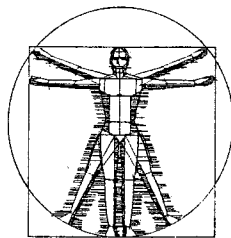


IMPROVING YOUR HEALTH THROUGH THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

This subject concerns a most important discovery of how the body functions. It is as basic to people as proper nutrition, and even more difficult to explain. Aldous Huxley, when asked the same question, said it was like describing color to someone who had been blind from birth. W.H.M. Carrington in a lecture to the Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique in London in 1969, said what many scientists, doctors and other lay people have felt about this research:

"I consider that Alexander's work is probably one of the most underrated achievements of the 20th century. I think that it is surprising how relatively unknown and unrecognized it is, because I am convinced that it will prove to be as important to humanity as the work of Newton, Einstein and particularly of Darwin."

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1985 CALENDAR

July 19-21
American Academy of
Environmental
Medicine.

Clinical ecology
seminar.

Holiday Inn,
Westlake,
(Cleveland), OH.

Sept. 13-15

Biomedical
Synergistics
Institute.

Conference on human
functioning.

Wichita, KS.

Sept. 27

American Academy of
Environmental
Medicine.

Clinical ecology
seminar. Granada
Royale Homotel
Denver, CO.

Oct. 6-17

Advances in
biochemistry:
Research and clinical
application in
psychiatry and
medicine. Academy of
Orthomolecular
Psychiatry/Weizman
Institute of Science.
Israel.

Oct. 1985

ICAN
Nutrition Meeting.
Rio de Janeiro
Brasil. Led by
Olympio Pinto
C.D., M.Sc.

1986 CALENDAR

Feb. 14-17

International Forum
of Nutritional
Medicine. San
Francisco, Ca. Sept.
12-14 Biomedical
Synergistics
Institute.
Conference on human
functioning.
Wichita, KS.

(ALEXANDER, continued from page 3)

F. Matthias Alexander was born in Tasmania in 1869. At age 25 he was very successful with his recitals from Shakespeare, other plays and concerts at private engagements in Australia and New Zealand. His voice and stage presence were notable, but in the early 1890's, his throat began to fail him during his recitals. Rounds of medical treatment over several years were no help. But these did lead him to conclude that the loss of his voice was due to something he was doing to himself. He began to check what he was doing by watching himself speak in front of several mirrors. After some time, he began to notice an almost imperceptible retraction of his head and tensing of his neck muscles as he spoke.

He was excited about this discovery, correctly guessing that the tension in his neck when he pulled his head backward, was closing off his larynx and causing his loss of voice. Disappointment soon followed as he found it almost impossible to overcome his old habit and manner of speaking. However, his unusual powers of observation and deduction kept him before the mirrors, persisting in his vigil. By continual practice he came to realize that his difficulty was due to reflexive actions, programmed subconsciously into his mind over many years, in response to the stimulus to speak. He found that the retraction of his head back and down created downward pressures and also tensions throughout his whole body. He also found that his efforts to introduce a corrective action, instead of helping, only created more tension. So it finally dawned on him that, to stop the harmful involuntary activity, the first essential was simply not to do it. While this seemed simple enough to accomplish, it proved most difficult as deliberate, conscious perseverance and attention had to be instilled in his thoughts in order to no longer be "bound in the prison of habit."

This led to the realization that he was not alone; that all of us develop body misuses in some form or other, and in the process, the brain is tricked into believing all is well, when in fact, it is still wrong. He found in observing other actors and

musicians (violinists, cellists, pianists and flutists), that they also jeopardized their performances by subconscious, stressful habits during a performance. As his own success became known, performers began clamoring for lessons, as those who intimately use their bodies are more aware, and grasp more quickly the significance of small adjustments, and the relationship of these to their performance.

The results his students achieved were often as startling as was the regaining of his own voice. His days and years were now filled with teaching and improving his understanding of the principles involved in "how our body moves." He found more and more that the way we use ourselves unobtrusively and subconsciously enslave us to our past. Because many of his pupils' problems were related to postural defects, much of Alexander's work has rather incorrectly been called a posture correction method. Alexander himself avoided the term posture in describing his work for two important reasons. First of all, the word 'posture' does not imply the extent to which all the body's functions (mental and physical) are involved. And secondly, posture indicates a position, and Alexander's discoveries about how we move showed that fixed or held postures of any kind are detrimental to our well-being and ease of movement.

Man is not bent over because he is old, but because his conscious defenses have left him. People persist in body position misuse, even when it is causing pain. Children today are particularly subject to slouching. Observe a child at a desk, learning to write. And the next time you are writing, observe your tensions as you sit. Note the tight clutching of the pen and the distortion of your body position. Our strained ways of sitting reflect early stressful misuse of the body.

