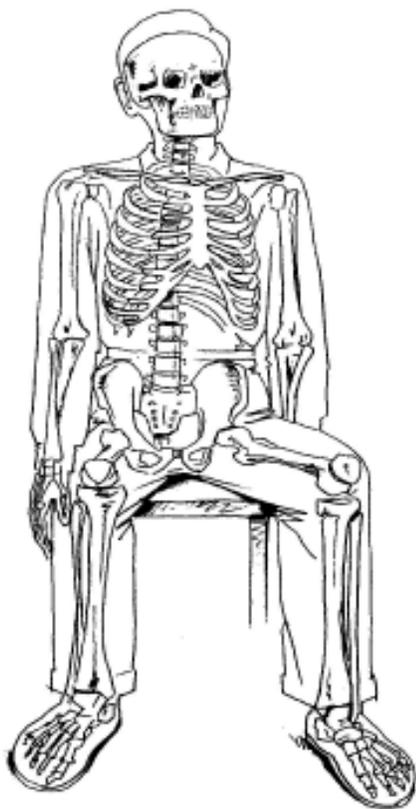
The legs thus function like the base of a bookend, making balancing on the ischial tuberosities possible. Try sitting right on the edge of a table. You will not be able to balance without leaning back and gripping down the front of yourself to counteract the drag from your legs.

Good sitting is efficient; that is, it becomes light and easy, low on expenditure of energy by using the head's weight to elicit the reflex upward thrust of the spine.

A common mistake is to think of our chunky gluteal muscles as built-in cushions that we can sink down onto. In fact when the legs are flexed for sitting, the ischial tuberosities are protruded towards the surface we are sit-



Rigid military posture



ting on. They need to be on a firm surface to give purchase to the trunk musculature so it can hold itself up.

Too soft a seat will defeat the reflexes. Place a hand under your buttock as you sit. You will feel a sitting bone poking onto your hand. Your buttock has made way for it by being stretched along the length of the right-angle formed by your flexed hip joint.

Some Comparative Anatomy

The spine of a four-legged animal can be described as a single shallow arch supported by four moveable pillars. The internal organs are suspended vertically from the arch and are evenly distributed along it. It's a kind of walking bridge. We humans have straightened out our hind legs and made the spine into a column that now has two arches in it standing on only two pillars. The weight of the internal organs is now distributed around this column. Since we turned ourselves into walking towers, our lives have become in some ways easier and in others more complex. Our shape has greater maneuverability than that of our four-legged fellows. But our balance and therefore our coordination is less sturdy. F. M. Alexander believed that self-consciousness and bipedal walking evolved together. He believed that the tricky business of maintaining the head balanced on the end of the spine at such a height on its narrow base and thin neck, was dependent on conscious control of the more refined ad-

justments that were now needed. Such a delicate business could no longer be left solely to the motor programming between the senses and the cerebellum. However that may be, we did evolve some aids to maintaining verticality. For instance, the soleus muscle, lying beneath the calf muscle at the back of the foreleg is especially sensitive to the swaying movements of the body towering above. It keeps the cerebellum informed of any deviation from the vertical so that it can send instructions to the musculature to bring it immediately back into balance. This rectification is in process constantly as we amble or sprint about our business. Special proprioceptors in the neck muscles contribute additional information to the brain about the balance and position of its lolloping skull.

In common with other animals our skeletal framework provides an arrangement of struts for the muscles, whose elasticity allows movement, and for the tough connective tissue that keeps the whole thing firmly held together. Muscle is highly responsive, being suffused in a rain of electrical impulses that speed around the neuro-network embedded throughout and about its every fiber. This electrical wash, receiving and delivering messages from the brain, incorporates the "I" that operates our muscle-wrapped selves. Unless *I* make a decision to do something—say, to go and get a newspaper—my clambering-out-of-the-armchair program will not



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engage. The *wanting* to take a step towards my goal is the first thing that must occur on the road to its fulfillment. Without the stimulus of my desire nothing will happen. But when I have decided that now is the moment to do it, my consciousness takes a back seat while the instructions are cobbled together by a series of mental functions. Programs are sent around my body carrying instructions to expedite a task, telling some muscle groups to act, and others to not act. They are carried out largely by reflex mechanisms. Consider that each of my legs has around 50 muscles that need to be operated for it to take a step, while my brain has to ensure that the 50 muscles of my other leg don't intrude on the operation; and consider that my weight has to be transferred and the balance of the whole of the rest of me has to be adjusted while the leg the program has decided to move off with is raised from the ground. If all this were not programmed to be carried out automatically, it would take me a lifetime to get to the post office. It has to be done reflexively. It has to be accomplished in nanoseconds. I couldn't possibly do this consciously. Muscles respond in coordinated groups, according to the bidding of their "I."

