

# EXCHANGE

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## Learning from Tiger

*Robert Rickover*  
*ATI Teaching Member, USA & Canada*

The August 14, 2000 issue of *Time* magazine features an article about Tiger Woods entitled "The Game of Risk—How the Best Golfer in the World Got Even Better." Although I have no specific interest in the sport of golf, I do have a long-standing fascination with the general theme of the article: how can someone learn to do something better.

That's precisely what the Alexander Technique is all about. And while Tiger Woods has probably never heard of it, it's interesting that his quest for a better golf swing parallels in many ways the process F. Matthias Alexander—the developer of the Alexander Technique—went through a century ago.

Alexander was a Shakespearean reciter who ran up against limitations in his ability to perform well on stage. At that time there were no microphones and speakers and so he had to fill an entire auditorium with just the power of his own voice. Like Woods he was very talented at his profession but he also knew that there was room for improvement. In particular, he found that his voice gave out during a longer performance and that he had a tendency to gasp for breath on occasion.

Neither his doctors nor his vocal coaches were able to help and so he set off on his own, using a system of mirrors to monitor his performance in order to see precisely what was causing his difficulties. If he were living today, he would probably use videotapes of himself to see what was going on.

That's what Tiger Woods did in order to improve his swing. "I knew I wasn't in the greatest positions in my swing at the Masters," Woods said.

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### ATI Vision and Mission

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

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

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

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## Editor's Page

*Andrea Matthews, Editor*

"It is not that mindfulness is the 'answer' to all life's problems. Rather it is that all life's problems can be seen more clearly through the lens of a clear mind."

So notes Jon Kabat-Zinn in his book, *Full Catastrophe Living*. Seems reasonable, even obvious. Yet experientially, it can pose a surprising emotional, even existential challenge. This issue comes up a lot with my students, who find often themselves struggling with the definite feeling that seeing through the "lens of a clear mind" is somehow wrong or selfish or unloving or too "detached." What are they up against?

Jack Kornfield writes, in *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*, "Our entanglement in thoughts and beliefs about ourselves, those around us, and the world makes it impossible to be where we are. It is like the Zen painter who finished a life-sized portrait of a tiger on the wall of his dwelling. Returning home lost in thought some days later, he was frightened upon suddenly seeing the tiger there, having forgotten it was his own creation."

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# EXCHANGE

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## From the Chair: Staying in Touch

Jamee Culbertson

*Chair, Alexander Technique International*

*Ed.: Practicing what she preaches, Jamee shares an experience from her teaching, starting on page 27.*

A year before ATI's 10th anniversary and we are off to Europe again for our Annual Meeting this October! Riding on the success of last year's Conference in Ireland we will be returning once again to the shores of Spanish Point in County Clare for more inspiration, fun, and exploration.

Our international identity has been enhanced by invitations to other sites for future AGMs, including Switzerland and Hungary. Hungary and Japan have been added to ATI's list of worldwide offices. We are expanding into new territory and continue to participate in conversations with other organizations who represent the Alexander Technique throughout the world.

Communication is the key. Watch as our inter-office relations grow and enhance our Vision-Mission. Communications Chair Rebecca Lisak and Board liaison Teresa Lee are busy strengthening our outreach as well as our inter-committee relations. Staying in touch makes a difference. We hope to see you in Ireland for this year's conference. If you can't make it we'd love to hear from you just the same. Let's stay in touch! ☺

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## Learning from Tiger

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“But my timing was great, so I got away with it. And I made almost every putt. You can have a wonderful week like that even when your swing isn’t sound. But can you still contend in tournaments with that swing when your timing isn’t good? Will it hold up over a long period of time? The answer to those questions, with the swing I had, was no. And I wanted to change that.”

The article notes that Woods has become “...an obsessive student of the game who reviews videotapes of old tournaments for clues about how to play each hole.” Alexander too was an obsessive student of his performance and in the end his obsession paid off not only in providing a solution to his voice problem, but later in the discovery of a process that could be taught to others who wanted to improve the quality of their physical functioning.

“What is most remarkable about Woods,” the article continues, “is his restless drive for what the Japanese call *kaizen*, or continuous improvement. Toyota engineers will push a perfectly good assembly line until it breaks down. Then they’ll find and fix the flaw and push the system again. That’s *kaizen*. That’s Tiger.”

And that’s Alexander, too. Never content with the progress he had already made, first in solving his own voice problem and later in developing better ways to teach others and to train teachers in his Technique.

Wood’s first instructor Rudy Duran commented that he has “the ability to stay in the present during a tournament and focus on hitting one shot at a time.”

Alexander too discovered that in order to change his way of speaking he had to learn to stay focused on what he was thinking and doing in the present. Much of what Alexander Technique teachers do to help their students today is teach them how to develop this skill for themselves.

It’s no wonder that so many leading performers in the fields of acting, music, and dance have studied the Alexander Technique and have publicly endorsed it. It turns out that this ability is also very useful for people who don’t consider themselves to be performers but whose “performance” of activities in their daily lives has put harmful stress on their bodies, often to the point of causing pain such as backache or stiff shoulders and necks.

Learning how to monitor your thoughts and actions in real time is a valuable skill for anyone to master.

*Robert Rickover is a teacher of the Alexander Technique living in Lincoln, Nebraska. He also teaches regularly in Toronto, Canada. He is the creator of The Complete Guide to the Alexander Technique at <http://www.alexandertechnique.com> ☺*

*Ed.: This article is the second 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!*

## In Practice

*Dalia Geffen*  
*Alexander Technique student*

Listening to the operas of Richard Wagner and having an Alexander lesson have the same effect on me: my world expands and I feel I can see a thousand years into the future, to a time when humans have evolved into wiser and more noble beings. Although both Wagner and Alexander are products of an earlier age, they still haven't come into their own and are met with controversy. Their legacies are artifacts of the future. To see how alike they are, listen, for instance, to *Parsifal*, an opera composed in the early 1880s. Surprisingly for its era, Gurnemanz, one of the main characters, says: "Here time and space are one." And what is the Alexander Technique if not a way to teach an awareness of the unity of these two artificially separated realities? Speaking personally, learning to give myself enough space by taking the time to do it has changed my sense of the world, of human possibilities, and has given me more confidence. The Alexander Technique has helped me bear what I was sure was unbearable. I sense that had I been born under different circumstances, I might feel as though I were having Alexander lessons all the time.

