

EXCHANGE

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A “Stiff-Necked People”

Robert Rickover
ATI Teaching Member, USA & Canada

The Lord said to Moses, “I see this is a stiff-necked people. Now let Me be, that my anger may blaze forth against them and that I may destroy them...” (Exodus 32:9, 10)

Moses had been up on the mountaintop for a while receiving God’s commandments. The people had lost faith in his return—and in God. They built a golden calf to worship and began sacrificing animals to it.

God had just led them out of Egypt, saved them from Pharaoh’s army, and provided for all their needs. Yet just a little delay in Moses’ return, and they reverted back to their old idol-worshipping ways.

It’s not surprising that God was angry when He saw what they had done. But why did He use the phrase “stiff-necked people”? And why is that same phrase (the Hebrew word is *kashe-oref*—*kashe*: hard; *oref*: scruff of the neck) repeated again in Deuteronomy 9:13 and 14? After all, God didn’t rail against their stiff shoulders, stiff arms, or stiff legs.

What’s so important about that particular part of our anatomy, that God should make specific mention of it in His anger?

Take a moment to think about where your neck is located and what function it plays in your life.

Your neck is the vital connecting corridor between the most important parts of your body, your head and your torso. These are two parts of you that are absolutely necessary for you to survive as a living human being.



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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From the Chair

Jamee Culbertson
Chair, Alexander Technique International

I remember years ago going with some friends of mine to an outdoor concert being held at the Copley Place Green in the middle of Boston on a sunny Thursday afternoon. Three of us were enrolled in different Alexander Technique training courses at the time. I had met one of them while she was visiting my school for a while from the UK. Being new to Boston she wanted to see the sights and have some fun while in town. It was a warm and beautiful spring day and it turned out that the three of us were free in the late afternoon, so I said, "Hey, I'm meeting some other friends of mine at a free concert in town this afternoon, why don't you come along?"

This concert was a weekly event sponsored and broadcast by a local radio station, so whoever was playing was famous to some degree and thus would draw quite a large crowd. The show started at 5 pm and would last about an hour. Well, 5 pm was also "rush hour" and wherever we went there was bound to be crowds and traffic. With all this in mind, I said to my friends, "There are going to be hundreds of people there, how will we meet up with each other?" We eventually agreed that we would simply find each other and we didn't give it much more thought.

At the end of the training course that day we parted ways until later on that afternoon when it was time to take the subway into town for the concert. I knew some other people who were going to be there early to be sure that we had a good seat. We hoped to sit together even though we were to arrive at different times from different places. I'd been to concerts at Copley with them before so I pretty much knew where they liked to sit. I arrived at the green at about 4:30 with a fellow trainee and joined my other friends on the grass. We talked and got to know each other some more while at the same time keeping watch for our other Alexander-trainee friend who was on her way to meet us. She was from the UK and not so familiar with Boston, this being her first time here, but she said she'd be fine traveling alone and was confident that she could find the Copley Green.

Well, the longer we sat there and the closer it got to 5:00, the more people showed up for the concert. Before long not a single piece of grass was left to sit on except for the small spot next to us that we were saving for our

EXCHANGE

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adventurous friend from the UK. I wasn't sure what subway stop she was getting off at so I wasn't sure what direction to look toward to see her arriving, so scanning the crowd back and forth was the thing to do.

All of a sudden there she was, weaving in and around groups of people seated on the lawn, heading straight for us, waving. "How did you find us in this sea of people?" I asked. "No problem," she replied, "I spotted you immediately as soon as I got up out of the subway over there, the two of you are sitting completely different from any one else here, brilliant!"

She pointed to the nearest subway station across the green with maybe 200-300 people in between. We looked at each other and laughed, enjoying the recognition inherent in what each of us were learning and now living. We each felt that if we could pick each other out in a crowd of hundreds of people, we really had something going on that we hoped we could share with others. We came from different training schools yet share the same recognition.

At ATI, we are in the business of recognition, too. We have a list of other AT organizations throughout the world that we "recognize." Through our Sponsorship program we "recognize" competency in a teacher. We recognize a need for a global community and have put forth efforts to create one and to expand our reach wherever we are welcome. We recognize what is common among us and nurture that. As teachers of the Alexander Technique we "recognize" the potential for freedom in ourselves and in our students. When we recognize each other in this way we are acknowledging acquired knowledge, skill, and wisdom—knowledge from shared information, skill through the application of that knowledge, and wisdom through personal exploration over time.

Often I think that the troubles of the world are due to the fact that we simply don't know each other very well. We see each other through our interpretation of what we see rather than what and who is really there to be discovered. So, where do we go from here? ☺

Alexander Technique International

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A “Stiff-Necked People”

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A surgeon will tell you that there are as many distinct structures in your neck as in all the rest of your body. Air, food, nerve pathways, and life-sustaining fluids such as blood and lymph have to pass through this narrow region of your body. And because the structures of your neck are packed so closely together, they require an absolute minimum of excess tension to function at their best.

Clearly it's important for your general well-being that your neck freely allow what might be called efficient “biological connections” between your head and torso. But its condition also has a huge impact on the “mechanics” of your functioning: your posture, coordination, and ability to move efficiently.

Your head weighs between 10 and 12 pounds and it is poised at the very top of your neck. I often hand my new Alexander Technique students a sack filled with 12 pounds of sugar and ask them to hold it in their arms for a few moments to get an idea of what this feels like. Most are amazed that they're carrying so much weight on top of the necks.

If your head is lightly balanced on top of your neck, very little muscular effort is needed to keep it there. But if that balance is compromised, you're going to have to hold it up with a lot of muscular effort. In other words, you'll have to stiffen your neck to keep it from falling forward, or to one side.

And if your neck is stiffened, that tightness will cause compensatory tightening throughout the rest of your body, harming your ability to move freely and efficiently—not to mention restricting your breathing, putting pressure on your internal organs, etc.

Think for a moment of people you know who have stiff necks. Watch how they sit, stand, and move and you'll see what I mean. Chances are they move comparatively stiffly and awkwardly.

And then think of how they adjust to changing circumstances in general and how flexible they are in their thinking. Very likely you'll notice a certain mental rigidity that mirrors their physical stiffness. (It is for good reason that the word “stiff-necked” is often translated in the Bible as “stubborn.”)

If we are indeed made in God's image, then it stands to reason that He would be displeased when we would take poor care of ourselves. Stiffening our necks is one of the quickest and surest ways to do just that.

And learning how to release undue tension in our necks is one of the best things we can do to improve our overall functioning.

Robert Rickover is a teacher of the Alexander Technique living in Lincoln, Nebraska. He also teaches regularly in Toronto, Canada. Robert is the author of Fitness Without Stress: A Guide to the Alexander Technique and is the creator of The Complete Guide to the Alexander Technique (<http://www.alexandertechnique.com>). ☺

Ed.: This article is the third in a series intended to provide ATI members with articles they can reproduce or adapt to promote the Technique and their teaching practices. Permission is granted to reprint these articles, provided authors and the ExChange are credited. Your suggestions and submissions are highly welcome!

Letting Go With a Difference!

*Kathleen Morison
ATI Teaching Member, Ireland/Scotland*

I jumped before I jumped, I had been in free-fall for months, but it only lasted 20 seconds, the descent took about six minutes and I've only just landed.

Confused? Well, life is a bit of a riddle sometimes.

My perspective was 10,000 feet up in a single engine Cessna, sitting on the floor of a draughty, freezing cold aircraft which had no door. It had taken fifteen minutes to achieve this height, nearly two miles up. It was Saturday 11th November 2000, Armistice Day and full moon—what I would call an auspicious day. We had waited since 8:30 a.m. for a break in the clouds and now, at 3 p.m., there was little daylight left and only one opportunity to jump—NOW!

The instructor had said that the brain seizes up, failing to assimilate new information, because a part of you believes you are going to die. I disagreed with him. Admittedly, it does seem like absolute madness to choose to leap out of an aircraft which is perfectly sound and plummet to earth at an astounding 120 miles per hour. For a long time I had had a yen to do just that, in the form of a tandem skydive. I heard that charities encourage people to do some crazy, daredevil events, raising sponsorship on the way, and the charity which came to my attention was Marie Curie Cancer Care, who provide at-home care for terminally ill cancer patients. I raised nearly £700 by the time of the jump, so many thanks to all those who contributed.

We “Alexander” people know all about letting go, trusting that the new space created by releasing will be filled by something new and so allow the unknown or unfamiliar to emerge. It can be a scary, confusing experience, but clipped to the chest of my skydive partner who had over 5,000 skydives to his credit, I felt no fear. Why should I, after all? Billy was not afraid; in fact I think he was a little bored at the thought of yet another one-off jump with someone who was not intending to take this up as a future sport.

The brain does not seize up, but I was bombarded with so many new sensory experiences in a fantastically short time that it is just not possible to assimilate them all or remember the sequence of events clearly. Billy and I edged our way to the gaping side of the Cessna with me strapped to his chest, sitting between his legs. I swung my legs outside, tucking them behind me and below the floor of the aircraft, arched my back so that my head was on Billy's shoulder, then fell forward into space. I yelled with

Letting Go With a Difference!

exhilaration as wind roared past, hardly realizing that the “wind” was in fact the effect of falling. With arms and legs spread-eagled, it was as if I were suspended in space, not falling at all, certainly not plummeting to earth at 120 m.p.h. Time stood still and 20 seconds were filled with a wealth of sensations and new experiences which will last a lifetime or until memory fades. When the parachute canopy was opened, the rapid deceleration drew another yell of surprise from my belly. The next five and a half minutes drifted by almost endlessly, as the earth spiralled upwards, gradually magnifying details into growing reality until suddenly everything became properly life-size. The ground was now approaching at a startling speed. Owing to our combined weight and lack of headwind, which meant that we could not achieve a last-minute lift in the canopy, we opted for a sliding landing, rather than a stand-up one. For the first and only time I felt a moment of anxiety as my imagination ran forward to twisted or broken ankles, or jarred spine, but seconds later we were sliding onto our bottoms on spongy, waterlogged grass. The video cameraman appeared on the scene to record my instant response and never before have I heard my own voice come from so deep in my boots.