When a glitch occurs in this intricate communication system, we experience cramp pains. Both the agonist and antagonist muscles have answered the call to action simultaneously. The neuro-network in your leg, say, has got a message a little wrong and it is attempting to both straighten and bend itself simultaneously. Remarkably this doesn't happen often; and when it does, it's promptly rectified by conscious intervention.

So while "I" sit, an interplay of neuro-electrical programs maintains me, out of my awareness, on my sitting bones. If I am well-habituated, stocked with good-use programs, a predominance of reflex muscular activity will minimize the effort needed to hold myself up. This good posture will not be upset by any additional individuated act such as waving Hallo to someone as I sit. The additional voluntary activity will be organized so as to

enhance the reflexive performance of my sitting, thus ensuring that the energy and wear costs of adding a wave to my poise will be small. Neither sitting nor waving should tire or damage me. Come to think of it, nor should I become fatigued or harmed by pushing a mouse around a pad.



Dangers Lurk Within

Among animal designs the human has exceptional maneuverability and dexterity. We can curl into a ball or stretch out to our full length and create an infinite range of shapes in between. Our limbs flex and extend and rotate with a versatility that affords us a greater variety of movements than any other creature on earth. Even our closest relatives, the chimpanzees, cannot do with their hands or legs or trunks what we can with ours. The flexibility of the spine at its lumbar and cervical curves helps us to balance and maneuver our willowy structure. If my sacro-pelvis is given an unexpected shove forwards, my thorax springs back at once to stop me from falling over. In an instant I can swerve the whole or twist a bit of myself to avoid danger. My parts move automatically to compensate each other for the threat to my balance.

But when destructive programs develop, the organism ends up working against itself. The downside of our versatility is that we are able to continue functioning while deviating far from the ideal of our blueprint verticality. It's very hard work operating a word-processor with the body at full throttle in a slump.



Paradoxically it will need to spend more energy tightening down in front to keep from falling over than it needs for clicking along on the keys. That we manage to function at all betwixt the absurd contradictions we create is due to our marvelous adaptability coupled with an extraordinary flexibility. Somehow we manage to keep going for years using these gifts to our disadvantage—at least until a damaged part causes enough pain or hindrance to capture our attention.

The tragedy of allowing such deterioration in comportment is that once the trunk has shortened and become misshapen, the relationship of its parts—especially that of the head to the trunk—will no longer effect the gentle stretch of the postural muscles needed to stimulate them. The body's most important muscles will wither and will be supplanted by compensatory muscle groups that should remain free until required for more

strenuous jobs. In vicious circle fashion, because the alternative muscle groups are shape-shorteners, their employment prevents engagement of the postural maintenance musculature, thereby ensuring that all attempts to “correct the posture” will fail. The now vestigial postural muscles will need subtle coaxing by means of specialized re-education in good habits of use, to restore them gradually to adequate fullness.

Individuation and Integration

Another factor that adds to our rich movement potential is the high degree of individuation we acquire as we mature. Individuation is the ability to move one part on its own while leaving the rest of the body undisturbed. When we are mature we can stand very still and blink an eye without moving any other part of ourselves. This must have been useful during our hunting eras as a means of communicating silently. It is the body's ability to remain integrated while individuating that enables us to keep our balance while we wink or wave.

But when a baby chuckles she kicks her legs and flings her arms around at the same time. Her unindividuated way of responding is very appealing. Perhaps we are nostalgic for the feeling of deep satisfaction such total response gives. As she gets older she'll get better at individuating her response: she'll be able to smile and wave one hand at a time. Her integration skills may not be the greatest yet so she might stagger a little; and she'll hold her hand with a charming floppiness while she is not yet very good at individuating her waving hand from the gross movement of her arm.



With all we've got going for us, we should be the most joyful of creatures.