"Here time and space are one."

*Richard Wagner, Parsifal*

Six years ago, before I had even heard of Alexander, I felt alienated from myself, full of self-doubt and stifled. I was lucky to meet my teacher, who began working with me soon after she started her training. The last six years have been

enormously exhilarating and enormously painful. By patiently tolerating whatever feelings came up during lessons and outside of lessons, I found reserves of patience inside myself that I never knew existed. Each time that my teacher painstakingly led me back to myself, I became more comfortable with remaining there in spite of the enormous pulls that my past and the learned habits of the past exerted on me. She was unfailingly patient and generous, something I had never expected from any human being. The lessons and the attendant phone conversations between the lessons were hard work, but they were much better than the alternative: feeling stuck, unfulfilled, and quite unhealthy.

I remember the time I was worried about a family get-together that I couldn't attend and what my family would say about me and my absence. My teacher told me to enlarge myself and my world as much as possible until my worry seemed insignificantly small and my tension about it dissipated. To me that experience was nothing short of miraculous. At other times I had great difficulty staying there with myself and tolerating what-

## In Practice

ever feelings rose to the surface of my consciousness. The urge to escape, to do anything but experience myself, was almost overwhelming. Yet the gentleness, patience, and reassuring tones of my teacher, who would lead me back to myself, made me willing to try. And once I had tried, I felt joy and a sense of mastery—unfamiliar feelings.

I used to have enormous difficulties dealing with my mother, who seemed stuck in her stiflingly small worldview. After five years of Alexander lessons, I began to tolerate my mother. When I talk to her or see her, I just keep my wide perspective, keep my “aperture” open, as my teacher would say. Occasionally I have fun with her. I used to think this state of affairs was beyond the realm of possibility. But it is real now.

The Alexander Technique is a boon for people who are afraid of falling into an existential void. By making our felt (however unconsciously) experience immediate and concrete, a teacher can impart a sense of reality that is rooted in our bodies and senses. This leads to greater self-acceptance and trust. ☺

*Ed.: The In Practice column is offered as a place for students and teachers of the Technique to share their insights and experiences from lessons. Please join the conversation!*

**To express what one wishes, one must look at things with enough attention to discover in them what has never been seen before.**

*Gustave Flaubert*

## Alexander Technique on the Net

New items are always appearing on ATI's web site at [www.ati-net.com](http://www.ati-net.com). Also, at [www.alexandertechnique.com/](http://www.alexandertechnique.com/) **online**, you'll find links to the rapidly growing number of Alexander Technique resources on the Internet. Alexander teacher listings can be found both on the ATI website and on the “Ask Dr. Weil” website at [www.drweil.com](http://www.drweil.com).

Karel Weissberg sends word of the Washington, DC, area teachers' site: <http://www.alexander-teachers.org/>

To join ATI's internet mail group, Interchange, send an empty email to [ATI-Interchange-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:ATI-Interchange-subscribe@yahoogroups.com). The new list has lots of great features, like common file storage and a chat room. To access these features you need to join yahoogroups (at no cost!). Log onto <http://www.yahoo.com/> and join!

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If you launch your own website, or find anything Alexander-related on the Web, let us know at: [newsletter@ati-net.com](mailto:newsletter@ati-net.com)! ☺

## Understanding a Therapeutic Experience in an Alexander Technique Class, Pt. 2

Andrea M. Matthews

ATI Teaching Member and editor of ExchangeE

*This article is continued from the previous issue of ExchangeE (Vol. 9, No. 2, May 2001).*

### **A Central Source for My Understanding of the Experience: The Work of Frank Pierce Jones**

*Frank Pierce Jones (1905-1975), originally a professor of classics at Brown University, studied the Technique with F.M. Alexander (the developer of the Alexander Technique) and his brother A.R. Alexander; Jones became so impressed with the work, and so convinced of the importance of conducting research to establish the scientific validity of the work, that he changed careers in mid-life, becoming a professor of psychology at Tufts University, conducting studies on the Technique as well as teaching it. His papers are collected in the Alexander Technique Archives on permanent loan to the Tufts University Special Collections. He was the author of one of the best books on the Technique, *Freedom to Change* (originally published in 1976 as *Body Awareness in Action*).*

Frank Jones trained Tommy Thompson, who trained me as a teacher at his school in Cambridge; he also taught another of my Alexander Technique teachers as a student at Tufts University. My understanding of the Technique has been shaped by Jones's influence on my teachers as well as by my reading of his book and many articles.

In *Freedom to Change*, Frank Jones remarked that “[i]t is said that a simple way to trap a monkey is to present him with a nut in a bottle. The monkey puts his paw through the bottle's narrow mouth, grasps the nut, then cannot withdraw his paw because he will not (and hence cannot) let go of the nut. Most people are caught in monkey traps of unconscious habit. They cannot escape because they do not perceive what they are doing while they are doing it. Having an unconscious response pattern pointed out to you by somebody else is not the same as perceiving it for yourself while it is happening. The Alexander Technique opens a window on the little-known area between stimulus and response and gives you the self-knowledge you need in order to change the pattern of your response—or, if you choose, not to make it at all.” (p. 4)

In 1967, at a time when discussions of awareness and consciousness were widely considered ridiculous or irrelevant in the profession of psychology, Jones wrote a paper entitled “The Organization of Awareness.” In it he defined awareness as “knowledge of what is going on while it is happening—of what you are doing while you are doing it. It is a generalized alertness to present events. It must be admitted, however, that awareness of what you are doing is not everybody's primary goal. Many people on the contrary prefer to be *unaware* of what they are doing. They aim at a

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kind of learning that will give them automatically the right response for any situation. The advantage of learning something so well that you can do it automatically is, they say, that you can think of something else while you are doing it...[The problem is that once] you are in the habit of thinking of other things than what you are doing it may become hard to stop...In my view the chief disadvantage of automatic performance is that without awareness it cannot be changed...Even if a habit is good, it loses something if it becomes unconscious and stereotyped.” (pp. 174-175) Conditions change and the response may cease to be appropriate—if it ever was.