And the other landing? I had been at another set of crossroads in my life where I had to make a step in a new direction. I was living in the North of Scotland and it was time to move, somewhere else from where I was, but it could be almost anywhere. A step into the unknown. After free-falling for some months, I landed in the West of Ireland, near Galway, where I am now building up a private practice.

Post Script: Nothing is as we expect or plan. My favorite joke these days is: Question: How do you make God laugh? Answer: By telling him your plans! Sadly, my mother had a severe stroke in August 2001, but became even more seriously ill in November. I have therefore returned to Scotland to be close to both my parents. She decided to continue in this sphere meantime, has stabilized well, and is now adapting to a new life in a nursing home. ☺

Editor's note: As this article was originally submitted before our last AGM, Kathleen has kindly sent along this update.

Points of Mindful Speech:

Speak slowly
Enunciate clearly
Listen to yourself
Listen to others
Pay attention to space
Simplify

courtesy of Richard White, AT student

In Memoriam: Dr. David Garlick (1933-2002)

Jeremy Chance

AT teacher and former editor, DIRECTION Journal

Editor's note: This article was adapted from Jeremy's posting to the AlexTech email forum in April.

It is with sadness we note that Dr. David Garlick passed away of cancer in Sydney, Australia, on Wednesday April 10th, at the age of 69. He had been diagnosed with liver cancer earlier this year, but forbade anyone to know of his condition. He undertook a treatment of chemotherapy and finally stopped his work just 10 days before his death.

David trained with Christine "Kri" Ackers from 1990 through to 1995, and subsequently he continued to attend the course once a week to teach anatomy and physiology to the trainees. He was also a physiologist and medical research scientist at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. His interest in the Alexander Technique led to a number of projects, including the planning of a major symposium of scientists to consider "postural mechanisms," many extended research experiments based on Alexander's work, and an active involvement in supporting and advising the Alexander community, both in Australia and internationally.

Many of us will remember his dry, laconic humor in presenting his work at several of the International Congresses—particularly his brilliant morning lectures at the 1988 Brighton Congress. He was himself the Director of the 1994 International Congress of Teachers in Sydney. At the conference he interested a number of local scientists in the work and was subsequently quite active in supporting, attending, and presenting at later Congresses.

In fact it was David's work, way back in 1983, that first inspired me to start *DIRECTION*. David had initiated several research projects on the Alexander Technique at the time, and I realized that bringing this work to the attention of the wider Alexander community of teachers would be a worthwhile project for a junior teacher like me, as I was at the time. In every issue of *DIRECTION* since the first, David has contributed "The Garlick Report." Many training schools have used those articles as a guide for studying relevant physiological information in relation to Alexander's discoveries.

I am sure we will be reading more more about the life and times of Dr. David Garlick. It's a platitude, but it is also actually true, to say that his death is a real loss to the Alexander community. ☺



ATI's Ninth AGM and Conference Spanish Point, Ireland October 21–25, 2001

*Richard Brennan
ATI Teaching Member, Ireland*

Stories by candlelight, crashing waves, cliff walks, uplifting conversations, windblown hair, flowing business, warm sand, laughter during dinner, thought-provoking questions at workshops, and the graciousness and courtesy of the Irish people were just some of the images that the attendees were left with after ATI's Ninth Annual General Meeting and Conference. For me, it was the warmth of people's hearts and a willingness to learn and change that left an impression with me.

The idea for this AGM came at the end of the last year's conference when an overwhelming majority voted to return to the wonderful location of Spanish Point on the West Coast of Ireland for a second year running. The 2000 AGM had been a milestone in the history of the organization, as it was the first ATI meeting on European soil; all of the 70 Alexander teachers who participated had a remarkable week of inspiring workshops, thought-provoking talks, and hands-on sessions. On more than one occasion I heard that this was the kind of gathering that many people had been waiting for!

For me, personally, the 2001 conference from the start had a different, more intimate feeling. With first the foot-and-mouth crisis and then the World Trade Center catastrophe, understandably many people were very wary about traveling. However, about 45 people did manage to find their way to Spanish Point from all parts of the globe, including Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Switzerland, the UK, and the USA. The hotel's staff were just as welcoming, if not more so, as they had been the previous year, and they were even more efficient. In fact the whole conference just flowed with ease—there just weren't any problems—perhaps because most people were familiar with the hotel or all the initial teething of the year-before problems had disappeared. Or perhaps the events of September 11th were still fresh in people's minds and the small differences between people were no longer important.

The theme of the 2001 conference was "Stories That We Share—Recognizing and Celebrating the Diversity of Our Teaching." Ever since I heard about the Alexander Technique in the early eighties, I have always had the feeling that teachers were adamant that there was a right way and a wrong way of teaching and practicing the Technique. Here was a chance not only to tolerate or accept grudgingly each other's different ways of teaching, but actually to CELEBRATE the different styles and personalities. After all, would not the Technique be incredibly dull and boring if there were only one style or one way of teaching it?

This year the participants descended on Sunday morning into a fog-bound Shannon Airport, but on being transported to the hotel soon found a warm, sunny coastline with deep blue water and not a cloud in sight waiting for them. After registration everyone enjoyed the perfect weather by sitting out in the sun with a long cool drink, taking a leisurely walk along the coast or take the option of the organized trip to the Burren—a stunning and unique limestone landscape dotted with castles and ancient standing stones and burial chambers.

The conference started with a workshop led by Cathy Madden, and at the first of many four-course suppers by candlelight there was the annual awards ceremony followed by a very entertaining keynote speech from Ireland's first-ever Alexander teacher, Frank Kennedy. This was followed by a concert from one of Ireland's best-known traditional musicians, Sean Tirrell. The atmosphere soon encouraged everyone to relax, ready to enjoy the next four days. The day ended in the bar as people met old friends as well as making new ones.

After breakfast on Monday, the day's activities started with a welcome to the ATI business meeting with reports and a summary of topics due to be discussed that week. This was followed by a workshop given by Elisabeth Walker, which included many little stories, and she showed photos of Alexander himself. There were plenty of questions and answers flowing throughout the demonstrations.

The afternoon commenced with a choice between a language panel facilitated by Graham Elliott and Catherine Kettrick and a teaching exchange. The language panel discussed the problems that non-English speaking conference participants were experiencing and some solutions to improving communication were found. After a short break there was a choice of workshops given by Lucia Walker entitled "Moving and Being Moved"; Alice Pryor on using a video camera during teaching; and myself where a group of teachers shared ideas about how to introduce the Technique to new people without the use of confusing jargon.



The Burren, drawing by Raewyn Haywood

After another candle-lit supper practically everyone participated in an Irish step-dancing session with Mary Clancy. If nothing else everyone had a good laugh and I think a few dances were learned as well. People then refreshed themselves in the hotel bar and a large crowd soon gathered around a newly lit peat fire.

Tuesday started with a business meeting and was followed by a special presentation from Elisabeth Walker, facilitated by Don White. This was an open forum where many teachers asked questions and Elisabeth talked in depth of her training with F.M. Alexander and how the teaching has developed over the years.

After lunch, Rosa Luisa Rossi presented a fascinating teaching forus entitled "An Exploration of the Diversity of our Methods" during which Peter Ribeaux, Lucia Walker, and Tommy Thompson all demonstrated their differ-

2001 AGM and Conference

ent styles of teaching and then explained and answered questions about the very different ways that they liked to teach. People came away with the feeling that all very different ways could help a pupil to learn different aspects of the Technique.

After the break two more presenters, David Bainbridge and Philip Cotton, gave two more workshops. David's workshop was entitled "Evolution: The Gravity of the Situation," in which he took twenty people through the Dart procedures in search of chocolate! Phillip's on the other hand explored multi-perceptual recognition of un-balanced use. The afternoon concluded with another teaching exchange where teachers had the opportunity to share hands-on work with other teachers.

After supper the day concluded with a candle-lit meeting entitled "Tales That We Teach." Funny, sad, interesting, and intriguing stories started to emerge from many teachers—from stories that had happened to them while teaching, to stories that they tell to help their pupils understand certain principles of the Technique.

Wednesday started off with a choice of a teaching exchange or Peter Ribeaux's workshop entitled "Teaching the Use of the Self, Doing and Non-doing, Words and Hands" where teachers explored different thoughts as they put hands on and then discussed the results.

Then two business meetings (one before, then one after lunch) followed to discuss the sponsoring process, the code of ethics, and the revision of the bylaws. There was a high participation and most people I think felt very much a part of ATI's decision-making process. The afternoon concluded with David Mill's presentation entitled "Go to I Know Not Where and Bring Back I Do Not Know What," and another teaching exchange.

After dinner, Mairtin O'Connor and friends, wonderful traditional Irish musicians, entertained everyone for over three hours with music, song, and dance around the peat fire. A fair number of participants also volunteered their own song that made the last night so very special.

The last day was a day of farewells. Cathy Madden's closing circle consisted of everyone meeting each other in appreciation of what they had contributed to these wonderful five days. Strangers who met at the beginning of the week left as friends and old friends became even better friends. Bags were packed, taxis ordered, and staff thanked, and then people departed with fond memories that would not fade with time.

Alexander Technique International's 10th Annual General Meeting, 9–13 November 2002, will be held at Bon Secours Spiritual Center in Marriottsville, Maryland USA, and all are welcome. Bon Secours has a website at: www.bonsecours.org/bssc. For full details, please contact Alexander Technique International, 1692 Massachusetts Ave. 3rd Floor, Cambridge, MA 02138 USA. Email: usa@ati-net.com. ☺

The cardinal sin of communication, which compromises all speech and relationship, is assuming that what was said is what was heard. To avoid this, you must ask, observe, inquire, discuss, and listen for what the other person understands.