Sit Happens

The trap we fall into is that because we are moving only one part, we assume the unengaged parts don't need our attention, they can go hang. It's a mistake to think that while I'm winking what I'm simultaneously doing with my legs can be ignored. On the contrary, this is precisely the point at which I need my individuation and integration skills to be up to scratch. If I stiffen and shorten myself while operating my eyelid musculature I shall be harming myself—while just winking. This is why exercises to strengthen one area of the body—without taking into consideration what is happening to the other parts while we perform them—can end up doing us overall more harm than good. How many people do you know who, subsequent to performing a “back-strengthening” exercise, have developed a sore neck, knee, or shoulder?



They would not have had any guidance in how to use themselves to perform the specific movement—what to best be doing with the rest of themselves to ensure that they don't harm other parts of themselves in the process. We need both individuation and integration. Our superior separation skills must not obscure the fact that we act as one. It is fallacious to think that giving a wink or a wave is really all that we are doing.

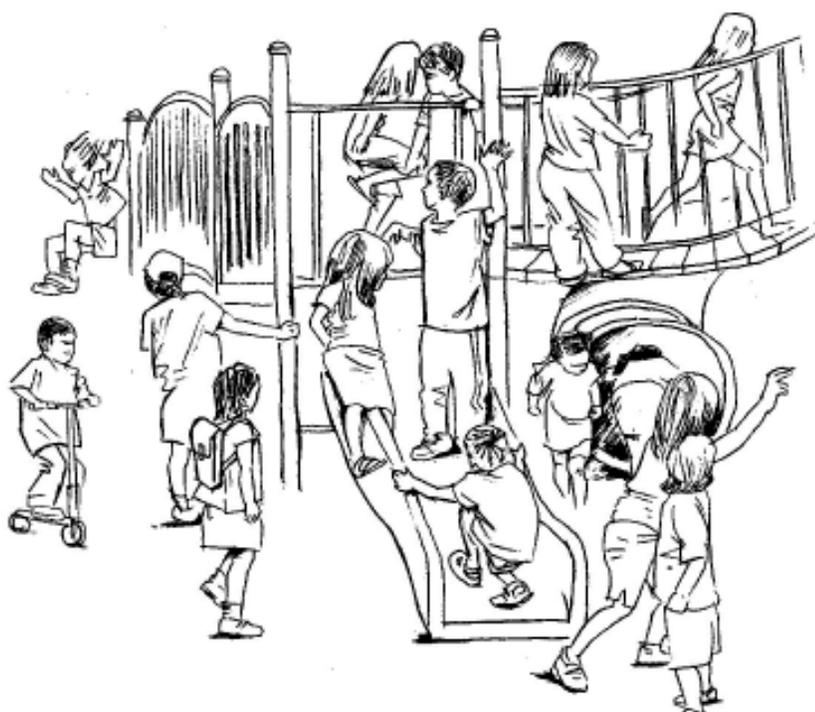
By understanding a bit about individuation we can recognize that we act as one, under a central command. What the “I” decides to do, the brain then organizes its specialist departments to carry out. First I must have the desire to do it, then—if it's something I've been practicing for a while, such as getting a sandwich down my gullet—the software for grasping and moving my hand to my mouth kicks in. It happens before I know it. On the other hand, when I learn something new such as driving, I must first bring consciousness to the task. Once the skill is learned, I will then not have to give my attention to the particulars of steering, braking, and accelerating. The vehicular controls will have become almost an extension of myself. I shall be able to listen to a talking book while I'm driving from Sydney to Brisbane. And I can be alert to the vicissitudes of the highway at the same time. I can respond to sudden ice or a lovely view.

At the learning stage, wisdom lies in acquiring good-quality programs both for task outcome and wear of parts. Imagine a program that involves our putting undue stress on our necks each time we depress a pedal or change the cassette.