Jones goes on to describe the Alexander Technique as “a method for organizing awareness in such a way that a performance can be well-learned without becoming stereotyped and mindless, and hence incapable of change. The key is to be found in the relation between awareness and another conscious state, attention. Awareness, as I conceive it, is a general unfocused condition in which a person is wide awake and alert to whatever may be going on without being concentrated on anything in particular. Attention, on the other hand, is focused on some particular aspect of the field. It has been compared to a spotlight on a dark stage... The ability to give attention—to concentrate—is much sought after and is often valued in proportion to its intensity and the degree to which everything else is shut out.” (p. 176) He gives examples that “illustrate the common notion of concentration as a narrowing of the field of attention...[and] the danger in concentration—the danger that something important is happening *outside* the field of attention without ever being observed. The spotlight may be too bright and the rest of the field too dark to make the observation...[With the Alexander Technique, to] use the figure of the spotlight and the stage again, this time the spot is still bright but the stage is merely dimmed instead of blacked out.” (p. 176)

He notes that the one supposed division in consciousness that is rarely questioned is “the division between self and environment.” (p. 177) Yet “[i]nformation about the state of the body and the state of the environment is being recorded in the brain at one and the same time. Attention is ordinarily directed either one way or the other but there is no reason why this need always be the case, since the organism is capable of selecting the stimuli to which it will respond.” (p. 177)

A wider awareness such as this brings to consciousness (by a figure-ground contrast) habitual preparatory sets that facilitate learned responses to stimuli, but that do not always make those responses better. “A set in this sense of the term is an attitude of expectancy [both physical and

mental, I would add] which facilitates a learned response...Sets differ from one another according to the expected character (the 'idea') of the response and the previous experience of the subject...A set may be imposed very quickly after the stimulus is given, but it is never instantaneous. It starts with a change in the tonus or tensional balance in the neck and trunk and spreads to the limbs so that there is a general postural change before the particular goal-directed part of the pattern appears." (p. 178) These preparatory sets are modeled on the unlearned and rapid startle pattern, but occur more slowly; thus, it is possible to interrupt them by inhibiting the displacement of the head which is the first stage of the pattern. This is very different from suppressing the pattern or ignoring the stimulus, both in execution and in effect. "Awareness of the head-neck-trunk relation serves as a framework for the learned activity. By inhibiting the set or fixation of the head, a better distribution

of tonus is obtained in the trunk and limbs and better coordination and control of the specific activity." (p. 179) This inhibition (in the physiological sense, rather than Freudian sense of repression) can be induced in a willing student by skilled hands-on contact and later sustained by the student through conscious inhibition of the impulse to disturb the head-neck balance

"The Alexander Technique opens a window on the little-known area between stimulus and response and gives you the self-knowledge you need in order to change the pattern of your response—or, if you choose, not to make it at all."

(on what could be called the level of structure) and ultimately through the unified field of awareness (i.e., of self-in-environment), of which the head-neck relation is necessarily a subset.

Parenthetically, this issue of "willingness" is important. As F.M. Alexander himself remarked: "As soon as people come with the ideas of unlearning instead of learning, you have them in the frame of mind you want." (Maisel, 1967/1995, p. 7) Willingness in this context means being willing to suspend and not act on your sense of what you "must" do in order to accomplish something, whether the activity be thinking about something or executing a more obviously physical movement of some kind. The student must then be willing to tolerate the discomfort of the paradoxical experience that arises between the old reality and the new experience which violates it, and more than just tolerate it, to actively experience it until it resolves into a new reality.<sup>2</sup>

Frank Jones writes of connecting awareness of inner and outer states through attention to *aspects* of self and environment simultaneously; I have been experimenting with my own students with a more generalized

## A Therapeutic Experience, Pt. 2

awareness of self-in-environment, through the step-by-step expansion of one's field of awareness from self (as in sensing one's skin—as shorthand for getting a sense of one's whole self) to include space one can see, then space one can't see (the usually forgotten space behind and above oneself), then awareness of being on a planet. I reserve the use of hands-on contact to moments when the student appears to need additional support for sustaining this awareness while meeting challenging stimuli. I do this to promote as directly as possible the student's sense of competence with the new tool and the novel sort of "control" over one's use that it affords: the experiential awareness that "what you think is what you get," as one Alexander Technique teacher puts it.

In his 1973 essay, "Learning How to Learn: An Operational Definition of the Alexander Technique," Jones reflected on how revolutionary this method is: "When you look through a microscope or a telescope the first time you are forced, if you accept the evidence of your senses, to revise your views of the universe outside yourself. Alexander discovered a way of using his hands to give a person new experiences which force him to revise his ideas both of himself and of the universe...The discovery has profound implications. If the new knowledge were properly formulated, I believe that it would do for the field of psychology what Newton did for physics, transform it into a unified science." (p. 188)

He didn't regard effects from Alexander lessons such as improvements in health or posture ("impressive as they are") as criteria sufficient to set the Technique apart from other methods. "It is always difficult to prove that your results followed directly from the means employed and could not have come about in any other way." (p. 189) Also, viewing the work from the point of view of medical effects overlooks the fact that it works exactly the same way with "normal" students as with those with disabilities. "I believe the distinguishing criterion should be the movement pattern itself. As I understand it, the Alexander Technique is not concerned with three-dimensional but with four-dimensional posture, in other words with movement." (p. 190) He continues:

What distinguishes the Alexander Technique from all other methods of self-improvement that I know anything about is the character of the thinking involved. Other people talk about awareness and thinking, but operationally they mean something quite different from the Alexander experience. To me it is an expansion of the field of consciousness (or of "attention" if you object to the term "consciousness") in space and in time so that you are taking in both yourself and your environment, both the present moment and the next. It is a unified field organized



around the self as a centre...The expansion of awareness in time restores free will as a datum of experience.

Such a concept of awareness would, if it were established, force the re-organization of two fields of psychology—perception, which at present is fractionated, and learning-theory, which seems unable to cope with the problem of free will.