**Matthew Budd, M.D., and Larry Rothstein, M.D.,
You Are What You Say, p. 141**

A Report from the Language Panel at the 2001 AGM

*Graham Elliott
ATI Teaching Member, England*

The Language Panel took place at our Irish AGM/Conference on Monday, 26th October, 2001. The panel members were Catherine Kettrick, Rosa Luisa Rossi, and Yuzuru Katagiri, and Graham Elliott facilitated.

We saw this panel as exploratory and had planned accordingly. After a brief introduction from Graham, panel members introduced themselves in a non-English language. Yuzuru went first in Japanese, then Catherine in American Sign Language, and Rosa Luisa in Swiss German. We invited the group to observe and offer comments afterwards.

Yuzuru said he talked in a less structured way than planned; knowing that people didn't understand, he was carried along by the language. Catherine found it very strange to sign to people, knowing they weren't understanding. Rosa Luisa forgot we couldn't understand. Others commented on noticing the beauty of the languages, but frustration at not understanding. Someone noticed people look different and more comfortable speaking their own language.

Does language affect our use?

We then posed the question: Does language affect our use? Rosa Luisa volunteered to give a short prepared talk on the Technique in Italian, Swiss German, French, and finally English. Graham asked

people to notice and share any observations about her use.

A wide range of comments ensued! In Italian she was seen as light, staccato, up, as if she was dancing. In Swiss German it was bouncy, childlike, down, and as if she were cooking. French was seen as airy, very warm, and flat, and English as flat, solid, and with almost no movement. Others said the differences were smaller than they might have been, that she smiled less and less as the languages changed. The concepts in English aren't necessarily the same as in other languages, both because of the language but also because of the different cultures.

There was discussion on the translation problem because of this—Yuzuru pointed out that in Japan, the culture is not to talk about feelings so you have to overcome cultural norms when translating feeling issues. Words take a different significance. Students have to overcome their cultural resistance to talk about feelings.

Language Panel Report

This sharing of ideas led neatly into our next activity—teaching through a translator, which, in an international organization like ATI, we all get a chance to do at least at our international workshops. Yuriko Ishii had bravely volunteered to do a teaching demonstration in Japanese with Yuzuru translating to a volunteer pupil—Jim Froelich volunteered.

Jim commented that it was like listening to two radio stations, so it was difficult to stay in touch. The time lag between the words and the translation made him feel lost at times. He felt a little ill at ease hearing through a translator.

Yuzuru started positioned in front of Jim—a place he later said he would have avoided from experience. It was suggested he move out of sight of the pupil and this seemed to improve things. For Yuriko it was very important to be clear what she wanted to say—she thought very carefully before speaking. Would we all perhaps do this? Several said they would love to be in Jim's place—what an interesting situation! Many confirmed that language is very habitual, prompting the question of how aware we all are of our language habits.

We noticed that waiting for the translation is very supportive and makes you slow down. Catherine pointed out that Marj Barstow had worked with deaf and hearing people. When she gave her famous “There you go!” the interpreter was often behind, so by the time they caught up, the pupil had gone! Yuzuru suggested it was not good to work just on the linguistic level. Jim said we rely a lot on voice and could certainly be more visual.

There was a strong sense that we could all learn much from being in all three roles.

We ended by inviting thoughts on what members would like from ATI in the context of language—Graham pointed out that as an international organization, it was important that we welcome members from all language backgrounds and make their participation in ATI affairs as easy as possible.

In French, and probably other languages too, the way of thinking is different—some English phrases or sentences would not reflect a suitable way of saying something. This makes translation a challenging task. Are we English speakers able to express ourselves in a way that minimizes such difficulties? In Japanese, translation has to be a compromise between habitual Japanese and artificial constructs to get the message over. Too much habit misses too much, but too much artificiality turns people away.

Teachers visiting other countries could give examples of phrases they regularly use so that translators could prepare good ways of saying these things. We could prepare other language versions of Alexander jargon. We could invite members from other language backgrounds to answer the question: How do you experience the Alexander Technique in your own language—then translate and publish the answers in English.

Graham thanked panel, volunteers, and all present for their help in making this panel function well. He expressed the hope that all would take their ideas further, try things out, and share results, while he would take what we had done into the Language Committee which will hopefully be confirmed soon as an ad hoc ATI Committee. ☺

Decoding Silence: The Stories Behind Misuse

Jano Cohen
ATI Teaching Member, USA

Author's note: I was scheduled to present a workshop of this title at the October 2001 AGM in Ireland. I was unable to attend, so in submitting this article to the ExChange, I am giving myself the liberty of writing at more length and with more detail than I could have offered in the allotted timeframe at the Conference.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank: my students who were so willing to contribute their stories to this paper as well as all of my students who have continued to allow me to explore new teaching territory; my colleagues, Rachel Mausner and Diane Gaary, who gave me invaluable editorial suggestions (some of which I will have to make use of in the future) as well as confidence in my ideas; and two of my students who are psychotherapists, Alyson Adler and Andrea Solomon, who looked over my work for the integrity of the psychological information and gave me their enthusiastic support.

Preface

The inspiration for writing this article came from my reading of the short story "Silence," from the anthology *First Snow on Fuji* by Yasunari Kawabata, translated by Michael Emmerich. It propelled me into thinking over how teaching the Alexander Technique (henceforth, "AT") has begun to include helping students overcome patterns of misuse by acknowledging the "stories," the emotional issues and history behind those patterns.

I realize that a discussion of an emotional component (and personal histories of students) of the teaching of AT will undoubtedly bring up questions and concerns about *a*) the ethics of working with this component, *b*) the delineation between AT and psychotherapy, *c*) what guidelines can be put in place to ensure that teachers are applying the principles of AT, *d*) how to determine when and how to work with this component, and *e*) how to train teachers to handle this material.

I cannot possibly address all of these questions in the scope of this article. However, I wish to open up an inquiry into this realm by discussing some of my own experiences with teaching and the issues that have presented themselves. These issues run through my paper, particularly in the conclusion. Anyone who teaches AT has encountered similar situations. All teachers devise their own ways of handling the needs of their students. I invite my audience to share your own experiences, ideas, questions, or proposals. You may send your responses to janocohen@comcast.net or 1512 Sheffield Lane, Wynnewood, PA 19096-3727, or attend my workshop at ATI's 2002 AGM and Conference.

This article may meander a bit, mirroring my style of teaching. It will not be an investigation into the questions I listed above. I intend to respond to the content of "Silence" with ideas I feel are relevant to teaching AT. A

Decoding Silence: The Stories Behind Misuse

few case examples from my private practice will be used to illustrate some ways I have of working with the stories that have come up in people's lessons while applying the principles of AT. Some guidelines I follow will emerge within the descriptions. The examples I have chosen are somewhat unusual cases. I am using them to make my points clear, but any student's experience could be used to show the relationships between our past histories and our patterns of use and misuse. To help me understand and explain some of the psychological issues that I have encountered, I have done some reading in and have given relevant definitions for terms that are commonly used in that field.

The Story

What is teaching really, but the sharing of stories—experiences and instructive information? Both the teacher and the student offer what they know, what interests them. The difference between them is that the teacher only shares information for the purpose of helping the student and the teacher is responsible for working to understand what the student wants to get from an AT lesson and using that understanding to facilitate that aim.

As teachers, we sometimes “decode” or interpret a student's behavior and language to determine what the student's goals are and how they are being interfered with by their unconscious habitual patterns, their “misuse of the self.” A student is often “silent” about the history behind their misuse—the “reasons” they think and move the way they do. Sometimes memories of important events in their history are so hidden that a student is either unaware of these events or unaware of the effect on their present behavior.

When I read “Silence,” I was impressed by its exposure of the challenge we all have in trying to understand another person's stories, or even our own. The story is about a novelist who has a stroke and can no longer speak nor write. His daughter is taking care of him, since he lives alone. The narrator comes to visit him and speaks with the daughter.

The narrator wonders whether or not the novelist might be avoiding communication by not finding some way to communicate. In an AT lesson, a student may choose to communicate or not at any time. It is a personal choice we are always making throughout our lives to communicate, to reveal ourselves, to take the risk to make a request and expose a desire or a need for something.

The narrator states that “However ambiguous words may be, they are certainly much easier to understand than clumsy body language or awkward gestures.” We can certainly easily misinterpret one another when we “read between the lines” in our verbal communication or in our “body language.” One way to avoid misunderstanding is to discuss in words what we are experiencing in movement, sensation, or observation. We can work towards understanding, knowing that we can never directly access another person’s experiences. This is not always the best approach for every student.

In an AT lesson, a student may choose to communicate or not at any time. It is a personal choice we are making throughout our lives to communicate, to reveal ourselves, to take the risk to make a request and expose a desire or a need for something.

As the narrator travels to visit the novelist, a taxicab driver tells him that recently the ghost of a beautiful young woman has been appearing in the backseats of cars as they pass a crematorium. She seems to disappear when the car reaches a residential area as if she has been trying to get home. “Judging from the way he spoke, he had repeated the story often enough to make

him tired of telling it.” “And from what I hear it’s not like you stop the car and she gets in, either. You don’t know when she gets in. The driver starts feeling a little weird and turns around, and there’s this young woman in the cab. But since she’s a ghost, there’s no reflection of her in the rear-view mirror.”

I do not know what the author’s intention is, but the ghost could represent our incessant habitual patterns and unpleasant memories of past experiences. They are invisible to us, we don’t notice when they are created. Certain events in our lives were unpleasant, painful, or frightening—like ghosts might be. We often don’t like to look at these types of memories. We don’t like to feel pain, fear, or shame. We wish they would just “get out.”

