

EXCHANGE

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Keynote Address from the 2001 AGM at Spanish Point, Ireland

Frank Kennedy
ATI Teaching Member, Ireland

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. To begin, allow me to greet each one of you in our native Gaelic language: *Cead mile failte*.

In English that translates as 100,000 welcomes to each one of you. This greeting also comes with a special wish that your stay in Ireland will be filled with peace and happiness.

I am told that an after-dinner speech should be like a lady's dress—long enough to cover the subject and short enough to be interesting.

Walter Carrington once said that he considered the discoveries of F.M. Alexander to be “probably one of the most underrated achievements of the 20th century.” Walter went on to say that he was “convinced that the Alexander Technique will prove to be as important to humanity as the work of Newton, Einstein, and particularly Darwin.” Undoubtedly in time the truth of this statement will be fulfilled.

Tonight let us briefly explore for ourselves what makes F.M. Alexander's discoveries so important to people's daily lives.

Most of us start out in life like this young child, perfectly poised, with the ability to concentrate without being tense—“at one with ourselves.” [See Figure 1.]

Most of us have also found ourselves in this situation, sitting an important school examination “under pressure.” [See Figure 2.]

Do we know anybody who sits at a desk like this? What aches and pains do you think this student would have at the end of the examination? This



ATI Vision and Mission

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

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

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

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Editor's Page

Andrea Matthews
 Editor, ExChange

Despite appearances to the contrary here in New England, spring—soon to be summer—is upon us, and things are quieting down around my editorial office. I hope this means that we're gearing up for the AGM and the meetings and exchanges of work and thought that will happen there. I know after this year of college teaching I need some Alexander battery-recharging....

Many of my loyal contributors seem to be going through either a processing phase or an activity phase, as am I. So after our special 40-page Anniversary issue, this ExChange is a bit slimmer than the usual. Quality, if not quantity! I hope the articles we have this time will inspire you to share your thoughts and researches of the work!

As for me, I'm still processing some of the writing I asked my voice students to do, in particular, a weekly "use" journal of observations from daily life and a review of an Alexander book or video. Change is still a mysterious process, especially in just 26 lessons a year, but these little essays give me a glimpse into the heads of my students, just as the tasks give them a glimpse into the possibilities of Alexander for the quality of their singing and their lives. Sometimes I think, "Oh, if only I had assigned that sooner!" and sometimes, "Oh, why doesn't she experience what she 'knows'?" And sometimes, I'm just thrilled and proud to have set off a small lightbulb in my student's mind about use and functioning, or awareness and primary control. Teaching is demanding work, physically and emotionally, and at the end of the year, when the students have disappeared and my studio is empty, suddenly I'm grateful to have something tangible, in writing, about what has registered in my student's mind. And I'm convinced now that the ones who do the writing, get the most out of the lessons. Just as when I take the time to write something, I understand it a little better, or from a different angle.

Now, honestly, I wasn't heading to this when I started writing that last paragraph, but here I am: So even if we are teachers, we are all still students of the work. Anyone have their writing assignment to turn in? ☺

EXCHANGE

ExChange is published three times per year by Alexander Technique International (ATI), the purpose of which is to promote and advance the F. Matthias Alexander Technique. *ExChange* is designed to disseminate information regarding the Technique to ATI members and the public.

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From the Chair: The Yearly Rhythm of ATI

Cathy Madden
Chair, Alexander Technique International

In the fall our Annual General Meeting brings new ideas and impulses to our organization. Then through the winter months, the Board, the committee, and individual members take those ideas and begin acting on them. The first manifestation of the winter ideas usually appears in the form of the plans for the new AGM, created in part from the ideas and concerns that appeared in the fall. Please enjoy the Workshop Planning Committee's terrific work as you see what is planned for next fall in Ireland!

At the same time, the Communications Committee has been working to keep information flowing to the membership through the ExChange and the Communiqué. Work on the website, and on translation, is moving ahead. Exciting work is happening in the Sponsorship Committee. Early work on the business meetings of the AGM has begun....there is much potential for growth and recommitment to our vision bubbling up.

There is a steady pace to the work of ATI. Because it is a volunteer-run organization, it works at the pace of the available volunteers...a steady pace, with the occasional pause as a volunteer needs to focus elsewhere for a while. The advantage to this pace is that we do have time to "analyze the conditions of use present" and assess a situation carefully before we make a plan to deal with it. The disadvantage is sometimes we would like to move ahead more quickly, but don't have enough volunteers to spread the work around.

Shortly, you will be receiving a call for Nominations from our Nominations Committee. I would ask you to consider their requests. And also to take a look at the Committees of ATI—is there somewhere you would like to contribute?

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Alexander Technique International

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drawing is of interest to us in a number of ways.

First, the way this young student is sitting very much takes away from her appearance; she could be the most beautiful girl in the world, but nobody would ever know it.

Second, the way she is approaching the task of writing greatly undermines her performance; for example, at a time when she needs two full tanks of oxygen, she has only two half-tanks. Her lung capacity is greatly reduced from the way she is slumping.

She is also making hundreds of times more muscular tension and strain than she needs, because she is even writing with her legs.

The sad aspect of this photograph is that while this young lady is undoubtedly doing her very best, she is making all of the wrong kind of effort. In fact, you could say she is working against herself.

Third is the effect of this awkward sitting position on well-being. Poor body use like this can lead to a drain on our nervous energy and interfere with breathing, circulation, and digestion. There is also unnecessary wear and tear on bones and joints, which in time can cause various neck, back, and shoulder problems.