The expanded field of consciousness makes possible what [John] Dewey [himself an enthusiastic student and supporter of F.M. Alexander] called “thinking in activity”...I believe that this model can be applied to any situation that involves perception or learning.” (pp. 192-193)

He quotes one of his own students (who may well have been my teacher later in New York, from the description given) as saying, “it is nothing more than maintaining a balance between the internal and external environment,” and himself concludes: “Learning how to learn’ is what distinguishes the Alexander Technique from all the other ‘ways to grow.’” (p. 193)

F.M. Alexander once remarked: “You can’t know a thing by an instrument that is wrong.” It is a curious twist that the instrument by which we perceive and judge reality is our psychophysical self. When we distort our structure, we distort the flow of information in and out; the assumptions and expectations with which we operate act as a filter for sensory perception coming in, and shape our reactions and the manifestation of our intentions going out. Necessary information that is filtered out on the way in is replaced by “old” information from previous experiences. This can lead to quite a divergence between what we think is going on and what is actually happening; this naturally leads to an uncomfortable sense of insecurity, to which we tend to respond by doing more of what we’re already doing, moving us further from consonance with our actual situation: a vicious cycle. Under these conditions, functionally speaking, we are living in the past or are busy projecting that past into the future; the one place we are not in is the here and now. A characteristic feature of the Alexander Technique is the comprehensiveness of its view that the organism is always trying to right itself as a psychophysical unity. If the interfering patterns of thinking and reacting can be removed, a dynamic equilibrium will naturally be restored. This is why the openness to “unlearning” is so critical; so much of what is usually considered learning is simply adding on another layer of interference to cope with the interference already being produced.

# A Therapeutic Experience, Pt. 2

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “Autonomy involves responding from an ‘I’ position rather than reacting from a ‘We’ position.” (p. 383) In the Alexander Technique, a distinction is made between responding from “non-doing” and reacting from habit. The emotional outcome seems very similar to the description in the text-book: “The ‘responsible I’ assumes responsibility for one’s own experience and comfort and leaves emotional and intellectual space for others to create their own happiness. A reasonably differentiated person is capable of genuine concern for others without expecting something in return.” (Prochaska & Norcross, 1999, p. 383) [Ed.: This endnote was mistakenly omitted from Pt. 1 of this article.]

<sup>2</sup> I was struck while reading about Jay Haley’s “Ordeal Therapy” by the acknowledgment that the client must cooperate by not breaking the paradox, in order for the “trick” to work, because when I recently tried the “reading upside down” approach from my “therapeutic experience” on a student who is especially driven by “getting it right,” he steadfastly refused to play along. He read the words not as he saw them, but as he thought they ought to be, i.e., normal words, just upside down and backwards. (Imagine my surprise!) In fact, he seemed quite proud of his ability to do it. Even when I stopped him and asked him to read exactly what he saw, he could not (or would not) see the task as paradoxical—it was either controllable or impossible. So I stopped tormenting him and moved on to something else. In a way, this made me all the more appreciative of paradoxes and of how that one worked for me.

“Learning how to learn is what distinguishes the Alexander Technique from all other ‘ways to grow.’”

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## Excerpt from *The Chair*

Galen Cranz

*To know a Chair is really it,  
You sometimes have to sit.*

*from "The Chair," by Theodore Roethke<sup>1</sup>*

### Chapter 3

#### An Ergonomic Perspective

##### THE CHAIR AS A HEALTH HAZARD

In the early 1970s, I ran across what I thought was a brilliant article. It purported to explain why people always fidget so much when they sit in a chair for more than a few minutes. The argument went like this: When a person leans backward into the chairback, that initiates both a backward and a downward force. The downward force pushes the bottom of the pelvis forward. Eventually, the sitter finds himself sitting on his tailbone out at the edge of the chair with the spine as a whole transformed to a C-shape slouch. Sound familiar? We've all been there.

This particular slump proves to be uncomfortable in several ways: congestion is created in the lungs and in the guts; the ribs fold down over the diaphragm toward the belly; strain is created in the lower back. In order to try to relieve themselves of this discomfort, people sit up straight and perch on the front edge of the chair without back support. In short order, they also find this position tiring, so they scoot all the way back into the seat to take advantage of the chairback. Once they lean back, they recreate the twin forces that eventually push the pelvis forward once more, initiating the cycle all over again. (*Fig. 28*)



Figure 28. *The inherent instability of the seating posture is diagrammed here. Note that Westerners assume the third position is too tiring to maintain.*

## Excerpt from *The Chair*

What a revelation! If the seated posture is inherently unstable, no wonder designers have not been able to design the perfect chair. If there is no stable posture, it cannot be supported. Doug Stewart, in *Smithsonian* magazine in 1986, apparently without the benefit of reading this analysis, observed in his title that “Modern Designers Still Can’t Make the Perfect Chair.”<sup>2</sup> After all this time, despite scientific rationality, modern designers have not been able to keep pace with their counterparts in other professions and occupations. But designers are excused once we understand that the body itself is to blame. Its inherent instability makes the perfect chair forever elusive. Blaming the body frees the designer from anatomical constraints and leaves the door open to self-expression and artistic experimentation with form, materials, and symbolism. Early on, therefore, I dismissed chair design as an area for rational inquiry.

I have since developed an opposing view: the chair, not the body, is the problem. Bodies were here first, so chairs should respond to bodies, not vice versa. Thus, if people are “unstable” because they move frequently, chairs should accommodate that movement. Chairs that fail to offer that flexibility can harm our bodies.<sup>3</sup> I have come to believe that chairs are hazardous to our health, and I do not believe that our bodies compromise the success of our otherwise skillful design solutions.

After many years of training in various body-mind disciplines, I finally recognized that a cultural assumption lay hidden in the first explanation. The assumption is that sitting at the edge of a seat upright, without support, is too

tiring to sustain. But in other cultures, people sit upright by the hour. I wondered why we couldn’t do that. A radical thought kept surfacing: we can’t sit upright simply because we have grown accustomed to being supported by chairbacks. Because we lean against the backrest, the many layers of muscle that comprise the torso get weakened. It’s a vicious cycle: we lean back because our muscles are weak, and leaning back weakens the muscles even further, so that we “need” support even more. Let me tell the story of how this hypothesis was born.

[T]he chair, not the body, is the problem. Bodies were here first, so chairs should respond to bodies, not vice versa.

A friend of mine in England was showing me photographs from the time she had spent teaching English in Upper Volta, Africa. I scanned snapshots of families, individuals, and groups—men, women, and children of average stature, varying in posture and physical development. Suddenly I noticed one man who was remarkably different from all the others. He stood beautifully, with wide shoulders that were neither pressed back under military tension nor rounded forward in a clerical stoop, and his chest

was deep. His spine was erect and his head balanced, with no strain apparent in his neck muscles. I exclaimed at the perfection of his physical development. Then I found a second such person. (*Fig. 29* [omitted])

Without knowing anything about my interest in chairs, my friend commented that the two men I had singled out were the only two who had grown up in a village without a missionary school and its tables and chairs. Of course, there may have been other differences between these two and the rest that I will never know, but my friend's comment served to precipitate my suspicions into a hypothesis. Here was a dramatic sign that the entire scientific paradigm for chairs was misguided. Chairs *in and of themselves* are the problem; not poorly designed chairs.