“...he [the writer] had himself become a sort of living ghost.” “I [the narrator] was perfectly aware that I myself might die at any moment....” I believe that Kawabata is pointing out how each one of us could become a ghost. We could become victimized by traumatizing events from our past, poor health, or poor caring for ourselves. We could lose the will or ability to communicate and be intimate with someone else. It then behooves all of us to have empathy for people who are suffering as a result of painful experiences. We AT teachers could have a way to interpret our students’ misuse in a deeper way. Then we can help them overcome this misuse.

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The daughter tells the narrator that her father once wrote a novel about a young man who wanted to be a writer. The young man became insane and was sent to live in a mental institution. He was only allowed paper to write with—pens were considered to be dangerous. Every day he wrote with an invisible pen, but nothing appeared on the paper. When his mother came to visit him, she would read the blank paper to him. She made up stories about his life and told it to him over and over again. Both she and her son felt better, as if her son weren't suffering mental illness.

While the son is an extreme example of functioning under mental dysfunction, all of us have limitations and a unique way of communicating. Can anyone ever communicate for another person successfully? Do we create and recreate our own fictional realities when we try to understand people? We make assumptions about what other people are experiencing. I believe we do not listen closely enough to what people are saying. It takes skill to look for clues about what a person is actually feeling.

When the writer himself has had a stroke and can no longer speak or write, his daughter speaks for him, interpreting his silence. She claims she knows what he is saying. She is thinking about writing the novel she thinks her father wants to write about himself. The narrator wonders if she is becoming her father. The daughter's behavior reminds me of what can happen when well-intentioned people lose their boundaries.¹ She has taken over actions for her father.

In AT lessons we may encounter people who have trouble maintaining boundaries. (For example, they may lose the clarity of teacher and student roles, expecting the teacher to provide another function, or having a sensation that a teacher is “invading” their body yet not being able to say something about it.) Sometimes this trouble comes from having had parents who were very controlling or abusive. As children, they had their boundaries intruded upon. They then have trouble maintaining their boundaries in other situations. They can also take on their parents' attributes, internalizing their parents' belief systems and behavior patterns. Later, this can interfere with their ability as adults to interpret behavior by people other than their parents. They substitute the memories they have for what is actually happening with the people they are interacting with in the present moment. This is a type of transference.²

As AT teachers, we must hold our own boundaries and carefully maintain our professional roles. This is a form of inhibition. To be able to help our students create new ones for themselves we must not force our own personal belief systems, habits of misuse, or personal needs onto our students. Because of the nature of the roles of teacher and student, there

is an inherent danger of abuse of power that could be damaging for the student. I discuss this more fully in my conclusion.

As AT teachers, I believe our role is to support the building of a student's self-awareness by acting as witness and listener. We draw attention to the experiences our students are having and help them develop the ability to make changes in their use if they choose. We can notice patterns of use and misuse and the thought patterns that go with them. We can help people decode the silence created by reserve, fear, and shame to look at difficult issues. We have many tools we can use. We can hold up a mirror for our students so that they can see themselves (literally and figuratively), so that they can see any ghosts in the back seat. I think we can develop tools to "read a student's mind" by observing the quality and direction of movement. We can witness physical reactions to ideas and tasks. We can ask questions to determine the relevance of our observations. We can ask direct questions about what happened in the past to help students find the connection between their reactions to experiences and their patterns of misuse.

These tools can be helpful when the AT teacher respects the limitations of the Technique as well as their own interpersonal skill level with these tools. It is always safer to work with this material with a student who has had or is having psychological counseling or therapy and the teacher must always have the consent of the student to work on this material at all.

Students vary in how much they want to disclose about themselves. Sometimes a student will say that they can't "hide" anything from me, but that they feel safe with me. They tell me they feel relieved to know that someone can perceive what they are experiencing and help them give names to what it is. They know I won't invade their privacy. I don't try to find out things. Sometimes a student doesn't want to share inner thoughts and feelings. That must be respected. Sometimes there are stories from the past that a student has been forbidden to tell. Students must never be pushed into territory that they aren't ready to handle or don't want to go into. I only work with what they present—what they want to improve for their physical comfort or skill improvement.

As an example of the treacherous nature of disclosure, I'll describe an experience I had. I once choreographed a dance for two dancers, two singers and myself called "In the Silence of Memory, Sound Would Be Pain." I asked the performers to tell me their personal experiences of trauma. All the stories turned out to be about sexual abuse. When it came to the performance, members of the audience were horrified, upset, or thankful for the exposure of the issue. Some cried, some walked out. A reviewer

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wanted to shut down my production. I was shocked by the strength and variation of the responses. I am more careful now with how I share that type of material.

But I also learned during the process of making the dance and in subsequent experiences teaching that people are often silent about pain and it stays hidden in their bodies. It is sometimes frightening to break the silence; but ultimately, as time goes on, and the old coping mechanisms are replaced by new ones, healing takes place. A new level of integration is then possible and a person can experience thoughts, feelings, and movements that are appropriate for the present moment. More honesty and intimacy is possible for them. It can be worth breaking the silence.

When I am teaching there are times when I sense that I need to address a “story” behind students’ behavior to improve their awareness. Students usually solicit my help to change how they use themselves physically. They may either want to improve how they perform an activity or to undo habitual tension patterns. It is when I get an indication that the usual tools aren’t working well that I stop and change what I am doing. It can be a moment either when I approach them or when I touch them that they seem to move away from me or in the opposite direction from the one I am indicating. Their whole body may tense up or contract. This is a form of startle response to a stimulus, the stimulus being my touch or my presentation of an idea.

Sometimes students are unaware that this is happening. They do not realize that there is a visible physical component to what they are experiencing on an emotional level. Or they may not realize that there is an emotional component to what they are experiencing physically. They might not notice that they were not actually following my directions. Some students, however, are instantly aware when they are having an emotional response to a lesson. Some students know before they begin studying AT that increased awareness of their body invokes emotional issues that they are already exploring in a therapeutic environment.

The physical pattern of tension may be similar to the one that occurs when a student “tries to be right,” to “do” the directions, or to try to “stand up straight.” However, an emotional reaction looks different. Student’s faces may become blank, or they may look withdrawn, afraid, or angry. Students may express a fear of “losing control” when they experience a release of tension (their holding pattern). A student may also spontaneously burst into tears or punch or kick out in a sudden outburst of anger. This can become frightening or embarrassing for some students (and for some teachers as well).

At a moment like this in a lesson, I stop the action. I center myself, inhibit and direct myself. I stop the teaching process I was using and ask myself and my student whatever questions seem helpful to find out what is going on and what would be in the student's best interest to do in this context. I watch the student closely to see what I have permission to do. It is important to give the student a sense of control and safety, to make the choice to continue to explore at this moment. A student's own learning style and sensitivity must be taken into consideration.

Some of the tools I have used in those situations include:

- 1) Stopping and pointing out the physical reaction I have noticed, and then proceeding with the lesson.
- 2) If a reaction continues to recur, I give the student some choices on how we can modify how we're working. The choices I have offered are:
 - a) Engaging in a new activity.
 - b) Making the activity more removed from the problematic stimulus in some way – (e.g., touching a cup instead of a violin).
 - c) Asking the student to go somewhere different in space (e.g., cross the room, sit down, look out the window, etc.).
 - d) Changing the direction from which I approach the student.
 - e) Using a different placement of my hands.
 - f) Using a different amount of pressure (lighter or stronger).
 - g) Proceeding more slowly with our process and/or our movement.
 - h) Explaining more specifically or in different words what I am suggesting or what I am describing.
 - i) Looking at anatomical pictures to clear up any misunderstanding about the body ("body mapping"—please refer to this work developed by Barbara and Bill Conable).
 - j) Having the student put her hands on me so I can demonstrate with my body what she doing physically.
 - k) Asking the student to engage in his habitual tightening pattern consciously, even to the point of exaggeration, to observe the experience, then to move out of it when he is ready.
 - l) Asking the student to give her own directions and see what happens.
 - m) Giving the directions to the student verbally instead of using touch.
- 3) Discussing possible reasons for his reactions by first identifying whether he is reacting to my touch, my position in space, the activity, or the context of the activity, then by exploring the feelings and thoughts that arose.

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To further illustrate my methodology, I'll describe some lessons I gave to three students. I will give them each fictitious names to protect their privacy, but I have received their permission to publish this material.

The three examples differ from each other in the way their past experiences and psychological makeup affects their use. I have put them in a certain order to demonstrate the different levels of intervention I have applied in their lessons and have revealed more and more details from their "stories."

Student A: Maribelle

Maribelle has been a student of mine for several years. She was already working with a therapist that specialized in healing the "inner child." She came to me originally for back pain that quickly resolved. She quickly determined that AT worked well in conjunction with her therapy to help her with her "body, mind, and spirit development."

We began to work on helping her reduce her tension in stressful situations. She often had neck and shoulder pain whenever something or someone was upsetting her. During one of her lessons, I gave her some time lying down. When I touched her head and neck and asked her to give herself some silent directions, she began telling me a story about some trouble she was having with some alcoholic friends. She started tensing up her neck instead of following my directions and began experiencing neck pain. I then sought to help her become aware of how she was tightening her muscles and ask herself what she was thinking. I listened carefully to what she said and began to ask her questions that followed each response. My selection of questions was guided by whether she could continue to follow my directions to free her neck as she answered. My goal was to allow her to discover her own thinking process, not to solve her emotional problems. This was not to be "therapy."

She first noticed that she was rushing to get the words out so that she wouldn't bother me. She said, "What I say isn't important. I'm not supposed to speak." When I asked her what feelings these statements brought up, she answered "sadness and shame" and that she felt childlike. As she told me this, she tightened up her neck even more and said, "That was very big!" We both felt this was a big clue to her pattern of misuse. She freed her neck a bit then continued on with her story about her friends. She tightened her neck again. I asked her to ask her body for an answer to "What I say isn't important." She said, "I do have something to say—something important to contribute." She was able to free her neck more after that statement. I pointed out that this statement sounded like an

adult voice, and perhaps she could trust that voice to answer her habitual reactions. Then we asked her deeper child voice if it had an answer, too. She then said that these friends had let her down on several occasions when they were supposed to do some things with her. The thoughts that then came out were “What I do isn’t important. Being with me isn’t important.” As I continued to give her AT directions through my touch, she answered her friends, “That was mean how you treated me. I am worth knowing. I am worth being with. I am here.” All at once she released throughout her body, expressing joy and relief. She wanted to “break out the champagne!”