Proprioception and Learning

By means of proprioception I experience myself. My proprioceptive sense lets me know how firm a grip I need to hold the phone, or how much contraction I need in my arm for picking up an egg or a brick. We are born with some motor programs, e.g., how to lock onto the nipple. From the moment of birth we know where “up” is. But much development of our proprioception is acquired the trial-and-error way. By reaching fruitlessly time and again, babies learn how close to a toy they need to be to grab hold of it. They drive their mothers mad with their tireless preoccupation with gravity. As toddlers they discover with their bodies how to get more power and

direction into throwing a ball. A few tumbles on and they will be able to assess whether a tree branch is likely to support their weight; or to estimate how much of a run they'll need to clear the creek. Watching five-year-olds get to work on playground furniture demonstrates the drive to learn about the world from full-body contact. They manage to exploit the possibilities of a construction well beyond the imagination of its designer. Watch them coming down the shoot: head first, feet first, on back, on front, pairs in tandem, pairs head-to-toe, at half-bent shape, sitting, lying down, running back up, one leg over the side, arms behind back, eyes shut...and so on.



Later, with their skateboards and rollerblades they execute inventive moves on the most improbable street furniture. As they accumulate bodily experience they are building programs for application to more complex activities—ski-jumping, sailing, playing the piano, teaching the Alexander Technique.

Tool-handling, from the relatively simple business of smashing a bone with a stone, to the extremely complex performance of microsurgery in ever more remote control, is also dependent on proprioception. Do you remember your first go on a computer before you had a grasp of how



Sit Happens



rapidly the cursor would move across the screen in response to your wrist movement? For those of us born before most of you, learning how miniscule the movement needed to be took a few goes. An equivalently indirect finesse is needed for learning how to operate ourselves efficiently in sitting.

Why We Sit So Badly

What we now ask of a creature designed to sprint and forage in the wild, is that she sit motionless for hours maintaining her head in fixed relation to a screen. Here we are, eons into the future, and sitting more than ever. But how many of us do so safely and in a manner that keeps us in good working order? For most of us maturing is a disaster. We muddle along through life hoping that a bit of ill-considered exercise will counteract the damage caused by long bouts of collapsed sitting. Not even our Olympic athletes can sit up. As babies we did it so beautifully until the harmful influences got to work. From banana-shaped strollers to high-heeled shoes, with poor parental modeling, ruinous furniture, and unsatisfactory activities—such as studying for long periods—in between,

both our use and consequently our kinesthetic appreciation are subjected to deleterious influence.

Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869-1955) discovered inaccurate proprioception by observing that, when he tried to straighten himself out, he found he was not doing what he *felt* he was doing. What he saw in the mirror was not how he thought he looked. Logically he supposed that a faulty instrument would not give an accurate reading; and since his use of himself was poor, he could see that proprioceptively he wasn't working too well either. He called this faulty sensing "debauched kinaesthesia." We can corroborate his findings with our universal experience of an apparent lack of ability to monitor our performance. Only when a knee, neck, or lower back is damaged does the question arise of what we might be doing to ourselves. Only when the swimming coach tells us our faulty strokes are not taking us to the Olympics, or our dancing teacher suggests the netball team as an alternative, do we look at movement and coordination as something that has anything to do with consciousness.

These days in Western societies good carriage in an adult is so unfamiliar that it is often misinterpreted as rigid. This is because we cannot interpret what we don't recognize. We use memory to recognize and assess what we are looking at. In this way an actor feels her way into a role by imitating a character's posture, gesture, and facial expression. She knows how someone feels when their eyes bulge and their jaw is tense because she has felt angry too. When we have lost the easy uprightness we had in early childhood, our judgment of what another is experiencing will be correspondingly limited by our current range of postural experience between collapse and the sort of painful stiffness we associate with trying to stand up straight. We won't have a fresh supply of proprioceptive experience to tell us that sitting upright actually feels pretty good! The upright posture in the other person will be read as



correlating with what we would be doing to ourselves if we held ourselves upright with the only musculature we now have at our disposal. It is this same faulty perception that leads us to think that baboons are smiling at us when they bare their teeth.

Alexander spent many years pondering the question of faulty sensory appreciation, concluding that conscious control in the use of the self was the way to re-establish coordination and shapeliness. He retained a remarkably youthful stance up to his death at 86 years which in 1955 was a great age. He would not have imagined how the end of the 20th century would see such an increase in human longevity. We now have many more years to live with malfunction and chronic pain if good use is not inculcated from an early age. It is common now to see primary school kids with very poor posture. With 90-odd years to go, we don't want to start them off with postural programs that are going to have deleterious effects on their future well-being.