I began to look for research evidence that sitting in a chair itself generates physical problems and deforms the body. I found diverse evidence from many countries that such sitting has been associated with numerous problems: back pain of all sorts, fatigue, varicose veins, stress, and problems with the diaphragm, circulation, digestion, elimination, and general body development. (*Fig. 30* [omitted]) Most of this research is published in journals devoted to rehabilitative medicine and ergonomics. The term "ergonomics" comes from the Greek *ergon*, meaning "work," and *-omics*, meaning "to manage." Thus, ergonomics is the study of the relationship between the person and the immediate work environment. It is primarily a twentieth-century discipline developed during World War II, first in cockpit design and thereafter in factory production facilities, and is now applied in office workstations. Because the chair is part of the immediate work environment, it has received plenty of attention from ergonomics researchers.<sup>4</sup>

First of all, I learned from ergonomic and occupational health perspectives that sitting is hard work. This is true whether we sit well or badly, because the pressure on the spinal discs is 30 percent greater when sitting than when standing.<sup>5</sup> In consequence, sitting strains the spinal column, back muscles, lower back nerves, and diaphragm. If sitting is so stressful, why do so many people prefer sedentary office work to physical labor? In 1985, two American epidemiologists found that sedentary office workers report 25 percent less back pain than people who do physical labor.<sup>6</sup> However, a German researcher, T. Hettinger, analyzed statistics on sick leave and found that musculo-skeletal problems among administrative workers were higher than in any other industrial sector, and similar to those in construction, metal industry, and transport. His conclusion: sitting should be considered as much a risk as lifting weights and excessive vibration.<sup>7</sup> Sitting may or may not be less dangerous to the back than heavy lifting, but if it is merely the lesser of two evils, it is an evil nonetheless.

## Excerpt from *The Chair*

Hettinger has identified three sources of diseases of the spine: carrying weight, vibration, and “enforced (unnatural) posture, including continuous sitting.” He points out that two populations of Africans and Asians who squat rather than sit on chairs report far less compression of the spine than do Europeans doing either light or heavy work. The only other reason he can think of for this finding is that perhaps the tissue of the intervertebral discs was “genetically” stronger to begin with.<sup>8</sup> Presumably, he is hoping that readers will accept his first explanation that chair sitting is to blame and reject the subtle racism that would be at work in this particular genetic explanation.

Unconscious racism is all too often involved whenever people seek genetic explanations for social differences. Certainly, it lies behind statements to the effect that “Westerners can’t squat.” That is anatomical nonsense. Westerners have simply lost the flexibility required for squatting through lifetimes of not squatting. Remember, as children we all squatted beautifully. And if we work at it as adults, we can regain the ability. In societies where squatting continues as an adult practice, medical researchers have observed lower rates of disc degeneration than in sitting cultures.<sup>9</sup>

A team of Swiss researchers were among the first to confirm that the constrained sitting postures used at video display terminal (VDT) workplaces and in full-time typing were associated with physical impairment of the hands, arms, shoulders, and neck.<sup>10</sup> Despite all this diverse evidence that prolonged sitting is the problem, when trying to account for low back pain, medically oriented epidemiologists still seek structural rather than behavioral explanations. That is, they look for explanations such as leg-length difference and whether or not the person has been in an automobile crash. Tautologically, they find that the best single predictor of back pain is previous back pain. One such researcher concludes that lower back pain is a mystery, even though others have very clearly shown that sitting is implicated as a major cause.<sup>11</sup>

Complicating the issue further, psychological causes also have to be considered. In the mid-1980s, John Sarno, an American physician, published a popular book, *Mind Over Back Pain*, in which he argued that back pain has a psychosomatic basis.<sup>12</sup> He developed a comparison with ulcers, which he reasoned used to be the way people expressed tension, until its psychological base was discovered, at which point people began to express their tension through their backs.<sup>13</sup> He did not consider posture, and certainly not chair sitting, as a source of tension.

Wilfred Barlow, a British medical doctor and Alexander Technique teacher, has clarified what lies behind the confusion over sources of back pain. “Conflict of opinion on the subject of low back pain will be with us

forever,” he wrote as early as 1955, “unless we realize that it is behavior which disturbs the mechanics of the back, all day and every day, and that it is only through a re-education of behavioural attitudes that we will alter these mechanical faults.” If the body is analogous to an automobile, the standard medical approach often would be to provide new brake linings. “But,” Barlow goes on, “if the driver insists on putting on the brakes on the front wheels whilst he accelerates with the rear wheels, it is no solution to provide new brake linings; the driver needs to learn how to integrate his performance so that he brakes or accelerates at the right time.”<sup>14</sup>

In societies where squatting continues as an adult practice, medical researchers have observed lower rates of disc degeneration than in sitting cultures.

More recently, a massage therapist wrote a letter to *The New York Times* responding to medical columnist Jane E. Brody, who suggested that strenuous activity and overuse were the main culprits in muscular pain and spasm. The

therapist objected, to the contrary, that poorly coordinated action or sitting still—in chairs—is the actual cause of such pain:

As a massage therapist—with a clientele ranging from world-class athletes to the chronically disabled—I have learned that under-use contributes to significant muscle pain, spasm, and, if they are untreated, disability.

Anyone who sits before a word processor for six or seven hours a day might have significant pain and spasm in the muscles of the posterior neck, shoulders, lateral hip, hamstring, and sacroiliac regions. Not infrequently, such people are unaware of their pain condition and will be perplexed about the cause of sore muscles. They’ll say, “I didn’t do anything out of the ordinary to have caused this pain.” Precisely. Holding any posture for prolonged periods without redress or remedy is, I’m convinced, a major cause of chronic muscle pain and spasm.