Maribelle has continued to take lessons. We continue to work with her unconscious habitual thought processes when we are not working on improving her physical coordination for activities of daily living.

Student B: Elizabeth

After several years of studying Alexander Technique, Elizabeth began having episodes of panic when she felt extreme terror and anxiety. Her anxiety made receiving hands-on work more difficult and brought out particular activities that were stressful to study. She began seeing a psychotherapist who diagnosed her with a dissociative disorder.³ When she explained how her past experiences and psychological makeup were affecting her, it became easier for me to understand the process she was going through. I had to become very sensitive to her state of mind. I created new methods for teaching her that were more appropriate to her needs.

In our lessons together we have worked with a variety of seated activities that have brought out a high level of distress. It was always her choice which activities we explored. In one lesson Elizabeth chose to explore sitting and typing at a computer. This proved to be challenging for her.

Elizabeth is a person who in other situations moves with ease and grace. As she sat down to begin typing, her whole body became extremely tense and her breathing became very shallow. She reported that she had been experiencing a lot of tension at the computer when she was tackling work that made her especially anxious. She had discovered that she could undo this tension pattern when she stopped doing that activity and switched to gardening. Gardening is a very carefree activity for her. She enjoys the movement and bringing awareness to this movement. She experiences an immediate change in her mental and emotional state.

At previous lessons, when we had worked with Elizabeth sitting and reading, we had discovered that she reacted to my touch with fear and excess tension. She asked me to take my hands away. She explained to me that she had some vague memories of having been sexually abused while she was sitting down. She had been discussing this with a psychotherapist, but felt that I needed to know that her physical behavior was a result of her dissociative pattern. This dissociative pattern developed as a reaction to her childhood experiences. She explained that she had had years of traumatic experiences with relatives who were violent with her. Her ability to go into dissociative states had kept her able to function well in society. However, it also kept her from being comfortable in her body and from being able to integrate all the “parts” of her self. She began a long journey of building awareness and experimenting with changes with her therapist and with me.

To help Elizabeth, we alternated between using technical tools of the AT and emotional awareness discussions. It was up to Elizabeth to monitor her own state of mind and determine from moment to moment what activity to explore and when to disclose her thoughts and feeling state. In each activity we worked with the physical tools of having her balance her head and torso squarely over her sit bones while she sat. We had her notice which situa-

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tions brought up emotional discomfort and which did not. I helped her notice that she pulled her head forward towards the computer screen as soon as she initiated her activity. She noticed how much anxiety she experienced at the same moment. As we worked we realized that trying to bring awareness into her lower body or releasing into the ground made her extremely anxious as well.

When anxiety like this rose up in her, it was impossible for me to continue to touch her, she would tighten up even more. I usually continued with verbal instruction or switched the activity. Once, when we switched to driving, thinking this would be an innocuous activity, we discovered that she there was yet another story behind her discomfort with driving. She knew she got tense when she drove and I clearly observed this as soon as she sat down in the car. I helped her move into the car and turn on the ignition, pointing out that she could keep moving her whole body the whole time. When I joined her by getting into the passenger's seat to help her from inside the car, her whole body tensed up all over again and she seemed to panic. I asked her if something dangerous had happened to her in a car. She said, there was and "I hate cars. I hate driving. It's worse when someone else is driving." I didn't ask her what had happened and she did not want to explain it to me. However, she felt that it had been valuable to her to realize that there was an experience from her past that was causing her distress in the car. She felt that accepting the sensations of the feelings helped her move somewhat better and that this was as much change as she could tolerate at this moment.

It appears that discovering and acknowledging the stories behind a pattern can sometimes be freeing in itself. It helps avoid self-judgment when a student can see why something has been so difficult to change. The technical tools are there to help when a person can emotionally tolerate the change.

Student C: Emily

Emily has been studying with me for 15 years. When she first came to me, she wanted to exercise to get over her postural habits and heavy abdomen that developed after she had her first child. She soon dropped the exercise portion of the work and focused on AT and massage. She was very interested in the philosophy of AT, but was not in touch with the physical sensations in her body and did not retain the information on a kinesthetic level. She was a highly functioning business executive in her father's company. When her father's company went bankrupt, she retired

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to have two more children and stopped her AT lessons and massages. Two years later, she recommenced taking AT lessons with a whole new approach to the experience. She had completely changed her relationship to her body and could experience the movement. She began studying Pilates exercise in another studio.

Emily chose to study her movement patterns and how they relate to her psychological habits. She was not in therapy but had begun to become aware of how thoughts about her family were affecting her use. She began to spontaneously describe her thoughts to me while I directed her with hands on. After a while I could recognize which family member she was thinking about by how she was moving or speaking.

Soon, more issues began to arise during the lessons. She told me she used to write poetry in college. She had gone through a painful time in college and had seen a therapist. She then dropped poetry and went into her father's clothing business. When she decided to pick up poetry again, we worked with her use as she sat and wrote. However, the activity that helped her most to write poetry was to have her talk about how she was afraid to write poetry, feeling that it was against her parents' wishes.

When her nine-year-old daughter developed very dangerous food allergies, she and her daughter started seeing a psychologist. She is now in intensive therapy, seeing this therapist three times a week. When her daughter suddenly died of anaphylactic shock in her arms, she was thrown into both post-traumatic stress⁴ and mourning. The stress of this trauma also brought out all the conflicts she had had with her own nuclear family. She learned that she had actually lived in a dissociated state most of her life. She pulled away from experiencing the world as it was. She had been functioning by adapting to her parents' wishes and ideas.

I first discovered the level of her dissociation (after years of lessons with her) while I was giving her a lying-down lesson. As I touched her arm to move it away from her side, she pulled back and said it felt like I was invading her. I immediately took my hands off and stepped away from her. I realized that I needed to change methods in order to teach her. I suggested that we work with verbal directions instead of hands-on experiences. To give her more space, I sat on the windowsill facing her. I suggested that she explore the boundary where her body ended so that she could keep me separate from her. When I suggested that she feel her skin, it was a revelation to her— weird, yet somehow comforting. It was upsetting to her that she wasn't comfortable "inside her own skin."

When I asked her to hold and describe a piece of pottery my mother had made, she became very distraught. She couldn't bear to acknowledge any associations with art-making and sensation. She also couldn't share the "reality" of the vase with me. She shared with me that her mother had been a painter, but had given up painting to please her husband and raise a family.

Her parents had also repeatedly disputed experiences and feelings she had throughout her childhood. In a lesson where I asked her to sit on a chair, she couldn't let herself experience the sensation of the chair, it sent her into feelings of disgust and discomfort. When I asked her to describe the chair, she could only describe its function. I described the chair for her and asked her if she saw the same chair. She said that she did, but that she didn't really believe that I was actually seeing the chair the same way.

In another lesson, we tried to figure out where she could stand in the room and be safe. I asked her to rearrange the furniture. This upset her. She realized she wasn't comfortable taking control of my room. I suppose you could say she had transferred to me the role her parents had taken—that of control, running the show in this room. She finally agreed to move the furniture, though, and set up the table on the diagonal so that she could

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stand in the corner behind it. Then she felt safe. In the next lesson I asked her to close the door. At first she couldn't do it. Then she felt that shutting the door again gave her control over the space and she felt more centered and safe with me. As soon as she let go of the door, she felt lost.

During another lesson, when I asked her to lie down on the table, she spontaneously told me a story that explained her discomfort with being touched and lying on the table. When she was a teenager, she had had nightmares, and her mother had asked her father to lie down with her in her bed until she fell asleep, but he would always fall asleep before she did. She stayed up, terrified that he would touch her by mistake. We concluded that this was what had made it difficult for her to experience her body when she was lying down and receiving my touch.

When she comes to an AT lesson now, she confronts her feelings of turmoil and desperate urge to escape with nowhere to go except back into disassociation. The urge to escape into disassociation is frightening to her, so she wants to work with me on being present and learning to experience her own body physically as well as the world around her. We have worked with her feeling her own skin, trusting the reality of a chair, feeling her own feet touching the floor. In her dissociated state, when she feels those things, she experiences terror, sadness, and sometimes disgust. We continue to monitor how she is reacting to my verbal suggestions and to my touch. It seems important not to push her too far or too fast, when the terror takes over and she dissociates further.

Periodically I check in with Emily to make sure she is clear about the boundaries between therapy and what we are doing together and if she is confused or uncomfortable about any aspect of our work. She has told me that I represent someone who might be able to understand her and that she feels quite safe and comfortable. She feels free to decide for herself when to stop disclosing her inner thoughts. I support her no matter what she is struggling with, yet my goal remains to help her reengage with her body for the purpose of wholeness and health. She knows I am her ally.

Conclusion

I believe that an AT teacher is truly an advocate for the self—someone's true nature, the self that one becomes when one lives by one's own values and goals. AT lessons are laboratories for experimentation, discovery, support, and acceptance—a haven of safety and support for the voyage towards truth, understanding, and choice. We must be the assistant pilot for this voyage, though. The pilot must always be the student.

To change we must choose to overcome our habits of misuse over and over again. It takes courage and perseverance, both for teachers and students. The contract between a teacher and a student to do this must be renewed over and over again, from moment to moment and from lesson to lesson.

A teacher and a student share a moment in time. They share their understanding of what happened in the past, what is happening now and what the student would like to have happen in the future. Teachers must be deeply aware of their own past and present and have a vision for their own future as well as the potential of the student.