Improved Coordination Is Learned

A shortened trunk is not so much a shortened spine, but rather a spine that has been pulled out of shape, particularly in its more flexible areas, by a combination of inactivity of some muscle groups and over activity of others. The muscles packed around the spinal vertebrae that pull each one into proper arrangement with the one above and the one below, so as to achieve the spine's best overall length, slacken and atrophy from insufficient activity. So other muscle groups must take over the job of moving the animal towards its needs—in the direction of its food, or away from enemies.



No matter how awkwardly he sits at his screen, a modern child's dominant need will keep him glued to his computer game until hunger intrudes into his awareness. Once his spine has begun to assume the shape he habitually uses for playing his games, his muscles will oblige by maintaining their length and bulk in accordance with the shape his body repeatedly assumes. Muscle has a habitual length. At whatever length it is normally used, it adds or sheds fibers in accordance with the everyday demands made of it. This is why it wastes to nothing when not used, and why it's possible to build more of it through training. But its elastic potential is also determined by use. The habit length of muscle determines the shape of the body within its genetic limitations.

If I do 100 sit-ups a day, I am practicing drawing my upper body downwards with my hip flexors and, to a lesser extent, my abdominal muscles. Naturally this results in a very pulled down shape—and into the bargain considerable stress to my sacro-iliac joints. The shape thus arrived at will be one in which my vertebral alignment is also queered, which will incur damage to the intervertebral discs and facet joints of my spine. This shape will also

Sit Happens



Doing sit-ups...

determine continued use of the wrong muscle groups—they will be the only ones available before long—so that the vicious circle continues until I interrupt it with intelligent strategy. Exercises to alter my shape—or my posture—will stimulate further use and development of these wrong muscles. What is needed is for this overactivated flexor musculature to diminish, so that the postural musculature can regenerate. I can only get this to happen by changing my use, changing the way I start to do things. I must abandon poor motor programs and plan better ones. I must think.

Alexander's method of re-education in the use of the self involves directing one's awareness to certain areas of the body and sending messages to inhibit the engagement of the wrong muscle groups. Simply, he called it his technique of "non-doing." Interestingly, recent scientific findings confirm his, in telling us that the postural muscles cannot be accessed directly. The physiotherapy patient can only get his multifidus muscles enlarging by directing his thinking to their region. Restoration of natural shape is achieved gradually by the cultivation of improved habits of use, never by the pushing, pulling, and stretching involved in exercise programs, yoga positions, or orthotic appliances; and definitely not by being contorted into weird postures by the ergonomic contrivances that still bear the name of their ancestor—"the chair"!

F.M. Alexander said we must learn to non-do—to quiet the interference from the wrong parts of ourselves in order to stock up on better motor programs.

How to Sit Well

Sitting is a process. It is not definitive and it therefore cannot be described in the same terms as fixed structures. In the sitting process there might exist a hypothetical relationing of parts that would result in the body's ultimate openness. Certainly just this ideal is what we must be asking for when we run our awareness through the neuro-network of our voluntary musculature in order to ensure that we don't tighten and interfere with its lengthening. But if we were to achieve such perfection we must be ready to relinquish it at once, or we shall have defeated our object. We would be trapped by fixation, which is contrary to being in process.

Processes are by definition ongoing. We want the process of sitting to be one where there is an asking for the shape to open, a releasing and balancing rather than a deliberate holding of ourselves in "good posture" with instructions of the Head-Up, Shoulders-Back, Tummy-In variety. Generally it is now understood that the kind of instructions that get us gripping down into ourselves don't result in the opened-out shape we want. It is increasingly recognized by health practitioners who address spinal damage that more release is needed. However, we have to understand specifically what we need to release, how to release it, and where we want it to go to when



...results in a pulled-down shape



we don't sit and stitch buffalo hides together any more; still, I wouldn't want my dentist to be wobbling around on a ball.

What to Sit On

It is true to say that there are parameters within which it is more important how a person is using herself than what she is sitting on to do it. If she is using herself well she will do so with no detriment to her poise on a variety of furnitures. But outside those parameters the struggle to maintain balance becomes too much of a strain. For practical purposes our furniture must be designed in accordance with the body's need for support. We can walk on our hands, but our arms and shoulder joints are not designed to carry our weight. We are straining the structures if we do so for more than a couple of minutes at a time.