As a taxpayer and the mother of a child in primary school, I am disturbed that sitting still is still considered an essential component of public education. We should be teaching our children the habit of shaking loose five minutes in every hour, from the insidious vice grip of the common chair.<sup>15</sup>

As a single practitioner, her views are not conclusive, of course, but in general they corroborate the experiences of Alexander teachers and other somatic practitioners, that malcoordinated action or sitting still, rather than too much exercise, gives us muscular pain. Sitting certainly does not

## Excerpt from *The Chair*

relieve it. To the contrary, the 1985 medical research reported earlier states, “Lying down or walking provides relief for most sufferers.” The same report specified that stooping is the most aggravating factor in back pain, followed by sitting.<sup>16</sup> And many people manage to stoop while they are sitting.

The head of a Norwegian furniture company has confessed that he felt guilty about making his living from producing chairs after he learned about the health problems they create: “Being a chair manufacturer, it was an unpleasant experience when I realized that humans were not created to sit: humans were created to walk, stand, jog, run hunt, fish, and to be in motion; when they wanted to rest, they lay down on the ground.” He bravely soldiers on, summarizing the health problems (in addition to low back pain) that are associated with the traditional sitting posture: “The ninety-degree sitting angle at the hip joint exerts pressure on the diaphragm and all the natural functions of the internal organs in and around the stomach area are restricted. The lower the chair, the worse it is. This again means that by restricting the natural functions of the internal organs the blood circulation is reduced, which in turn causes a decreased oxygen supply to the head. This results in a person becoming tired more quickly.”<sup>17</sup>

As we saw in Chapter 1, Dr. Mandal of Denmark is especially worried about children’s health—in particular, their eyesight and spines—being undermined by years of sitting in chairs. He knows that adults suffer back and neck pain of all sorts, but he has judged that the long-term solution is to protect people earlier. He hopes that if children’s health can be protected in schools, they will not only be better off physically but also psychologically prepared to expect and demand improved work environments.

Other indications of the deleterious effect that sitting has on our internal organs comes from research on a common affliction of infants, gastro-esophageal reflux. The involuntary bringing up of food or liquids is sometimes associated with pulmonary aspiration, pneumonia, bronchial spasm, apnea, asthma, and even death. Since gravity helps prevent reflux in adults, infants younger than six months have routinely been placed in an infant seat since the 1950s. But medical research concludes that the seat, rather than being therapeutic, is actually detrimental. What’s a better approach?

...if children’s health can be protected in schools, they will not only be better off physically but also psychologically prepared to expect and demand improved work environments.

Simply placing the infant prone. Babies younger than six months do not yet have strong torsos, so sitting them upright prematurely allows the junction between esophagus and stomach to become constricted; when prone, their digestive apparatus lengthens properly.<sup>18</sup>

An Australian doctor, Colin J. Alexander, reports that varicose veins are common only in chair-sitting cultures; conversely, they are uncommon in cultures where people sit on the ground. The chair-sitting posture holds the sitter in a static right angle between the foot and the leg. That angle opens the saphenous vein in the ankle to its maximum, subjecting its walls to constant pressure, so that they lose their elasticity. After years of sitting in school in that posture, the vein is permanently dilated. Later, an adult who works for hours on his or her feet or experiences pregnancy may need that elasticity. But when the elasticity is not available, the walls of the veins rupture.<sup>19</sup>

After reviewing all the havoc sitting in chairs wreaks upon the body, it becomes less surprising that this cultural practice could impede overall morphological development.<sup>20</sup> No wonder the two African men who did not grow up in a table-and-chair culture developed so differently from those who did.

### Endnotes

1. Roethke, "The Chair," op. cit., p. 178.
2. Doug Stewart, "Modern Designers Still Can't Make the Perfect Chair," *Smithsonian* (April 1986), pp. 97-104.
3. Chair design might be called a wicked problem because no single solution can fulfill all of the desirable criteria. But more than frustrate designers, chairs can actively harm human beings. Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Science* 4(1973), pp. 155-69, first described wicked problems.
4. Several review articles provide a jump start on the often tedious and dispersed ergonomic studies on chairs: Kroemer and Robinette (1969), Branton (1969), Grandjean (1969), Andersson and Ortengren (1974), Osborne (1982), Lueder (1983), Grieco (1986), and Zacharkow (1988). In addition, I have provided a list of all the ergonomic studies I consulted in the Bibliography at the back of this book. [Ed.: omitted from this excerpt for space considerations]
5. See "Sitting Down on the Job: Not as Easy as It Sounds," *Occupational Health and Safety*, vol. 50, no. 10 (October 1981), pp. 24-26. Another summary of seating is by Dennis Zacharkow, *Posture: Sitting, Standing, Chair Design and Exercise* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1988). Reviews of the strains imposed on the spine by sitting usually cite a series of six research articles by B. J. G. Andersson, et al., published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine* in 1974, and followed by additional

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publications in *Spine*, *Engineering in Medicine*, and *Human Factors in Transportation Research*. A chiropractor has tried to help people cope with the strains of sedentary work: S. Donkin, *Sitting on the Job* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986).

6. Lesly Reisbrod and Sander Greenland, "Factors Associated with Self-Reported Back-Pain Prevalence: A Population-Based Study," *Journal of Chronic Diseases*, vol. 38, no. 8 (1985), pp. 691-702.
7. T. Hettinger, "Statistics on Diseases in the Federal Republic of Germany with Particular Reference to Diseases of the Skeletal System," *Ergonomics*, vol. 28, no. 1 (1985), pp. 17-20.
8. W. H. Farhni, "Conservative Treatment of Lumbar Disc Degeneration," *Orthopedic Clinics of North America*, 6(1975), p. 93. Cited by T. Hettinger, "Occupational Hazards Associated with Diseases of the Skeletal System," *Ergonomics*, vol. 28, no. 1 (1985), pp. 69-75.
9. George A. Gross, "Preventing Low Back Pain," in Richard B. Goldbloom and Robert S. Lawrence, eds., *Preventing Disease: Beyond the Rhetoric* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990), p. 205 and p. 208, citing Adams and Hutton, "The Effect of Posture on the Fluid Content of Lumbar Intervertebral Disks," *Spine*, 8 (1983), pp. 665-71.
10. W. Hunting, T. Läubli, and E. Grandjean, "Postural and Visual Loads at VDT Workplaces," *Ergonomics*, vol. 24, no. 12 (1981), pp. 917-31.
11. Eugene Nordby, M.D., "Epidemiology and Diagnosis in Low Back Injury," *Occupational Health and Safety*, vol. 50, no. 1 (January 1981), pp. 38-42.
12. John Sarno, M.D., *Mind Over Back Pain* (New York: Berkley Books, 1986).
13. More research has found that most ulcers are caused by bacteria.
14. Wilfred Barlow, "Psychosomatic Problems in Postural Reeducation," *The Lancet*, Sept. 24, 1955, pp. 661-62, 664.
15. Suzann Roalman, letter to *The New York Times*, Sept. 17, 1991, p. A20.
16. Riesbrod and Greenland, op. cit., p. 694.
17. T. M. Grimsrud, "Humans Were Not Created to Sit—And Why You Have to Refurnish Your Life," *Ergonomics*, vol. 33, no. 3 (1990), p. 291.
18. Susan R. Orenstein, Peter F. Whittington, and David M. Orenstein, "The Infant Seat as Treatment for Gastroesophageal Reflux," *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 309, no. 13, Sept. 29, 1983, pp. 760-63.