When a student reacts to a stressful thought by having an uncomfortable emotion, the emotion usually precipitates a pattern of tension in their body and a moment of "blinking out"—a loss of physical and mental awareness. Some people even dissociate mentally and stop being "present." They travel to a compartment of their mind. They return to a memory from the past. The physical habit associated with that habit replicates itself over

and over again when those thoughts and emotions recur. Sometimes, when the experiencing of the emotions themselves is extremely distressing, somatization⁵ can occur. This can manifest as pain, numbness, tingling sensations, illness, loss of consciousness, muscular weakness, blindness, deafness, even muteness (which prevents the disclosure of “secrets”). Flashbacks, physical memories, can also occur and present a revivification (a reliving) of symptoms that were endured during a traumatic experience.

In moments like these an AT teacher can bring the student’s awareness to the present moment—to the experiences and sensations of the student’s body in motion or in stillness. It can then be helpful to identify the story that is behind the physical habit, to give names to the habit in all of its dimensions. If necessary, these habits

can then be brought back to the domain of a mental health practitioner, who has a specific contract (agreement) with the student to understand and resolve these stories from the past. AT teachers, for the most part, are not sufficiently trained to manage that type of contract. Sometimes a person has

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sufficient resources without seeing a psychologist or psychiatrist to resolve the issues on her own. However, I feel strongly that the patterns of psycho-physical misuse that come from emotional or physical abuse are usually so debilitating and confusing that a professional needs to be involved.

There are specific situations (particularly when a student has had traumatic experiences, has a psychological disorder, etc.) when proceeding with caution is especially necessary. According to a clinical psychology text,⁶ “Moving too rapidly in either assessment or treatment will generate increased resistance and may overwhelm a fragile client with excessive affect and impulse, experienced by the client as retraumatization.” A student must be free to express resistance⁷ or fear and know that he will be allowed to learn at a comfortable pace.

Other clues that caution is needed include an undue amount of transference, panic, evidence of dissociation, or a student’s belief that she is losing her identity, flashbacks,⁸ mention of amnesia, or acting-out during a lesson. An AT teacher must learn to handle moments like these with caution and tolerance while maintaining the safety of both teacher and student.

A teacher must also avoid reproducing a student’s past relationships through transference. It is important for AT teachers to be aware of their own psychological issues that might affect their relationship with a student. If these issues are not understood or managed by a teacher, they may be acted out in a countertransference⁹ reaction, which will be damaging to the student. If the professional relationship cannot be maintained, the student must be referred to an appropriate mental health professional and the teacher may want to consult one as well.

Another issue to watch out for with students with emotional issues is the introduction of any ideas or methods that contradict what a mental health professional may have given them. This could create a split in the transference, the reproduction of their family pattern in the professional relationship by causing a conflict between their parent figures of therapist and teacher. The student could become confused or feel unsafe. It would be ideal if AT teachers could collaborate with mental health professionals about students’ development to help avoid this. It would provide an opportunity for coordination of treatment as well as increased insight about a student.

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To choose what to do in an AT lesson, I rely on a combination of keen observation, intuition, quick inductive reasoning, and remembering experiences of techniques that have worked in other cases. I pay close attention to what is going on with a student at that particular moment and do what would work to achieve their objective. I try to ease them into a learning process gently. I call upon a great variety of teaching methods and make new ones up on the spot when necessary. My main guides are the principles of Technique, my caring, and my understanding to date of what it means to be a human being. I try to include an awareness of a person's personality, their history, their wishes and goals, their strengths and weaknesses, their learning style, their occupation, their special interests and skills, their life style, their living situation and family background, their values, and their spiritual inclinations.

My intention is to use who I am as a person to help a student while endeavoring to avoid allowing my own patterns of misuse (including my own psychological issues and strengths and weaknesses) to interfere with the lesson. To vary the movements I use to help the student explore, I draw from my background in dance, exercise, massage, music, *t'ai chi ch'uan*, and childrearing. For thinking of questions to ask or cues to look for about a student's mental and emotional process, I draw from my own life's experiences and patterns of misuse, ten years as a client in psychotherapy, and all the sensitivity, insight, and curiosity that is in my nature.

I continue to learn from my students what the stories are all about and what methods can work to help them. Sharing insights and touching people on a deeper level is very gratifying. Connecting to other people and helping them on their own journey in this way helps me connect to myself and furthers me on my own journey of self-discovery.

Endnotes

¹ A *boundary* is an imaginary line that separates a person from what is not that person. It also separates what is part of a relationship and what is not. Each person is responsible for maintaining his/her own boundaries and therefore for his/her own actions. We are not responsible for another person's actions, however, we need to respect another person's boundaries and safety. A violation of a boundary could involve inappropriate touch, violence, emotional manipulation, etc.

² In psychoanalysis, *transference* is "the projection or displacement upon the analyst of unconscious feelings and wishes originally directed toward important individuals, such as parents, in the patient's childhood. This process, which is at the core of psychoanalysis, brings repressed material to the surface where it can be reexperienced, studied, and 'worked through.' In the course of this process, the sources of neurotic difficulties are frequently discovered and their harmful effects alleviated." (Robert M. Goldenson & Walter B. Glanze, editors, 1989. *Longman Dictionary of Psychology and Psychiatry*. Financial Publishing Inc.)

³ *Dissociation* is "an unconscious defense mechanism in which conflicting impulses are kept apart, or threatening ideas and feelings are separated from the rest of the psyche." (Goldenson & Glanze, 1989) It is "a continuous rather than a discrete process, ranging from normal phenomena to severe forms and degrees of dysfunction.... The dimension of association-dissociation... ranges from everyday "normal" events such as daydreaming and naturally occurring trance states (e.g. "highway hypnosis," deep absorption in tasks) to Multiple Personality Disorder and fugue states which present amnesia and identity discontinuities...." (James P. Block, 1991. *Assessment and Treatment of Multiple Personality and Dissociative Disorders*. Professional Resource Exchange.) Dissociation "prevents the synthesis of accurate representations of experience." (Block, 1991) Someone experiencing dissociation has a distorted sense of reality.

Survivors of dysfunctional families and/or significant trauma (e.g. incest or other sexual abuse or violence) can sometimes be unable to assimilate the complexity of the experiences. Normal personality development is disrupted and interpersonal functioning is damaged. In more extreme cases this can result in a number of psycho-logical disorders, particularly *dissociative disorders*, some of which include a separation of aspects of a person into distinct parts in an *ego-state disorder*, or even personalities (“alters”) in a *multiple personality disorder* (MPD), now usually called *dissociative identity disorder* (DID). Some of these disorders can lead to suicidal impulses, self-mutilation, compulsive behavior, substance abuse, and excessive rage, fear, shame or depression.

⁴ “*Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*, or PTSD, is a psychiatric disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of life-threatening events such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, ritual), and violent personal assaults like rape. People who suffer from PTSD often relive the experience through nightmares and flashbacks, have difficulty sleeping, and feel detached or estranged, and these symptoms can be severe enough and last long enough to significantly impair the person’s daily life.” (National Center for PTSD website, www.ncptsd.org/faz.htm)

⁵ *Somatization* is “The presence of real and significant physical symptoms that cannot be explained by a medical condition, but are instead a manifestation of anxiety or other mental distress.” (“Neurosis,” by Paula Ford-Martin, in Bernard Beins, et al., editors, 2001. *Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 2nd. ed. Gale Group.)

⁶ Frank W. Putnam, 1989. *Diagnosis and Treatment of Multiple Personality Disorder*. Guilford Press.

⁷ *Resistance* is “in psychiatry and psychoanalysis, everything in the words or actions of the [patient] that obstructs his gaining access to his unconscious.” *Conscious resistance* is “the withholding of information due to embarrassment or fear.” *Unconscious resistance* “arises in the ego’s struggle to maintain repression of the anxiety-evoking unconscious material as it gradually rises to consciousness in the course of treatment.” (Jean LaPlanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, 1973. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. Karnac Books (1986).)

⁸ *Flashbacks* are memories of previous traumatic events that arise as if they are happening in the present, often with the full experience of the sensations and emotions that occurred during the events.

⁹ *Countertransference* “is when the therapist, during the course of therapy, develops positive or negative feelings toward the patient. This is normal during therapy. However, therapists must not act on such feelings. To act on them is unethical.” (“Ethical Principles of Psychologist and Code of Conduct,” American Psychological Association website, www.peace.saumag.edu/faculty/Kardas/courses/GPWeiten/C15Therapy/Transference/html). Countertransference can result from a practitioner’s reaction to a client’s transference or to working with the client in general. ☺

Every act that breaks with the past evokes the past.

Dr. George Weinberg

The *DIRECTION* Story

Paul Cook
 Editor, *DIRECTION Journal*

DIRECTION has weathered many a storm throughout its 18-year history. Controversial articles creating a rich diversity of input from around the world have sculptured a lovable rogue in the world of Alexander Technique publications. Born in Australia in 1985, as a purely “down-under” initiative, its readership now reaches into 32 countries.

Looking back at a catalogue that contains topics from Dart to Dance, Kids to Emotion, Equitation to Sexuality, Voice to Vision to name a few, and a master-teacher series covering The Barlows, Carrington, Barstow, and Macdonald, it’s hard really knowing where to begin describing what *DIRECTION* entails. The writers who have contributed throughout read like a Who’s Who of the Alexander world, bringing one to the realization that a lot of ground has been covered, bumpy *and* sticky. See www.directionjournal.com/backissue.html

One main theme that radiates through the diversity of topics is tolerance. *DIRECTION* has always sought to enable the views of Alexander teachers to reach a wider audience, across societies, over training lineages, and around fundamentalists. All have been entitled to their own considered views of the work, boundaries of language and interpretation aside.