To understand what support is needed to sit well, we need to recognize that behaviorally the head balances on the thorax, which balances on the sacro-pelvis. Either the thorax or sacro-pelvis can be shifted into a new position but, in doing so, the other parts will have to correspondingly move to redress their interrelationship to maintain as far as possible the verticality of the structure. If this correction were not to occur, the whole muscular wrapping that encloses them would have to contract unduly to stop the trunk from falling. It is possible to lean both the sacro-pelvis and thorax to the same side; but it is more probable that as the thorax moves to the left, the sacro-pelvis will tip to the right because the brain always seeks the cheaper option, the one that costs less effort. We couldn't sustain a lean of the whole for long.

However, most of the leaning we do will not be sideways but frontwards, collapsing the chest down towards the sacro-pelvis. We drop down in front. In compensation, the sacro-pelvis must tilt backwards, or we would topple. And of course, because the spine and the pelvis are attached at the sacro-iliac joint, the flexible lumbar spine is drawn back with it. The cervical spine—the spine's other flexible part—will have been dragged forward by the thoracic slump. And, in order to stay on top of it all, the head will correspondingly reposition itself backwards of the forward curving neck, depriving the structure of the beneficial

we let go of it. Alexander further specified that we must not do things directly when it comes to reorganizing the relationship of our body parts to one another, but we must *allow* the parts to move; that is, we must create the conditions conducive to their moving themselves. He was specific about the directions the parts must be coaxed to move towards, if the shape was to open out to its best. Jumping chaotically around or being bounced higgledy-piggledy in movement for movement's sake would not have impressed him. It absolutely cannot make sense to sit on a bouncing ball when the reason we sat down in the first place was to make it easier to steady ourselves for handwork. So



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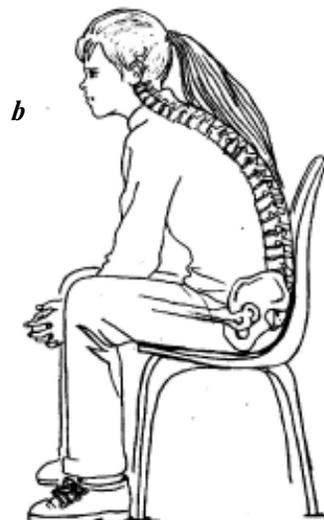
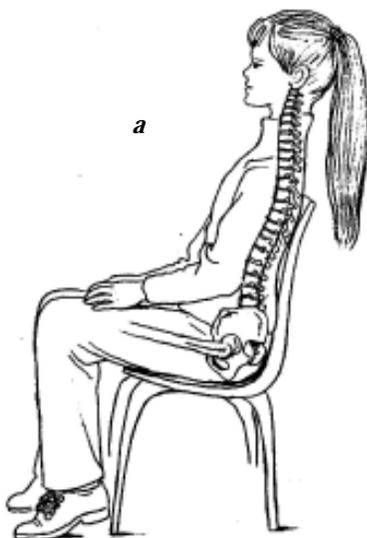


effects of the weight when it's right on top. Instead, because it is now off balance, the head must now be desperately hung on to by hyper-contraction of small muscles in the neck. No marks for guessing that this collapse down the front results in "neck problems."

This is our most common slumping sitting posture, and we use it on any furniture. But when the chair seat is canted upwards from the ischials towards the knees—the standard plastic moulded chair is a perfect example—this slump becomes the most frequently selected option of three unsatisfactory postural possibilities. The first possibility (*a*) is that you hold yourself at the angle the seat cant is pitching you (but this is unlikely as it will be too hard to sustain any longer than you could stand on your hands); the second possibility (*b*) is that you slump down as described above; and the third possibility (*c*) is that you pull your flexible

lumbar spine forwards, tilting the sacro-pelvis far enough forwards to counteract the tilt of the seat. This third option gives the appearance of "good posture" because it is more upright; but it puts strain on the sacro-iliac joints, and on the joint between the fifth lumbar vertebra and the sacrum (L5/S1 in medical parlance), and in the region of the atlas where the head joins the spine. When the head sits too far forward of the spine—which is the case here—it has the same effect as when it falls too far back of the spine, in the case where the cervical curvature is increased. In both these adaptations to sitting on a slope, springing is lost in the trunk because the weight of the head is not falling through the spinal curves.