Reprinted by permission, from *The Chair* by Galen Cranz, 1998, W.W. Norton & Co., pp. 94-101. This book is reviewed on page 23 of this issue.

*Galen Cranz, Ph.D., is professor of architecture at the University of California at Berkeley, specializing in the sociology of architecture. She is the author of The Politics of Park Design and a certified teacher of the Alexander Technique. ☺*

## Book Reviews



### Personally Speaking

#### **Walter Carrington on the F. M. Alexander Technique in discussion with Seán Carey**

*by Walter Carrington with Seán Carey*

Mouritz, London, 2001, ISBN 0-9525574-1-X. Paperback, 148 pp.,  
£12.95

*reviewed by Andrea Matthews*

This is a slim volume, but packed with the kind of clear, measured, and concise insights for which Walter Carrington is justly noted. Revised and expanded from the original 1986 Sheildrake Press edition, the book covers an astounding range of topics, filling in gaps in our knowledge of Carrington's own introduction to the Technique (including the journal of his first lessons as an appendix), the early training course and trainees, as well as the origin and development of the procedures for teaching the Technique, such as working with the chair, whispered "ah," lying down, and (new to me!) saddle work. He also shares his views on the relationship of Alexander Technique to the "complementary therapies" such as Feldenkrais, osteopathy, and massage. Along the way, he imparts a clearer sense not only of F.M.'s personality and approach to teaching, but also that of "lineage founders" such as Pat McDonald, the Barlows, and F.M.'s brother A.R. (whose impact on Frank Pierce Jones and Marjorie Barstow and thus many American teachers cannot be underestimated). I found particularly helpful the background story of Lulie Westfeldt's book (*F Matthias Alexander: The Man and His Work*, reprinted in 1998 by Mouritz) in understanding its tone of intense bitterness. Carrington's reminiscences of the early days of his generation of teachers helps to dispel the temptation to fix on one school or style as *the* way to present the work; clearly everything was a work in progress, from F.M.'s own teaching to the training course and the building of the Technique into a profession, and remains so to this day. As he noted in the last line of his journal of lessons: "Thus the process of education always goes on and is never finished."

Along with clarifying aspects of the history of the Technique, Carrington also gives his views on nuts-and-bolts issues that are always popping up in teaching, such as appropriately supporting emotional processing in students while respecting the limitations of the work, the use and quality of one's hands, first lessons, and frequency and length of a course of lessons.

As I don't have a copy of the original volume, I can't comment on the

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revisions, but Seán Carey's questions in this volume seem particularly apt and avoid "leading the witness." And as always, Jean Fischer's attractive and unfussy design is a plus. The bibliography and index round out the book's usefulness.

*Personally Speaking* is a welcome addition to the literature, especially as a complement to the two volumes of Carrington's training talks edited by Jerry Sontag of Mornum Time Press (*Thinking Aloud* and *The Act of Living*) and the Sheildrake Press volume of Carrington's 1946 teaching diary, *A Time to Remember*. One need not agree with his every view to find these volumes thought-provoking and encouraging; the clarity with which he expresses himself, and the profound experience backing up that expression, provide a clear framework for examining one's own teaching and thinking about the Technique.

### The Chair

#### Rethinking Culture, Body, and Design

by Galen Cranz

W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1998, ISBN 0-393-31955-5pbk. Paperback, 288pp., \$13.95.

reviewed by Richard White, Alexander Technique student

This is a pretty subversive book, one of the standards by which I set a great deal of store. I can see some poor editor at Norton trying to decide how to classify it, and finally coming up with Art/Design, but it's about as discipline-fusing a book as anything I've read in quite some time. I'd file it under philosophy.

The main point comes up early on: "What is true of the chair is true of all the artifacts we create. We design them; but once built, they shape us." This leads to an uncanny feeling of looking into a Magritte funhouse mirror, where all the artificially isolated components of one's body are reflected back as furniture, tools, means of transportation—a true "man of parts."

In a sort of inverted Kantian sense, the world is comprehensible because it's a conscious creation—by the time we get it (perceive it, feel it, bump into it), it's already been organized for us by those who made it. Of course, being people much like us, they didn't always get it right—you do what you can with the materials available. It takes a serious effort of will to see a chair as just an artifact, not as a god-given transcendental prototype to which our imperfect bodies must conform. Once you start seeing things that way (the chair is just the first step down that subversive path), everything may be called into question.

That's getting way ahead of the story, though. Ms. Cranz does a fine job of leading the reader through a well-researched history of the chair in Western civilization with aptly chosen contrasting examples from Eastern and African culture. The discussion of design has a light touch of irony that contrasts nicely with the photographs and drawings of chairs whose whimsicality and bizarreness require little additional commentary.

The chapters on ergonomics lead to a discussion of the Alexander Technique, integrated pretty seamlessly into narrative flow. It does not seem out of context here, and there is an absence of preaching and dogmatism that

sometimes puts people off. The real treat is a walk through the showroom of ergonomically-designed chairs, some well-motivated (the Rietveld), some lethal (the Beanbag!), some in-between (the Balans chair, a cheap knock-off of which just about crippled me back in the 1980s).

Finally, the question raised at the beginning, “what’s the best chair?” gets a whole range of answers. The verdict is pretty much that any chair, and by extension, any posture, occupied for too long, is not good for you. Stand up and move. This book encouraged me to do exactly that. Every time I thought I was getting comfortable, some new observation forced me to re-examine what I was doing. That counts for quite a lot. Stand up and read.