Whilst themes create a framework around which Issues are crafted, they haven’t been allowed to override the timely off-topic contributions from other authors. Therefore if Feldenkrais (Vol. 1, No. 7) is not your cup of tea, then perhaps the articles “Anatomy of Posture in Living Higher Primates” by Phillip V. Tobias, or “F. M. Alexander and Evolution” by Jean M. O. Fischer, or Dr. Garlick’s “The Garlick Report,” or “Friends of Alexander” by Margaret Long, might pique your interest instead, all of which bolster this same volume.

With advertising confined to “In All Directions”—the ever-evolving, 12-page center spread of news, reviews, and views—the main articles flow, undated and integral. Students walk through the door from every conceivable background, and having a *DIRECTION* catalogue of themed volumes creates a convenient search facility to complement one’s teaching practice.

DIRECTION has brought to print the Congress presentations from 1988, 1991, and 1994 in three separate volumes called the Congress Papers. These collections of talks, workshops, and photographs from the most auspicious event on the Alexander Technique calendar, is a resource of experiences and techniques to draw inspiration from, with over 30 contributors in each. All topics contained therein are listed at:

www.directionjournal.com/congress.html

Editor’s note: The members of the Board of ATI wish to welcome the new editor of DIRECTION to his important post, and to thank departing editor and founder Jeremy Chance for his profound contribution to the Alexander community. We present this article in support of the journal’s independent voice, to recount its achievements and to introduce the journal to future readers. We wish Mr. Cook and the Journal many more distinguished and illuminating years!

And finally, a video of epic proportions completes the stable of 18 years' perseverance from Jeremy Chance. Marj Barstow coaxes and cavorts her way through an Australian trip in 1986, showcasing her group teaching methods in an 83-minute collection of memorable episodes.

What does the future hold for *DIRECTION*? A new Editor, a new Publisher, and a new Printer should be more than enough change for 2002. A new Direction can hardly be aspired to, when so many Directions have already been followed. Then perhaps a *refined direction* may be just the ingredient needed to help evolve *DIRECTION* into a new era.

As a reputable international publication on the Alexander Technique, *DIRECTION* is destined to reach an even wider audience in the coming years as these re-educational methods used grow in acceptance for all areas of human learning. In a world shackled by end-gaining approaches for every conceivable want and perceived need, the Alexander Technique remains a solid rock of common sense, and constantly fosters this reputation.

The new management at *DIRECTION* plan to spread awareness in this respect via a peer-reviewed, professional publication, bridging the imposed gulf between what "we do," and what "everyone else" does. Your input into the means-whereby that this can be made possible, is vital. Make your contribution at www.directionjournal.com/help.html.

There is also a list of forthcoming Issues to which you can contribute, keeping in mind that all submissions are considered for publication regardless of their content. Look at: www.directionjournal.com/coming/index.html.

As the quintessential shop front of the Alexander Technique world, *DIRECTION* will depend heavily on feedback, contributions, and financial support. Operating on a shoestring budget not only prevents articles from being commissioned, but the flexibility for when Issues are printed is severely hampered.

DIRECTION Journal is a non-profit business that has a core mission of spreading awareness of the work to a wider audience. Many regular contributors already volunteer their energy to this cause, ensuring quality content and a shared workload.

The Movement Directory is an initiative designed in this vein. A universal listing of all teachers, schools, societies, and courses worldwide, updated every six months in print and at any time via the web. Once you have subscribed to this listing service, you are given a password enabling access to your own updateable details online. Anyone with web access can search this database, and it is envisioned that every library and reference service worldwide will one day receive a copy of the printed listing. See: www.directionjournal.com/md.html.

DIRECTION sponsors a web discussion facility known as Alex-tech-List. This is an online forum that hosts discussion in real-time on all matters Alexander Technique. Simply subscribe via the following link and keep informed about latest events, theories, news, and the deliberations on many diversified contemporary topics relative to the work: www.directionjournal.com/alextech/index.html.

In June 2002, "The Future" will be published. For a comprehensive abstract of the contents of this Issue please refer to the May ATI Communiqué. To be kept up-to-date on the latest developments at *DIRECTION* Journal, drop your email address into: office@directionjournal.com.

“So...It’s Like Yoga?”

Andrea Matthews
ATI Teaching Member, USA

Sound familiar? You’ve been asked “What *is* the Alexander Technique?” You take a deep breath and launch into your earnest, but (hopefully) brief description. As you finish, there is a reverent pause, and your questioner brightens up hopefully, and says:

“So...it’s like yoga?”

Well, no...

Sometimes at this point I think I hear the sound of helium escaping from a balloon. (Is that my ego collapsing?)

Another common question: “If this stuff has been around for a hundred years, and it’s so great, how come I don’t know about it?” For a long time, I used to attribute it to internecine warfare in the AT community, with its genealogy traced dutifully back to the friction among Carrington, Macdonald, and Barlow fighting to inherit the kingdom from that regal but sly old fox, Alexander. Suddenly it sounds suspiciously like “The Lion in Winter”—and my questioner’s eyes are glazing over.

Well, the friction is real and we’re trying to cope with that legacy, but I recently came upon a new and very compelling explanation: We have failed to create, promote, and maintain our “brand” effectively.

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The **DIRECTION** Story

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A subscription to *DIRECTION* Journal buys two Issues, the one currently in print and the next to be released. In this small way you are already supporting the future of *DIRECTION*.

By purchasing Congress Papers you ensure that these priceless materials remain in print and that all future Congress presentations are recorded for posterity. Many people cannot afford to attend a Congress, whilst they predate some teachers by many years. This valuable resource is being preserved by *DIRECTION* Journal.

Subscribing to *DIRECTION* Journal, or purchasing any of the above publications, can be done conveniently via credit card, through our secure server at: www.directionjournal.com/order.html. Your order will be shipped within the week.

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Ordering via this method will be subject to postal delays to and from USA as checks must be cleared prior to shipping orders. Feel free to contact the new *DIRECTION* management at: office@directionjournal.com.

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Brand?? But we are Artistes of the BodyMind! Philosophers of the Psychophysical! Teachers of Sublime Wisdom and Awareness! Well, yes. But we also have something we want people to buy.

The fact that we earnestly believe they *need* to buy it is “a good thing” (to quote that egregious queen of branding, Martha Stewart). We can feel good about our “product” and enjoy offering to our students. But they can only experience its benefits if they hear about it in a manner that is pervasive, simple, direct, and compelling enough that they actually come for a lesson.

For a long time, I resigned myself to the idea that most of us Alexander teachers are simply not market-minded by nature. What was your first business “turn-off”? Mine was having to sell candy for my Campfire Girls group. I admit it, I’m an introvert. Face-to-face cold-calling is my idea of hell on earth (up there with lima beans and liver). Numbers make my brain go numb. Over the years as a professional singer and now teacher of the Alexander Technique, I’ve learned to produce materials and even conduct introductory workshops. I do the minimum, and maybe a little more. I’ve benefited from word of mouth, but the idea of power networking gives me the willies. I push myself to do what I do for two reasons: for the sheer joy of teaching and to make money. I like to eat. I assume I’m not alone in this.

So it was only reluctantly I turned my thoughts to the conundrum of how this wonderful work that has been around for a century manages to languish in the limbo between education and alternative medicine, and why in the world we’re still facing hopeful-looking people who take in our explanations and convert them into—well, yoga.

I was prodded into this line of thought by an exchange of emails with David Horsman, who knows a heck of a lot more about this stuff than I, and is working with Rick Brennan on a video to promote the Technique. He got me thinking about how we might promote our “brand”: whether that would be Alexander Technique International and/or the Technique itself.

Knowing nothing about the subject, I exercised the great strength of all introverts and went looking for a good book—which I found. Well, at least a very good, digestible, and thought-provoking book: *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding*, by Ries and Ries (HarperBusiness). I highly recommend it, even to my most business-allergic colleagues. I don’t think I’ll ever think about Coca-Cola or Holiday Inn the same way again. Space doesn’t permit me to present all of their fascinating observations, but I want to bring up some that are particularly relevant to us, and that might help to focus our efforts at promoting ATI and the Technique. I’ll present a few baldly unsubstantiated assertions (for the excellent and very convincing substantiations, I hope you’ll turn to the book), and discuss what seem to me to be their ramifications for us.

Here is the first: “Customers want brands that are narrow in scope and are distinguishable by a single word, the shorter the better.” (p. 13) There’s a lot going on in this statement. The first thing, which is easy to overlook, is that the customer’s perceptions and thought processes are key in developing a brand. Company managements and marketers too often develop a brand based on the way *they* think and what they are interested in...and are baffled when their brand fails to capture the imagination of the consumer.

This is a particular danger for us, I think, as our whole *raison d’être* is to completely change the thinking of our students, as ours has been changed. We face a difficulty that is rather uncommon in the West, where education is often regarded as a simple “brain dump” or just an “upgrade” of the usual way of doing things. We’re more in

“So...It’s Like Yoga?”

the position of Zen in this regard: it is a challenge to describe what we’re getting at to a Westerner, without abandoning the reality that makes our way of thinking possible.

I have hardly worked out a solution to this conundrum, except to think that we cannot appeal to Western logic to attract students accurately, but we must somehow embed an *experience* or the echo of an experience they once had (as children?) in the way we “brand” the Technique.

The next point is: “narrow in scope.” For example, the strength of the Coca-Cola brand is that it *is* cola, the world around. It’s not cars or computers. And companies that extend their scope often lose the strength of their brand. Here we have something of an advantage. We stand to benefit from a brand, because we already know that AT is not for everyone. Our students have to make a certain kind of commitment to personal change and awareness on a total psychophysical basis if they are to benefit from what we offer. Those who wish merely to be fixed or to continue in their usual way but without the usual consequences will wind up going elsewhere. We cannot be all things to all people...unless, of course, we give up on a central principle of the work: students’ responsibility for their own lives and experience. (Do I hear the siren song of Alternative Medicine? Fi, away!)