No matter how you dress up the canted chair seat—in little skirts, or by scooping deeper holes in the back to "accommodate the buttocks" or similar fantasies, or by adding padding or tasteful upholstery—they remain the most profoundly damaging piece of furniture in our repertoire. If the ischials are not on a horizontal surface, the



slightest tilt of the pelvis—upwards, downwards, backwards or forwards—caused by a canted seat, will effect a proportionately much larger deviation from the vertical at the head end. The brain has to compensate for this lean by trying out all sorts of interesting and deleterious shapes.

When the seat is canted *downwards* from the ischials towards the knees, a new set of problems arises for the sitter. To give due merit, the development of this alternative chair design is thanks to thoughtful health practitioners and Alexander Technique teachers who have recognized the harmful effects of canting the seat upwards. But faults are not simply corrected by substituting their opposite. Living things are as complex as things get on this earth, so that, as Alexander discovered, subtle and indirect method is needed to redress their illness and malfunction.



Compensatory spinal distortion resulting from sitting on a downward-canted surface

Correcting the Leaning Tower of Pisa

In the 1970s the application of simple logic to the question of spinal damage gave rise to the “earth shoe.” The argument ran that since wearing high heels caused damage to the sacro-iliac joints by pushing the sacro-pelvis forward into a sway-back shape, then wearing a shoe whose heel was lower than its toe must ‘correct’ the harm. This is about the same as saying that if too hot is bad, too cold must be good! This shoe further complicated the wearer’s postural confusion by driving the sacro-pelvis too far backwards, bringing straightening forces to bear on the lumbar curve. To stop himself from falling over, the wearer had to tighten down in front, which drew his thoracic spine into a hump and pulled his head off balance so that his small neck muscles had to work overtime to support it. The shoe was a pain in the neck! Women didn’t take to it at all. I remember thinking at the time that surely feet would have evolved a while before shoes were dreamed of? If it were useful to protect the foot from raw ground, there probably wasn’t any extra benefit to be had from tilting it this way or that. The complex architecture of the human foot with its multiplicity of arches and joints, its free ankle joint, and its specially sensitive skin covering, is designed to deal with a variety of surface textures and with every imaginable combination of tilts. But variation from a more-or-less horizontal surface occurs naturally only during movement, and therefore only momentarily while the weight is suspended. Even so, it is much harder work moving up or downhill. The body can adjust to having its bottom end on a slope, but it is more difficult to maintain for long. Close attention is needed to ensure that the better choice is made in adjusting the balance of the body as a whole. It is within our human capacity to walk on the very tips of our toes, but our ballet dancers need a thorough understanding of an efficient norm they can return their bodies to after the show. We must be careful not to use simplistic correctional logic where the elements of an equation are manifold and complex.

Somewhere Between

When the downward canted chair seat is first experienced by a person who habitually slumps, she will enjoy it, as the pitching forward of her sacro-pelvis will relieve the immediate strain on her lumbar spine, and it will give the *spinae erector* muscles a fillip as her body lifts into a more upright shape. The movement would appear to

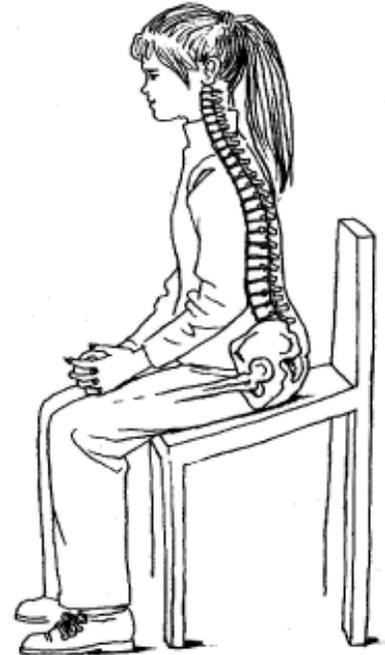
Sit Happens

produce the desirable Alexander Technique postural outcome—that is, with the back coming well back, and the head going forward. But it is soon seen that over-correction of the balance has occurred—the back has come too far back, sending the head too far forward in counteraction.