Last is how she is holding her head. As we know a head weighs in the region of a stone [*Ed.: about 14 lbs.*]. The way we carry that weight on top of the spine impacts greatly on the rest of the body.

Should this young lady continue to misuse her body in this manner, in later years the end result could be something like this: [*See Figure 3.*]

Do we know anybody like this?

The effect of poor physical conditions like these on general health and well-being is obvious, also on mood, because you would know that this gentleman had not just won the lotto.

Here we have a drawing that sums up the importance of F.M. Alexander's discoveries to people's daily lives. [*See Figure 4.*]

We have three surfers: one learner and two instructors. We also have very rough sea conditions, similar to how life can be sometimes. Life can sometimes be very rough.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

As you can see, the person in the middle of the picture is buckling under the pressure, in the same way as our student buckled under the pressure of the examination, or the old man buckled under the pressures of life.

But look at this gentleman on the right—you would think he was having a pleasant time at a cocktail party.

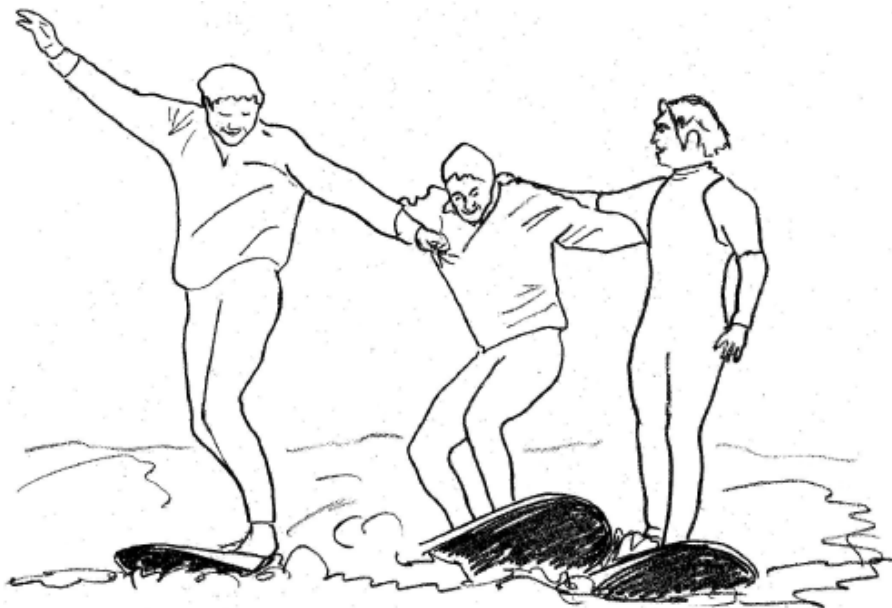
This is what we want, and this is what the Alexander Technique teaches us: how to maintain our poise and composure even under pressure.

Most people react to pressure by tensing up. The Alexander Technique aims at a degree of conscious control in how we act and react. For many, it provides the complete answer in learning to manage the stresses and physical strains that characterize modern living.

In short, the Alexander Technique offers people a more intelligent approach to living.

Given the obvious value of the Alexander Technique to people's daily lives, it is surprising the difficulty so many teachers have in earning a full-time living from teaching. Perhaps this is a topic people may wish to explore at this Conference, especially at Richard Brennan's workshop on "How to Introduce the Alexander Technique."

Figure 4



Of course, a central theme for this year's Conference is "Recognizing and Celebrating the Diversity of Our Teaching." To help us focus on this important theme, let us imagine that the gentleman in the middle of the surfing drawing has decided to take a course of 30 lessons from any one of us.

We will call him Arthur, Arthur Guinness the Fifth. Mr. Guinness is a multi-millionaire and a major player on the world stage. At his introductory lesson, he tells us that he is very stressed in his daily life, and how he suffers much pain from a back problem. Mr. Guinness is not interested in the history of the

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Alexander Technique. He is looking for someone who can explain and demonstrate a practical solution to his problems.

How would any of us explain the Alexander Technique to Mr. Guinness in a way that addresses his personal needs? How would any of us go about teaching him the Alexander Technique?

In a course of lessons, our first priority is to get him back to his full height and his full width without strain. In F.M.'s own words, what expert manipulation would we use to achieve this? And what language would we use to communicate our meaning?

Our second priority would be to teach him how to maintain the true length of his spine when sitting, standing, walking, eating, working at a desk, playing golf, or surfing like this chap. In other words, the full range of daily activity. How would any of us go about teaching this to Mr. Guinness?

How would we teach him conscious inhibition and conscious direction? And how, in teaching him, would we cope with the problems of habit, of end-gaining, and of faulty sensory appreciation? How would we structure the 30 lessons so that each lesson would be of benefit and ongoing interest to Mr. Guinness? These are the challenges that we all encounter in our teaching practice.

I believe Peter Ribeaux, Tommy Thompson, and Lucia Walker deserve a round of applause for being prepared to share their teaching skills with us on Monday. Their workshop on recognizing and celebrating the diversity of our teaching will prove to be of immense interest to all of us.

The dual theme of this year's Conference is "The Stories That We Share." There is an interesting story with regard to F.M.'s own teaching style. Lulie Westfeldt, a student on the first training course, writes in her book *F. Matthias Alexander: The Man and His Work*, how F.M. came into the classroom one morning and "said exultantly how he could now get the new head, neck, back relationship without the pupil's help." Lulie continues that F.M. spoke of his breakthrough "as if a great burden had been lifted from him—as if he was freed from the frustrating struggle of trying to get the pupil to understand him."