One of the most common problems of bad use today is the slumped over, round shouldered, protruding stomach stance. In such slumping, (and we all do it from time to time), the force of gravity is allowed to contract our body, making it shorter. We seem to be trying to shrink into a smaller

space. If someone says, "Stand up straight," or "Stand tall," we think of the sergeant and the military posture and brace up, but we hold it very briefly. We seem under the impression that if we do this long enough and often enough, we will develop strong muscles that will fix and hold us straight. As a matter of fact, if we observe the soldier at attention, we can note that the neck, face and head are undergoing severe tension.

Alexander found that the head should lead the body. When leading, it tends to simultaneously rotate slightly forward and move upward. As the body follows, the spine is lengthened, and the person actually becomes taller. Test measurements have shown height increases as much as one and one-half inches. Our manner of sitting is another common postural problem. When we sit, we go "kerplunk" - the body goes down, we feel heavy in the seat, so we wiggle down farther and farther, squeezing ourselves out of shape. This position inhibits breathing and impairs digestion. Most of us, when we sit, lift the chin which pushes the head downward and backward, then as our body goes back, we fall into the chair with an awkward thud.

In getting up, we again lift the chin forcing the head down and back. This puts strain on muscles of the back, neck, arms and thighs. If instead, we lead with the top of the head (not the chin), a little forward motion, will bring us onto our feet, as the body eases out of the chair.

Richard Brown, Ph.D., one of those who have conducted scientific tests to establish the authenticity of Alexander's work, has stated that:

"Alexander's technique is not one of adjusting posture or alignment as this denotes a static position. This implies rigidity. There really is no single Alexander position."

It is easy enough to see that a violinist may have a stiff neck because of his way of holding the violin, or the cellist with his back trouble, but it is difficult for the average person to realize the enormous importance of these tension habits in the lives of musicians.

Many doctors have agreed with the theory that bad posture can seriously affect health. Until Alexander's work, no one had shown that posture could correct health problems or restore health. While he never undertook to cure a disease or a body imperfection, almost without exception, all who studied with Alexander reported improvements or cures of their ailments. Numerous physicians and Ph.D.'s have been his pupils, and worked with the Alexander Technique; plus many famous and well-known people; and all of them have publicly acclaimed his work. Such conditions as rheumatism, arthritis, cervical spondylosis, spastic colon, ulcerative colitis, eczema, high blood pressure and asthma - all these and many others have been helped by following his procedures.

Reputable studies have been made, which firmly established the scientific basis of the Alexander Method. Such notables as: Frank P. Jones, professor emeritus of Tufts University, Wilfred Barlow, MD, Nikolas Tinbergen, University of Oxford Professor and Nobel Prize Winner, Anatomist Dr. Raymond Dart, George Bernard Shaw, John Dewey, Aldous Huxley, Sir Stafford Cripps and others too numerous to mention have all personally testified and publicly proclaimed this scientific basis of Alexander's Technique.

There are now over 150 certified Alexander teachers in 24 states of the United States and over 400 teachers in Europe and in 18 other countries. The F. M. Alexander Technique is taught at the following prestigious organizations: The Universiteis of Illinois, Maryland, Boston, Brandeis, Rutgers, UCLA, USC, San Francisco State, and in addition at the Julliard School of Music and Drama, Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestral Training Program, Calif. Inst. of the Arts, Manhattan School of Music, L.A. Civic Light Opera, The National Theater Conservatory, and in London, The Royal Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, and The Royal College of Music.

We are fortunate in Ojai Valley to have two exceptional teachers, Lena and Michael Frederick. Each year they conduct a seminar during the week

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(ALEXANDER, continued from page 9)

between Christmas and the New year at the Ojai Valley School, upper campus. During one of the evening sessions I will present a lecture on the relationship of nutrition to Alexander's work and how it relates to back, shoulder and limb infirmities. Information can be obtained from the Fredericks at P.O. Box 408, Ojai, California, 93023.

While the Alexander Technique is fairly easy to demonstrate, it is as I said in my first paragraph, almost impossible to describe in words alone, either oral or written. Any skepticism you may have should be considered helpful, as is any effort to find a truth. Because I feel Alexander's discoveries are important, and basic to everyone's health and well-being, I have studied five books and more than 40 articles about it. Although Alexander taught himself, most writers on the subject feel it is impossible to sense its real value and importance without individual or group lessons. While that is true, I believe that Alexander gave us some principles that can be helpful to PPNF readers in understanding and improving their own body functioning whether it be to overcome a back problem that has ruined a vacation or caused loss of work time, to improve one's tennis or golf game, or just to reduce tension and fatigue.