A brand defines something unique, focused, special. And that we are. We just (ha!) have to find a way to capture that in a brief, direct way. A really successful brand *creates* its own category, and becomes the category itself. To the consumer, adhesive bandages *are* Band-aids (no matter who makes them now). A photocopy *is* a Xerox.

We’ve struggled with the problem of what category Alexander Technique belongs in and with what other bodymind modalities we should be grouped with, as if AT’s uniqueness were a problem. We’ve been turning a feature into a bug (as my computer geek friends might say)! We need to *promote* the Technique’s uniqueness, and use it to establish its own special category. Since “somatic education” is already being bandied about for everything from Feldenkrais to Hellerwork, perhaps we need to come up with something else—and perhaps copyright it. It may not be easy, but the full recognition of the Technique in the marketplace may depend on it.

The big difference between us and all the others, as far as I can see, is not in our emphasis on “the principles”—as good and accurate as they may be. It’s in taking a chance on the student’s ability to learn to apply conscious attention without creating tension, while at the same time approaching the student as an indivisible psychophysical whole. All the other modalities I know of either work on a level below conscious awareness to generate physical release (as in Feldenkrais or Rolfing) or on the psychological level accessed through physical release (as in Rosenwork). Perhaps Ilana Rubinfeld with her “Synergy” of Feldenkrais, Alexander, and Erickson might take issue with this, but then she’s set out her own unique brand, and it’s no longer “pure” Alexander. We don’t have to compete with her. The principles then fit in this context as acknowledgements of psychophysical reality with which our students are learning to work. With us, our students are learning to *be*, with all the others, they will always be coming for a “fix” they can’t quite get for themselves. Granted, I’m stating this in rather black and white terms, and lessons are usually a balance of these two forces; however, our eyes are always on the prize—wholeness and autonomy for our students.

The next point of that sentence I quoted above: “distinguishable by a single word, the shorter the better.” Later in the book, it becomes clear that this is true not only of the brand name itself, but of the attribute with which it is intended to be identified. Some examples: Rolex (watches) = prestige; Volvo (cars) = safety; Intel (microprocessors) = reliable. Clearly this will be a challenge, and the first step may even be deciding what we are “branding”—ATI or the Technique itself.

One argument for branding ATI is that one requirement for branding is to be the “first,” the “only,” or the “leader” at something. The one thing we have that differentiates us (in an easily recognizable way—consumers don’t really care if we certify people or training courses!) from the other societies is that we are the only international (single) group. Heaven knows it’s enough of an organizational and logistical liability, we ought to milk it for all the brand power it might offer...but then we have to find a way to show it provides a clear and attractive benefit to consumers. Does it?

The book offers some insights on this score, and my conclusion is that ATI functions as “the company” and the Technique is the “brand.” (Or in considering who benefits from what, perhaps ATI is a brand for attracting teachers and members, and the Technique is a brand to the consumer of our services—in which case we need to be clear that we are actually conducting two branding campaigns.) Others may come to a different conclusion, given the existence of AmSAT and the various STATs and the perceived need to compete with them for “market share.”

A brand defines something unique, focused, special. And that we are.

The 22 Immutable Laws points out, however, that for visibility of the category, the competition of two “companies” in a market is ideal. Choice stimulates demand. And functionally speaking that is the situation that pretty much exists in

all the markets in which we operate: ATI is paired competitively with AmSAT in the US, and with each of the STATs in those countries. (There are indeed occasional additional groups, such as PAAT in England, but that’s still not an oversaturated market.) And although one company may launch a category, over time it cannot realistically expect more than a 50% market share—the market must grow for sales to grow at that point, and competition grows the market. Coke needs Pepsi, and maybe we need AmSAT and the STATs (and vice versa, one might say!). Thus the product we share is the Alexander Technique, and the question is, will we brand our “version” or “approach”? And how to do that? As the book points out, “Market share is not based on merit, but on the power of the brand in mind.” (p. 91)

Suffice it to say, ideally we need to reach into the customer’s mind with a single word that comes to be identified with one desirable, distinct attribute. (To find the most effective attribute to stress, we probably need not only our own suggestions, but those of our students and prospective students.) The book goes on to point out that the best approach to this is to take a common, but not generic word and apply it in an unusual way. That could mean coming up with our own name for the Technique and trade-marking it. Unfortunately that would leave AmSAT and the STATs free to claim with greater impunity that they are the purveyors of the true, original technique as developed and taught by F.M. Alexander. That’s probably not a risk we’re willing to take. Let’s face it, however, they say that anyway.

Is there a way we can make that work for us? If someone derides us as a “Yankee Doodle,” can we turn it into our marching song? (I hope our international members will pardon my very local metaphor...) If they are “traditional,” what are we? Is different necessarily bad? Not in my book. So perhaps we need to do a little brainstorming about just what our special approach to Alexander is, and when we identify the aspect that offers the greatest direct benefit to our customers—from the prospective customer’s point of view!—we should build our brand around that.

“So...It’s Like Yoga?”

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As the book puts it: “By first preempting the category...and then aggressively promoting the category, you create both powerful brand and a rapidly escalating the market.” (p. 67)

Here I see a parallel, for what it’s worth, from modern Judaism, in the heated arguments between the Conservative and Orthodox camps. In terms of a “brand” (at the risk of sounding a bit crass), one could say Orthodoxy has very successfully associated itself in the minds of “consumers” as preserving the true, traditional Judaism. Conservative Judaism remains respectful of and steeped in tradition, but presents itself (also successfully) as representing a “still-growing” tradition that is responsive to the conditions in which it exists today. Despite a lot of grumbling back and forth, both are recognized as Judaism and each is perceived by their respective “consumers” as filling a definite niche and need.

Maybe our “brand” of Alexander should be boldly presented as “still-growing” Alexander. (Trump that, “tradition”!) Or whatever word projects the clear choice for the consumer, without the need to directly or obviously compete with the approach of AmSAT and the STATs.

(Just as an aside, as I begin to think that sounds suspiciously like a ‘70s rock band or a group of governmental space agencies, it strikes me that as a brand name to the profession, ATI has a distinct advantage as an inoffensive acronym, despite its being not very descriptive in itself.)

As I noted above, it is essential to branding to be able to assert that your product is the only, the leader, the first. To me, one claim to the Technique’s “singularity”—the uniqueness required for a brand’s success—could certainly be that it was the first (by far) to insist on the wholeness of the student (“psychophysical unity”—unfortunately not a very marketable phrase, though beautifully accurate). It’s no longer the only method that asserts that unity (almost all pay lip service to the concept), though only a handful really live by it (in my opinion, Feldenkrais, Hellerwork, Rosenwork, and perhaps some others really do). Currently (again, as noted above) the enlisting of the student’s conscious awareness and choice about what he or she is thinking in activity is the unique distinguishing feature. And that’s not going to attract everyone. So, can we live with being the Rolex, the Volvo, the Mercedes of the bodymind educators (or whatever we call our own special category in the end)? We may feel uncomfortable with what begins to sound like elitism. That can be reframed, however, if we consider that very few people are really conscious even part of the time...does anyone really consider the Dalai Lama an elitist? Our message is not that only a few special people can learn to be conscious in activity, but that only a few special people will ever give it a serious try. We can all be special, because we all already are...but only special people wake up to that fact. Ha!

(You can perhaps see why I find the Buddhist perspective so helpful for Alexander teachers. We’re so often at odds with the Western worldview, but we still beat ourselves senseless with some of its assumptions.)

And here is where building an Alexander Technique brand is perfectly consonant with our principles: a brand requires uniqueness and cannot aim to be all things to all people, or it loses its power. When Alexander Technique wobbles toward fitting in with complementary medicine, it risks selling its uniqueness for an anticipated (but short-term) gain: that of “fitting in.” Unfortunately, it can never do that as well as the established brands in that category. There we can only be an ugly, ungainly duckling...and we need to go off on our own and discover that we’re actually the swan. As the book puts it, don’t compete with leaders in their own category—it’s better to make your own category.

Developing a logo, color identification, and effective promotion (the authors recommend starting with publicity, and only when the brand is established, maintaining it with advertising) are all areas needing our attention. At the same time, building a brand takes decades, not years, and consistency is key. The book stresses that it's easier to build a brand than change one, so we're in good shape not having a too-specific identity in the public's mind to start with. We may have to make an effort, however, to replace "posture" as *the* word associated with Alexander with something equally memorable, but more accurate and evocative of what we're offering.

One of the key points of the book is that if you want to build a successful brand, you must think like a customer, not a "company insider." This poses a considerable challenge to us, since we are selling essentially a change of thinking, which is not an obvious commodity like laundry detergent or a lawnmower. We have to understand why our listener is trying to compare us to yoga, and find ways to build a whole new category in his or her mind. Somehow, our brand must itself evoke an experience in our audience, one they recognize in some way and want to repeat and explore further.

As I scan the notes I took while reading *The 22 Immutable Laws*, I know I'm just scratching the surface of this subject, and many of the ideas proposed will be left behind in favor of more apt approaches, but I hope I've helped to stimulate your thinking and curiosity about the important challenge of promoting the Technique effectively as a "brand." We all feel the need to get going, but up till now perhaps we didn't have an effective compass to guide our efforts. Books and other resources like this one can help us pool our energies more productively and confidently in bringing Alexander Technique the "brand recognition" it deserves and needs in order to realize its full potential. ☺

Editor's note: This article first appeared on ATI's Interchange cyberforum, and is reprinted here in the hope of stimulating interest among the members, leading to discussions at the upcoming 2002 AGM. For those who are interested in sharing their thoughts and ideas, a special email list has been established at marketing@ati-net.com. To join, send your email address with your request to webmaster@ati-net.com. Your contributions are always welcome here at ExChange and on the Interchange list, as well.

Please note that the email address for ExChange is changing to exchange@ati-net.com.
We'd love to hear from you!

Worldwide Offices of Alexander Technique International

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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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