Frank Pierce Jones also refers to this in his book *Body Awareness in Action*. He writes that Alexander "was becoming increasingly skilled in the use of his hands and less dependent on words to convey his meaning"; in fact, F.M. told Frank Jones that he was now "able to get in three days results which had taken three weeks before."

What exactly want this refined skill that F.M. developed in his hands? We may wish to explore this topic further at this Conference in our Storytelling sessions.

Do you like this drawing? [See *Figure 4*.]

This drawing is striking in many ways, not least how the gentleman in the middle is holding on; part of our job description is teaching people how to let go.

There is a nice story that illustrates how difficult it is for people to let go: Many years ago there was a mountaineer climbing in the region of Mount Everest. He was thousands of feet up an icy mountain when he slipped and fell. He tumbled hundreds of feet, but managed to grab hold of a loose rock. The mountaineer was terrified and beside himself with fear; he screamed and shouted: "Is there anybody there?" After a short time, a beautiful voice said, "I am here." A degree of relief came over the mountaineer, and he asked, "Who is it?" The reply came: "It is God—I have come to save you." The mountaineer felt total relief, and asked, "What shall I do, God?" And God replied, "Let go." And the mountaineer screamed, "Is there anybody else there?"

This story illustrates how difficult it is for people to let go and yet it is only one element of the Alexander Technique.

Let us take a closer look at the gentleman in the middle of the surfing image for a moment. [See *Figure 4*.]

How would we describe his physical and mental state? We can see that he requires much help to prevent him from falling. I think we would say that he is over-tense, mal-coordinated, and that his fear reflexes are unduly excited. This is exactly how so many people struggle through their personal lives—tense, badly coordinated, and with fear reflexes over-excited.

This unthinking way of struggling through life affects people's appearance, performance, and health and well-being. In a highly pressurized world, the Alexander Technique teaches us not only tension-free poise, but it also offers a more intelligent way of coping with stress.

Perhaps this is what makes F.M.'s discoveries as important to humanity as the work of Newton, Einstein, and particularly of Darwin. ☺

Ed.: Join us this October as we return to Spanish Point for the 2003 AGM!

Ease Performance Anxiety Naturally

David Nesmith
ATI Teaching Member, USA

(This article first appeared in *The Horn Call, The Journal of the International Horn Society*, Volume XXXI, No. 1 November 2000.)

I am sitting on stage moments before the opening horn solo in Weber's Oberon Overture. It feels as if a giant spotlight is on me, gradually narrowing its powerful beam. It threatens to immobilize me like a deer caught in headlights. My palms are sweaty and my heart is racing as I remind myself to breathe and think of the music. Now comes the nod from the conductor. Ready!? Here goes . . . !

Many horn players experience this feeling at some point during their careers, whether they are amateurs or professionals. Performance anxiety can range from mildly annoying to completely incapacitating. Here is a simple, yet powerful technique I have used in my performing and teaching to deal successfully with this reaction.

Two Steps to Ease Performance Anxiety

We all know that preparing well for a performance means practicing in a way that will eliminate all doubts about its technical and musical aspects. As one teacher said, "A doubt in the practice room can become a disaster on stage!" Preparing with this in mind builds confidence. However, since we are human beings and not machines, we are often subject to a barrage of feelings surrounding the act of performing in public. Typically, these feelings are reactions to anticipatory thoughts concerning an upcoming performance in general or a delicate entrance in particular. The next time you experience feelings of nervousness do two things:

1. Notice the feeling as *non-judgmentally* as possible. Say to yourself, "It's just information."
2. At the same time, *while enlarging the musical conception in your mind*, open your awareness to include at least one more non-threatening element that wasn't in your awareness before, such as the support of the chair or floor beneath you, shadows on stage, the weave of a colleague's coat, etc. Continue noticing more and more as the range of your awareness grows in all directions.

Often, it is the act of judging our nervousness as bad that begins the snowball effect of becoming more nervous, sometimes to the point of feeling out of control. The fight/flight/freeze response is a valuable, natural

protective device, but going into this reaction and staying there is not. Intellectually, we all know a performance situation is not really life-threatening, though at times it may certainly feel like it! The simple acknowledgment, “It’s just information,” along with the opening of awareness to give the nervous feeling company, will eliminate the feeling of being overwhelmed.

Practicing is the key. Before a big performance, expose yourself periodically to performance-like stress. Find someone to listen to you. If there is no one around to lend an ear, do five minutes of jumping jacks or climb some stairs to elevate your heart rate. Then, while playing your solo, notice all the accompanying feelings simply as information and widen your awareness little by little. You can also practice these two steps during ensemble rehearsals.

One way to know if your awareness is expanding versus contracting is if you are using your peripheral vision. Seeing more peripherally, as well as frontally, naturally opens up and balances more of our entire being to the moment of performing. Any distraction can be dealt with in this way, from butterflies in the belly, to the rustling sounds of the audience, the sound of a dropped mute, or even a fly on your nose! Being easily distracted is a sign of a narrowed awareness. A positive consequence of an expansive awareness is that distractions begin to disappear. Or rather, what used to be a distraction is now just a part of the whole picture. As another of my teachers has said, “It’s not a distraction if you’re already aware of it!”