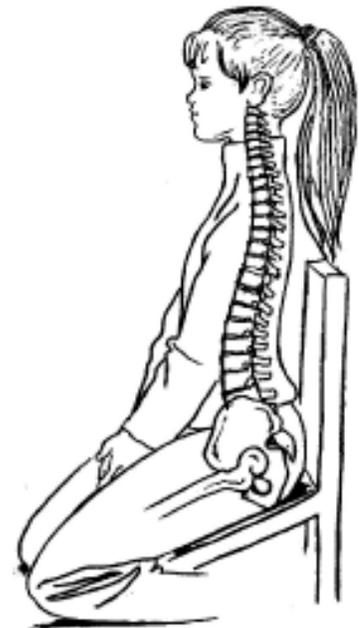
The over-compensation is revealed in the bulging backwards of the lumbar spine close to the thoracic area. Simultaneously, over-straightening of the natural forward-concave curvature in the thoracic and cervical regions has occurred. Before long the sitter's sensory apparatus will tell her she needs more upholstery, as the sacro-pelvis, straining to bring the body closer to vertical, will be tipping back onto a part of the ischials not designed to carry weight. Her legs will be under pressure from their own weight as they fall away from the trunk, inadequately supported under the thighs. She will move her feet a long way forward to relieve the pressure. She might even feel pleased that her feet are now “flat on the ground” as, in spite of high heels and earth shoes the belief remains that planted feet are best. (They are—but of course not by simply moving the feet further forward.) Without doubt she is more upright than when she slumped but, with regard to mechanical efficiency, she is no better off. The spine must not be too far forward; but neither must it be too far back. To encourage reflex muscular support of the trunk, it needs to be somewhere between.

When the sacro-pelvis is tipped forward on a downward-canted seat, the body finds itself at an angle that it cannot maintain. It compensates by either leaning the thorax and head back from the lumbar spine, or by leaning the sacro-pelvis itself back as far as possible into the vertical. The first response is what occurs on the “kneeling chair.” In the canted kneeling position the legs are prevented from pulling the whole thing over by in effect “standing” the body on its knees. This is not comfortable for long because naturally knees were not designed to be “stood” on. Nor is it good for the lumbar curve to be intensified by the sacro-pelvic tilt. When the sacro-pelvis is at sitting height, more commonly it seeks to rectify its position by leaning back against the drag from the unsupported legs.

If the body were to maintain the relationship of its parts in accordance with this move, it would have to be leaning back as though walking downhill. That is not the sort of hard work the sorting centers in the brain will opt for when energy needs to be conserved for handwork. Instead, it brings the upper body forward. Because the lumbar spine became rather over-straightened when the sacro-pelvis leant back, correspondingly the other spinal curves—the thoracic curve and the cervical curve—will also have been lessened, which in turn will have positioned the head too far forward. This over-straightened condition can result from engaging in a range of movement systems, not only from the downward-canted chair seat. The weight of the body is not able to drop naturally through the points of the ischials at their new angle, so there is more muscular activity around the mid-trunk as it



Too hard to maintain



struggles with the imbalance. It is not restful. Nor does it give the benefit of exercising the postural muscles, as the over-stretch effected in the straightening of the spinal curves dulls their responsiveness. To the Alexander Technique teacher's hands, a trunk held too straight lacks a lively feel.

You can discover the straining effect of a downward-canted seat on the body's balancing mechanisms by leaning forward on it. Then sit on a horizontal seat and lean forward. You will find there is less pressure on your legs too. Having the thighs supported makes leaning towards the keys or the kitchen table less of a strain.

When sitting has become painful, well-sprung support must be re-grown. It cannot be fixed by adopting a posture or by using an appliance such as an ergonomic chair, of whatever combinations of canted parts. When things have come to such a pass, rather more than a folkloric belief in exercise is needed to put them back together again. The whole self must re-learn good use if robust postural musculature is to be restored.

Whether we spend our working lives pole-vaulting or word-processing, the movement from stand to sit and from sit to stand puts the greatest constant demand on the neuromuscular mechanisms of our structure. This is why Alexander Technique teachers use this everyday movement as a standard procedure for the practice of Alexander's principles. But the business of how this is achieved must be the subject of another paper. Meanwhile, since general knowledge has it that I am 70% water, I may as well pool in a firm container as slosh around in an elastic skin like a goldfish carried home from the Easter show in a plastic bag!



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Ed.: To accommodate printing ExChange, original illustrations with this article were omitted or simplified. They will be available in their complete and original form in our online archive, or may be obtained from the author.

Worldwide Offices of Alexander Technique International

continued from page 36

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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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