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Look Alive

A Perspective on the Alexander Technique

Hello everyone,

Thanks for your positive responses to the newsletter. I heard from several of you who found the video link I posted to be quite helpful.

This month's article, Keeping Your Head with The Alexander Technique, first appeared in a longer version in TALKBACK, a magazine published by the UK charity BackCare. I hope you enjoy it.

For my students, this newsletter is meant as a supplement to the lessons. For those of you who have yet to try the Technique, it should answer a few questions and give you a little insight into the work. If at any time you decide you'd rather not receive the mailings, you can easily unsubscribe by clicking on the link at the bottom of every issue.

In the meantime, enjoy!

Keeping Your Head with the AT

Imagine a situation that makes you nervous. A job interview. Opening night with you in the starring role. The first date with the man or woman of your dreams. Notice what's happening in your body. Is your neck stiff? Are your shoulders tight? Are you breathing properly? Chances are, the anxiety you felt at the very thought of these situations caused you to react in a physical way.

Most of us react in some way to every situation we encounter, stressful or not, without realizing it. Intent on rushing home, we carry our groceries with our shoulders pulled up to our ears. Eager to express our opinions, we talk without stopping to take a breath. Burdened by our stressful day, we clench our jaws while sleeping.

Automatic responses like these can lead to a variety of health problems, including backaches, migraines, and even depression. The Alexander Technique teaches us to recognize and stop those reactions, which in turn allows us to start functioning freely, naturally, and with grace.

"I never knew where my shoulders were before I started the Alexander Technique," says Ann, 66, who started lessons to address a chronic back problem.

During a typical session with Ann, I might place my hands on her head, neck, and back, and ask her to sit down. In her eagerness to reach the chair, she might to throw her head back and push her tailbone out. F.M. Alexander, the Technique's developer, called this eagerness to obtain a goal at the cost of a healthy process "endgaining."

I remind Ann that there is no need to "lose her head" in order to sit down. In fact, I encourage her to forget all about sitting down. I use my hands to prevent her from contracting and to invite her to lengthen. Then I ask her to become aware of the process of sitting down by directing her thoughts and energies along the length of her spine as she folds from the hips and bends her knees. Before she knows it, she is sitting in the chair.

My aim is not to teach Ann the proper way to sit or stand, but to change the way she reacts to a stimulus - in this case sitting down. Slowly, Ann begins to make the connection between her thinking and her doing. Before long, she will be able to catch herself endgaining and make the choice to function differently even when I'm not around.

After seven lessons, Ann reports an improvement in her back condition and an overall improvement in her well-being.

"My back feels better, and I'm also able to react differently to other people and to my own feelings. I don't need to get upset every time something doesn't go my way. Whenever I do feel pain, I just lie down for a while and work on my directions. The pain doesn't frighten me anymore."

Ann will be moving into a sixth floor walk-up next month. Is she worried about her back?

"Not at all," she says. "Instead of shying away from challenges like stair-climbing, I now see them as opportunities to work on myself and improve my use. For me, the Alexander Technique has been nothing short of revolutionary."

Next Introduction: Saturday June 11

The next introduction is on Saturday June 11, 2010 from 11:00-12:30.

Location: Paris, Bastille (75011). Metros: Bastille, Chemin Vert, Breguet Sabin.

Cost: There is no cost to attend, but I ask for a check for 25 Euros to hold your place. Your check will be returned to you on the day of the introduction. No-shows will be charged.

[Click here to register.](#)

Fall Workshops

I am considering running a cost-effective, 3-hour workshop in late September. I have not yet settled on a topic, but the workshop will be appropriate for both beginners and experienced students of the Alexander Technique.

Please let me know if a workshop would interest you. I'm open to topic suggestions!

Closing Words

That's it for this issue. Feel free to write with suggestions, article requests, or questions. I'll do my best to answer them in future issues. To reach me, simply reply to this message.

Until next time, keep thinking up and hoping for the best!

Alexis

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