What is another way to know when our awareness is contracted? By the resulting contractions in our bodies: stiff neck, fixed eyes, rigid arms, and shallow breathing, to name just a few. Quite simply, our bodies reflect the state of our awareness. If we are too concentrated with an attention that is “fixed” on our nervousness or on “trying hard,” then we lose the more productive “in focus” quality of easy clarity and sharpness in our thinking. (Also, be wary of “scanning,” which is nothing more than rapid, sequential concentrating from object to object.) To avoid the excess concentration of physical and mental effort that results from a contracted awareness, train yourself to look for little windows of opportunity in which to open your mind. Rests in the music or pauses between movements are perfect.

As we broaden our awareness auditorially and visually, we must simultaneously stay in touch with ourselves tactilely and kinesthetically. Frank Pierce Jones, author of *Freedom to Change*, called this “cultivating a unified field of attention”: an awareness that is expansive and inclusive of ourselves and our environment, rather than exclusive.

Ease Performance Anxiety *Naturally*

Circles of Attention

In his book, *An Actor Prepares*, the great Russian theater director, Constantin Stanislavski, described how to use circles of attention to aid awareness on stage. Imagine three circles, a small one containing you and your music, a medium circle containing colleagues on stage, and a larger, third circle containing the audience. As we learn to organize the contents of these levels non-judgmentally within our awareness, we free our energy for the task at hand, music-making. If, however, much of our energy is spent attempting to block our awareness of the audience, or of the music critic in the twelfth row who happens to be a horn player(!), or any number of other distractions, we have wasted valuable energy resulting in diminished expressive power.

A Bit of Ancient Wisdom

As long ago as the fourth and third centuries B.C., the Chinese sage, Chuang Tzu, had something profound to say about performance anxiety. Thomas Merton composed the following verse from existing translations.

The Need to Win

When an archer is shooting for nothing
He has all his skill.
If he shoots for a brass buckle
He is already nervous.
If he shoots for a prize of gold
He goes blind
Or sees two targets—
He is out of his mind!

His skill has not changed. But the prize
Divides him. He cares.
He thinks more of winning
Than of shooting—
And the need to win
Drains him of power.¹

In Conclusion

Cultivating the intention to notice without judgment while increasing awareness multi-sensorially will allow your energy to become more fully engaged in performing and naturally support the communication of your

rich musical ideas. Persevere gently and have fun as you learn to ease your own performance anxiety naturally.

Resources

Jones, Frank Pierce. *Freedom to Change*. London: Mouritz, 1997. ISBN 0-9525574-7-9 (Previously published as *Body Awareness in Action*. New York: Schocken Books, 1976, 1979.)

Kaplan, Dr. Robert-Michael. *The Power Behind Your Eyes*. Rochester, Vermont: Healing Arts Press, 1995. ISBN 0-89281-536-1

Stanislavski, Constantin. *An Actor Prepares*. New York: Theater Arts Books, 1936. ISBN 0-87830-001-5

Endnote

¹"The Need to Win" by Thomas Merton, from *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*. Copyright 1963 by The Abbey of Gethsemani, Inc., 1977 by The Trustees of the Merton Legacy Trust. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

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Embodying Peace: An Introduction to the Alexander Technique

*Ariel Weiss Holyst
ATI Teaching Member, USA*

This article is intended as an introduction to the principles of the Alexander Technique both for those already familiar with the work and for those who are not. For the first group, it offers another possible lens with which to view the work. The discoveries Mr. Alexander made about human functioning are profoundly simple and offer infinite potential for positive change. My goal here is to provide some kernels of ideas that can lead us to use this technique towards learning and growing that can literally build peace.

While introducing the work to a new pupil several months ago, the beginnings of these peace-centered ideas bubbled up. I have been excited and delighted to follow their lead ever since. I am indebted to all of my students. It is through the honor of my interactions with them that I continue to be inspired and to re-imagine this work.

In essence, the Alexander Technique is a study of the relationship of our thinking to our actions, that is, we do what we think. Always! Part of the adventure is to uncover the thinking that “drives the train,” the sometimes deeply hidden belief systems that we adopt from experience, families, and our culture that shape how we act, react, and respond. With a clearer understanding of the motivation, or context, for what “drives our train,” it becomes possible to choose to change the thinking and the quality of the resulting actions.

The Alexander work specifically explores how patterns of muscular interference disrupt our full capacity for functioning as humans. Habitual tension in our necks disrupts the poise of our skulls on our spines, thus interfering with the functioning of our whole being. The premise is that all parts of our body are interconnected. Therefore, when we interfere with this primary relationship, we affect the whole system in a disintegrating fashion. We don't function in isolation. Each part of us affects the whole. When we tense our jaw, our breathing is shallow. When we grip our toes, our low backs ache, etc. With the clear intention and practice of the Alexander Technique, we learn to effectively change the primary piece of our disintegrating puzzle, and unleash ourselves into rejuvenating integration.

Even with this awareness, most of us persist in scrunching, pulling, shortening, and otherwise interfering with our head/neck poise. Why? Because it somehow feels “right.” The familiar thing (pulling our heads off the poise of our spine) is translated as the correct thing, even if it causes us

chronic pain, interferes with our breathing, and dampens our overall sense of well-being. What feels most familiar, and even “right,” however, does not always work to our best advantage.

As I observed my new pupil pulling on herself, I found that it looked as if she were “picking a fight” with her own neck. This idea resonated deeply with her both physically and emotionally. We have since gone on to explore, kinesthetically, what it would be like to find a more “peaceful” neck.

When we feel stiff or uncomfortable, most often our first instinct is to push our necks around. That is what I observed in my student. My experience tells me that this instinctual remedy is counterproductive. It doesn't help our well-being. Inevitably, we only feel stiffer. Tension begets more tension. Unwittingly we add stress in the pursuit of lessening the stress. We give our necks and/or shoulders, backs, etc., a big yank, and do so with aggression, force, judgment, impatience, and urgency. When we most need comfort, we tend to pick a fight with ourselves. We employ fighting words like “must,” “should,” and “can't” in harsh, critical tones towards ourselves. We add stress to the strain and end up perpetually frustrated, stiff, and uncomfortable. The stiffness begets more stiffness and more anguish. The tugging, or fighting, becomes a process which is ground into us, becoming a familiar cycle, a habit.

As I observed my new pupil pulling on herself, I found that it looked as if she were “picking a fight” with her own neck.

How can we change this dysfunction? What would a peaceful neck feel like? What thinking would lead us towards peaceful efficiency and away from our familiar, habitual pulling? A peaceful neck is one with less tension, without any extra effort or resistance. It

exists peacefully with its neighbors and works cooperatively and in concert with the rest of us. The thinking that can lead us in this direction must shift from an oppositional model to a contextual one.

We have become so habituated to knowing ourselves through our tension that we have come to identify where we are, and even who we are, by the resistance we exert against ourselves and our environment. We know our strength by how our muscles squeeze into each other. We know where the floor is by pressing down into it and the chair by “slumping” down onto its surfaces. We know our own “stand” on things in relation to our opposition to another person's point of view! A teacher of mine likened this kind of excessive resistance to driving around with your emergency brake on.

Embodying Peace: An Introduction to the Alexander Technique

In a sense, we are trying to “go” and “stop” simultaneously, an endeavor which is neither effective or efficient. It’s also usually highly uncomfortable! A “dis-ease” of our coordination. When we busy ourselves by engaging in opposition, we are in effect, stuck. We are coming and going at the same time. This slows us down and cuts off our options. We become immobilized and unresponsive. Yet we persist in relying on the familiarity of our preset patterns, even though it often does not work to our best advantage.

I am proposing a shift in our thinking to precipitate a shift in our action. When we take away resistance as our primary tool of response and the tendency to “dig in our heels” with oppositional bracing, we are left with an efficient, balanced use of effort or energy. Just right. No more, no less. I call this “working smarter” instead of the ever-popular “working harder.”

In a sense, we are trying to “go” and “stop” simultaneously, an endeavor which is neither effective or efficient.

It is possible, over time and with practice, to learn to know where and who we are without resistance. It is possible to move towards discovering ourselves contextually “in relation to” instead of “opposed to.” With each moment of choosing peaceful non-tugging, we practice a new strategy that can begin to grow as familiar as the aggression of our own muscular resistance. We can question the authority of our own, sometimes strong, urges to “work harder” and “push on through.” We can ask ourselves what is it we want before jumping first to what we don’t want. Instead of buying into “more is better” with body and soul, we can practice “less is more.” Instead of working harder, we can explore the possibility of pushing less and dare to find out how much is enough, and where and who we are without the supreme guidance of our old comfortable sensations of resistance. We can begin to recognize that pushing against ourselves hurts us, and causes a direct aggression towards others. Pushing begets pushing. We can model our new peaceful strategies towards our neighbors, coworkers, and children so that we begin to breed familiarity and comfort with nonviolent, connected, and open exchanges.

Finding peace, personal peace or world peace, through aggression will not, and cannot work. Just as jerking our neck around creates more “pain” for us, jerking others around creates more pain for both of us. Excessive force does not work in our best interest. It is less efficient, less effective, and usually highly uncomfortable.

My hope is that if we can come to better understand and recognize the deeply rooted urges we have towards aggression, pushing, and fighting, we might begin to risk trying strategies that bring us success, comfort, and peace. If our thinking does truly lead our action, and if we are actually connected to all that is around us, making the smallest change in our thinking has limitless potential to unleash an ongoing chain of peacefulness.

The next time you get stuck, internally or externally, take a moment to pause. Wait. Inhibit the urge to push and press your way through. Dare to not know in an old, familiar way for a moment and seek an unfamiliar option. Find out what it would be to un-push. If you want to share peace with someone because you love them, or because they're making you crazy, get peaceful, right down to your neck muscles. See what happens. See if changing a piece of your own disintegrating puzzle can effect a change on your whole self. See if by changing your end of things the interaction itself changes. See if by changing your interaction with the person in that difficult situation the world can change. After all, each piece affects the whole.

Peace. Embody it. Dare to wonder. See what happens.

Ariel Weiss Holyst has been in private practice teaching the Alexander Technique in the Philadelphia region since 1988. She is also a modern dancer and choreographer, bringing over 35 years of movement training to her teaching practice. Comments and feedback welcomed by the author: ariel@AlexanderTechniquePhiladelphia.com. For more information, visit her web site: www.AlexanderTechniquePhiladelphia.com. ☺

As we think, so we become.

The Dhammapada

In Memoriam: Saura Bartner

Susan Saura Bartner, a renowned and widely loved teacher of the Alexander Technique, died quietly at her home in Hillsborough, North Carolina, in her own bed, surrounded by her family, on February 25, 2003. She was 55.

As a teacher of the Alexander Technique, Ms. Bartner instructed performers, athletes, and people from all walks of life in a more energetically efficient and healthier way of moving their bodies.

Ms. Bartner was born in New Brunswick, NJ, and grew up in the neighboring town of Piscataway. She later lived in New York, Missouri, Rhode Island, and North Carolina.

The brain tumor that brought about Ms. Bartner's death was held at bay for almost three years through the complementary systems of conventional medicine, chiropractic, acupuncture, nutritional, and spirit work. She was as peaceful dying as she was graceful in life.

Ms. Bartner was certified as a teacher through the American Center for the Alexander Technique in New York in 1977. She taught in the Department of Dramatic Art at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Trinity Repertory Conservatory in Providence, RI, Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ, and at many other universities, training programs, theaters, and community centers around the world as well as out of her own home. These include the Alexander Technique Training Center in Boston and the F.M. Alexander School in Philadelphia. Ms. Bartner also trained at Columbia University (M.A. Modern Dance Education, '72), Rutgers University (B.A. English, '69) and at The Center for the Study of Authentic Movement in New York. She was also a member of American Society for the Alexander Technique (AmSAT).

Ms. Bartner's work with her students brought about a "general heightening of consciousness on all levels." She was loved and praised for the warmth and wisdom of her presentations. Students and colleagues continue to write of her life-changing influence upon them. Ms. Bartner was able to receive these kind words unto her dying bed.

Ms. Bartner's writings include her speech "Feathers of Consciousness," given in June of 1999 as the F.M. Alexander Memorial Lecture at the AmSAT annual general meeting in Amherst, MA. It is published in the *AmSAT News* Spring 2000 issue (#47). "Feathers of Consciousness" continues to win praise for its correlation of the Alexander Technique and spiritual wisdom traditions with the peaceful triumph and liberation of a creative mindset over totalitarian mindsets.

As a dancer Ms. Bartner performed with Phyllis Lamhut and Jamie Cunningham, and with the Louis Nickolais Dance Theater Lab. Her latest dance performance, "Lighthouse," was performed with her son Shem in New York City and Providence, RI, in 1991 and 1992.

Ms. Bartner was a member of the Beth El Synagogue in Durham, NC, and a life member of Hadassah. Past synagogue memberships include the Highland Park Conservative Temple of NJ and Temple Emanu-El of Providence, RI. Ms. Bartner was also a member of the Chapel Hill Zen Center in North Carolina.

Saura Bartner was a loving wife, mother, daughter, sister, and community member. Surviving are her husband, Dr. Paul Aaron; a son and a daughter, respectively, Shem and Nataw Bartner-Aaron; her parents, Elliot and Thelma Bartner of Piscataway, NJ, and two brothers, Jay Bartner of Kennebunk, ME, and Dr. Robert Bartner of Oakland, CA, as well as a large and beloved extended family.

Ed.: This obituary is reprinted with the kind permission of Dr. Paul Aaron, from Saura's website at www.saurabartner.us, where you can find further information on her life and work. ☺



Ed.: The testimonials to Saura's charm and gifts as a teacher are too numerous to reprint, but this brief one from ATI's Interchange online forum seems to capture her spirit "just so."

I went to the website, and feeling sorrow, I also had a clear and bright memory of her. Saura came to teach at Bruce [Fertmans]'s school while I was training there. She was demonstrating a table lesson, and she put her finger on the bridge of the student's nose, stating that that was another spot she liked to remind her students to direct from. "Why?" She answered, "I'm not sure, but it seems to work," and smiled with such a twinkle in her eye! Learned from her that teaching could be deeply joyful and personal. Thank you Saura.

Belinda Mello

Praise for the Technique

Ed.: This email message was forwarded to me by a friend. Reprinted with permission of the original writer, names omitted for privacy.

Dear All,

You may remember that just about this time last year, I was in a musical production and kept losing my voice—literally. The laryngitis lasted for the entire seven weeks of rehearsal, as well as the performances. I went through a huge struggle trying to understand why it was happening, and there seemed to be multiple causes, not least of which was just plain anxiety about singing solo and letting my voice really be heard, which created tremendous tension so that every time my voice got a little better, singing would shred the cords again. In the end I had to lip-synch the chorus numbers, and my two songs (it was to have been my first time singing solo on stage) were given to another person to sing, which was a bummer.

Meanwhile I went to various doctors, got a diagnosis of a thyroid nodule, and went through a miserable biopsy process which ultimately turned up nothing significant. Luckily, though, I have a friend who is a teacher of Alexander Technique, who started me down the road of retraining a lot of old habits of storing tension in my throat. These habits started in childhood, when I was abused by my stepfather and could not speak out. To be able to release the ancient constriction of those years has been liberation indeed.

Thanks to my very patient and encouraging Alexander teacher, I have just finished performing in a new musical. And I sang a big old song with a lot of high notes too! My old fears of singing solo have vanished. It was really fun! ☺



IMPORTANT!

Please note: due to trouble with spam, all ATI email addresses have been changed. Just add “ati-” in front of the old address.

For example, send your articles to ati-exchange@ati-net.com! The ATI Office can be reached at ati-usa@ati-net.com, if you have any questions. Revised email addresses for the regional offices appear in this issue on pp. 23 & 24. The website is being updated accordingly.

A Student's Experience

*L. Paul Geffen
Alexander Technique student*

When I first encountered the Alexander Technique, I could not imagine that it would help me learn to fly. This is not a metaphor. It turns out to be literally true, and no wires or machines were involved, only my body.

My early experiences as a student of Alexander left me puzzled. I didn't know much about bodywork. Sitting down and standing up were tedious at best. Table work seemed to be a gentle but ineffective type of massage. What was the point of this repetition of the obvious? That negative impression didn't last long. I was lucky that my teacher was a close and trusted friend. I knew she cared about me, so I knew there must be something of real value here.

I had long felt that I held back a lot both physically and emotionally, but I didn't know why. Alexander promised to build an awareness of the process of expression, which meant that any blockages would be exposed. This provided both the initial impulse and the ongoing motivation to practice.

In five years of regular lessons, my teacher and I went from the basics to sessions where almost all we did was talk. Those later sessions were some of the most challenging ones because when I talk I tend to be too much in my head and not fully present. For the most part, I left my body behind. At first I was unaware of that because my everyday experience and routine were (and still are) concerned mainly with solving problems by analysis. I am very good at working in the abstract and figuring things out. None of that was of much help in this context. The activity required by Alexander ultimately does not come from an intellectual source. It cannot be done deliberately; rather, it has to be allowed to happen. If Alexander is "about" anything, it is about getting out of our own way and giving the natural intelligence of the body more space in which to work.

My next step was to learn some T'ai Chi. I took weekly lessons in the 24-part Yang Style Short Form. The process of learning this form was helped by my experience in Alexander, which provided an awareness of centering in both space and time. T'ai Chi requires more deliberate and intentional movement, but both forms cultivate mindfulness and so complement each other. Each provides a way of practice toward being more fully present in the body, in space, and in the moment. The goal of T'ai Chi is connection with an existing universal flow, where the movement simply happens.

After about a year of T'ai Chi, I started to study dance. I found a social form called Contact Improvisation, which is based in Aikido and sometimes resembles acrobatics or wrestling. It is a cooperative rather than a martial art form and is rarely performed in front of an audience.

Contact Improvisation is about giving and receiving support, both as weight and as trust. We move from the core, from our center of balance, and from our essential nature. In this art form the medium is the body and the soul—the whole person. All we bring to the dance is all of what we are. There is generally no score, no music, no beat, no props, no costumes, and no expectations, just a willingness to discover and share. As it's improvised, there are few rules and many possibilities. It is very much like play. The improvisation is shared with a partner and with the group, so listening with the whole body is an essential skill.

In more advanced Contact Improvisation practice, we work with momentum and support simultaneously to get completely off the ground. We learn to tolerate disorientation and we start to fly. It's a long process that starts

A Student's Experience

on the floor, sinking into the support of the ground and feeling gravity. We roll and slide in contact with the floor; we spiral and eventually come to standing. All this can happen by following natural pathways in the body, almost without effort, when those pathways are clear. The path can be blocked by fear or by too much intention. We learn to be very gentle with our will.

While it is possible for one dancer to deliberately lift and carry another, this is not flying. Contact flying comes spontaneously when both dancers are ready. There is some luck involved. The dancers follow each other, bringing their centers close together. One may start to move her center under his, and then he may respond by releasing to the shared momentum. Or not.

Readiness has two aspects. One is experience. Lessons, deliberate practice, and exercises can give us that experience. The other side of readiness is letting go of intention and expectation, as far as possible. This is a state of heightened awareness and exquisite flow.

This awareness will precede the capacity for flow. The energy that will flow through a dancer to enable eventual flight is always present. It is defined by the laws of physics: gravity, leverage, impulse, and momentum. The ability to submit to these rules and to trust them completely is gained gradually.

We are always subject to these laws. Until we find ways to come to terms with them, they can feel like a prison. The first real steps toward flight are made by understanding and accepting both gravity and the operation of our bodies in response to gravity. For me, this understanding was not intuitive. Instead it was developed in the practice of the Alexander Technique. ☺

From the Chair

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Do you want to be involved in our Annual General Meetings in some way? Do you want to do something to strengthen international cooperation in our organization? Do you want to help generate new ideas for growth? What I have appreciated as I watch how our committees work is that people are valued for whatever contribution they are able to make. If your time is limited, you can say "I can do this, but not more." And you are valued for that, because without you, that thing wouldn't happen.

When I experience our Membership working together, I am amazed at the power and creativity of our partnership. It is a pleasure to experience. And each person who participates increases our flexibility to respond to our membership, the Alexander community, and the planet.

"Be patient, stick to principle, and it will all open up like a great cauliflower." —A.R. Alexander ☺

In Practice: Molly's Story

Debi Adams
ATI Teaching Member, USA

As a teacher of the Alexander Technique, I work with a delightful array of professionals each day. Some are teachers. Some are physicians. Some are performing artists. It is a challenge to connect with each of these students and a privilege to share the knowledge of the Technique with all of them. But when I was called to work with a friend who had just had a near-fatal car accident, my teaching took on a whole new meaning.

The accident had left Molly in a coma. She had been hit on the driver's side of her van by a truck running a red light. All I heard in everyone's desperate attempt to label her condition was *brain shearing*. I didn't know what that meant. I just knew that I needed to offer my help in any way that might be useful to her and her family.

Although I came to the Alexander Technique as a pianist in search of help for a hand injury, my personal discovery of the indirect nature of the work has been a true guide in my teaching. Suddenly I was confronted with my personal need to help Molly and her family, her family's need for help, and Molly's true need for an indefinable help. All I felt I could offer was a supportive disposition and a simple, grounded touch.

I entered the hospital room amidst the bustling of nurses and doctors. Two family members were crying at Molly's bedside. My intention to promote calm and space for healing was not matched by my surroundings. I spoke to Molly about who I was and why I was there. My instincts not to touch her head were strong and clear. I stood by the foot of her bed and placed my hands on her ankles. As I released into the supportive structure of my own primary control I began to sense turbulent movement within Molly. Confusion was the only description I could give. I continued to visit her and talk to her. Each visit included a few short minutes of hands-on contact. Each visit revealed less confusion. Molly seemed to respond ever so slightly to my presence.

Molly remained in a coma and was transferred to a rehabilitation hospital. The longer trip to this facility made my visits less frequent. I visited about once each week and was greeted warmly by the staff there. During her stay in rehab, Molly's eyes opened. Every time I entered her room I didn't know what to expect. What "new" person was emerging? I never realized how slowly someone comes out of a coma. It took months. When Molly's eyes opened they revealed a vacancy I had not anticipated. Yes, her eyes were open but she was not there. She stared blankly, never tracking movement of any kind. She did squeeze my hand as she had done before her eyes opened. That was a clearer sign to me that she would return than anything in her eyes. It was at this time that I began to ponder anew the relationship between mind and body. The mind/body connection has always been stated clearly by Alexander. I had never questioned this relationship but I had never witnessed its importance in such a clear context. It was a connection that had always seemed inevitable. But now I was faced with a body that seemed to have no mind. Where was Molly? If she is not here now then how can I speak to her thinking and coax her into release and wholeness?

Weeks passed. Molly began to track movement. I worked with her on this just by asking her to follow my eyes. She seemed to try. I had slowly moved my way up her body in terms of contact. While her ankles had appeared at first the only acceptable areas of contact, I could now quite comfortably touch her arms, ribs, hips, and legs. Her clavicle had been broken in the accident so I limited movement in that area. Contact always produced a calmness and an internal flow. But there was such a long way to go.

One day I received a call that Molly was waking up. No one knew what she remembered, if anything.

In Practice: Molly's Story

The subsequent visits to the rehab facility were filled with uncertainty. Molly began to speak slowly and not very clearly. She remembered me although she was not sure where we had met. She always asked that I do hands-on work with her because it helped her to relax. At that time I felt that Molly was simply getting reconnected with herself. I guess that's all we ever do anyway!

When Molly returned home I was able to visit her quite often. She had limited awareness of her surroundings and limited awareness of herself. Molly had an array of helpers to whom I decided to attach myself. Her speech therapist was very interested in what I did and listened carefully to my suggestions. She was busy getting Molly to "do" her breathing exercises. I, of course, was not interested in the doing and showed the therapist what verbal cues Molly responded to with ease regarding breathing. Molly began to notice the differences too. We practiced the speech exercises together always translating the therapist's instructions into clearer and simpler ideas of non-doing. One of our favorite activities was calling her friends on the phone to see if they could understand her. The physical therapist was curious but less interested in me. He was helping Molly walk and sit and stand from chairs. You can imagine how much I had to say about that! Molly and I practiced walking, sitting, standing, and doing small activities around her house. It was hard for Molly to remember what we had done from session to session. She liked taking notes and showing them to the PT. After awhile she began to remember our work and tried to make use of it even without me!

The fear in Molly's eyes was constant—naturally. Any stimulus caused her to contract hugely. I worked with Molly to help her sense herself as a whole person and to take in information about her surroundings. It slowed her down and reduced her accidents. It gave her physical stability and helped with her speech. Sometimes she would repeat my words back to me and it seemed as though they had no meaning. Other times she responded enthusiastically. Kinesthetic work was the same: her responses seemed either completely vacant or quite full.

After several months of work Molly improved enough to add activities to her life. My work schedule became busier and we were unable to meet on a regular basis. About three years have passed since the accident. Molly has a part-time job. She takes classes, exercises, and is preparing to get her driver's license. I am planning to work with her again. All of the therapists she has seen are convinced that her healing has peaked. I think she's really ready to begin! I feel that her thinking now is so superior to what it was when she was in rehab that she is certain to improve if guided appropriately. There is somehow more of her available to work with now. There is a mind/body searching for unification again. Her walking continues to be a challenge as does her speech. But now when I work with her I have a body that is responding to the person within. Mind and body are connected in a way that was not apparent earlier. Molly enjoys the Alexander lessons. They slow down her anxious pace; they provide useful information for her to explore; and they are a wonderful excuse for two friends to reunite. ☺

Ed.: The In Practice column is a space for members to share their experiences in teaching the Technique. We look forward to reading yours!

"It takes a genius, you know, to do the simple thing."

Marjorie Barlow, referring to F.M. Alexander

*7th International Congress of
the F.M. Alexander Technique*

*16-22 August 2004
Oxford, England*



Invitation

An open invitation to submit proposals for workshops, classes,
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If you wish to conduct or run any of the above, please apply to the Congress Directors using the appropriate form. To receive a form and a copy of our selection criteria, please contact us, specifying which of the above you wish to apply for. Contact:

Peter Ribeaux

46 Stevenage Road, London SW6 6HA, +44 (0)20 7731 6348, email: Peter@ribeaux.fsnet.co.uk

The forms are also available for downloading from the Congress website: www.atcongress.net.

Mark Your Calendar!

**JOIN US FOR
THE 2003 ATI
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

19-23 October at Spanish Point, Ireland

See the brochure mailed with this issue of ExChange for details!

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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