## **Secrets of Alexander Technique**

*by Robert MacDonald & Caro Ness*

Dorling Kindersley, New York, 2000, ISBN 0-7894-6772-0. Paperback, 224pp., color illus., \$9.95

*reviewed by Andrea Matthews*

In life as well as in my teaching, I’ve often been struck by how someone’s greatest strength turns out also to be his or her biggest weakness. I guess the same can be as true of books as it is of people.

When I received my review copy of this book, I found its size (4 3/8” x 5 1/2”) differentiated it nicely from other introductory volumes on the Technique, and thought that would make the book handy for carrying around and reading whenever a moment was free, on the bus or train. Portability—perhaps that is what the designer had in mind.

I’m always eager to find new books to recommend to current and potential students as introductions to the work, and I recently read Rob MacDonald’s previous book (based on his master’s thesis), *The Use of the Voice*, with great interest. Also he was kind enough to include ATI in his list of useful addresses, which naturally disposed me in his favor! *Secrets of Alexander Technique* is attractive to look at, with high-quality paper, color illustrations, and a “self-wrapper” cover of heavy stock. Unfortunately, when I tried (several times) to read this book, I found myself losing the thread or putting it down without having absorbed much. Finally sitting down to think about this review, I realized that the medium was affecting the message, and I can’t discuss the book without focusing on the effect of the format itself.

Due to the amount of content and the small size of each page, the type (to my 40-something eyes) is quite small; the captions to the illustrations in particular seem to be in what in my copyediting days we jokingly referred to as “4-point Houdini”—i.e., vanishingly small. Broken down into mini-chapters so that many of the topics could be covered in a two-page spread, the text soon began to give me a feeling of choppiness, despite the careful organization of the book into the four basic sections on “F. M. Alexander,” “First Steps,” “Teachers in Action,” and “Self-Mastery.” The book is full of colorful and eye-catching photo illustrations, which at first blush also would seem a plus. In reading, however, because of the small pages, the illustrations take over, and on some pages where a black and white photo has been expanded and faded into the background as a kind of watermark, the dots of the half-tone screen interfere with the type. The sense I get (though I can’t tell if that was how the

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book was in fact produced) is of a larger-format book reduced to its present size, and I can't help feeling the larger size would suit the design better, or at least a paring down of the text and illustrations to the most cogent elements.

Perhaps my somewhat slow and labored reading led me to be more than usually critical about the content of the book, but I was disappointed there as well. Here the reduced size of the text area seemed to me to call for a distilled and meticulously informative style, but often the authors resorted to the rather vaguely enthusing prose of a brochure, with curious lapses or factual fogginesses. My sense is that a newcomer to these ideas would tend to fix on familiar words (such as posture) or fill in gaps with the very thinking we're working to challenge.

One example of how design and editing in the book detract from the authors' efforts is when the "Star Procedure" is recommended on page 52 (but not explained), in the "First Steps" section. Not until page 140 is the Star Procedure itself explained, in the section devoted to activities ("Teachers in Action"). A simple indication that the explanation would follow would have been helpful in reducing confusion.

An example of a distracting sloppiness arises on pages 54-55, with the illustration and discussion of the human skeleton. I found myself wondering how useful it was to have the labeling of the illustration going from specific anatomical names for bones (such as tibia and fibula) to general English terms (such as ankle and hip bone), but it really disturbed me to see a cervical vertebra labeled "hyoid bone" and a part of the pubic bone labeled "sacrum." Similarly the discussion of the atlas/axis joint asserts that it allows the head to nod, when in fact it allows the head to turn, and on page 42, the atlanto-occipital joint is said to comprise the top two vertebrae of the neck, when in fact it is the joint of the skull with the atlas vertebra. (Interestingly enough, they do get it right in the Glossary.) I suspect they're getting at the idea that the nodding and turning of the head take place in almost the same spot, but the "naïve" reader would miss that.

In an ideal world, a revised, corrected, and enlarged (not lengthened) edition would address these concerns and let the authors' earnest effort shine through. I honestly feel I couldn't review the book they intended to write, due to the tyranny of this book's design. It certainly is ambitious in the number of topics and activities touched upon (ranging from Alexander procedures to tai chi and riding to the spiral organization of the musculature and "integrating instinct, emotion, and reason") and could be a useful addition to the knowledgeable trainee's or teacher's library. For the time being, however, I'll continue to recommend Michael Gelb's classic, *Body Learning*, for beginners. ☺

## AGM Travel Notice

U.S. members still needing tickets to Ireland, please check with Crystal Travel (Boston) at [www.crystal-travel.net](http://www.crystal-travel.net) or toll free 1(800) 327-3780. A round trip fare on Aer Lingus of \$358 plus about \$53 tax (slightly more with weekend travel) is available till 4-6 weeks before the conference (space pending). Departures are from Boston or New York JFK, perhaps also Baltimore and Newark (ask when you contact Crystal Travel).

Please ask for Kevin when you make arrangements; there may be a free flight for ATI if 25 fares (various days OK) are sold for conference time.

Jim Froelich, AGM Site Committee

## Languages Committee

Members interested in working with Graham Elliott on a new “Languages Committee” are invited to contact him at [gje@ntlworld.com](mailto:gje@ntlworld.com). (Please note his new email address; the one printed in the AGM brochure is out of date.) Graham will be facilitating a panel on languages at the upcoming AGM.

He also reports this regarding French translations of F.M. Alexander’s books: Jean-Do Masoero has meticulously translated all four of F.M.’s books into French. He is preparing for their publication and can be contacted by anyone interested at: Jean-Do and Laurent Masoero, 6 bis rue Bellevue, 69 740 Genas, France. His email is [lmasoero@libertysurf.fr](mailto:lmasoero@libertysurf.fr) ☺

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**Inscription on a *han*, a wooden block that is struck to announce the start of a session of Zen Buddhist meditation:**

**Great is the matter of birth and death.  
Life slips quickly by,  
Time waits for no one.  
Wake up! Wake up!  
Don’t waste a moment.**

*from Jim Bedard, Lotus in the Fire:  
The Healing Power of Zen*



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## Introducing ATME

*Teresa Lee, Communications Liaison, writes:* I am currently serving as organizational representative to ATI for the Association of Theatre Movement Educators (ATME). Since many Alexander Technique teachers also work and teach in the Theatre field, I wanted to bring attention to the ATME organization. The mission statement for ATME is stated below. This is a strong and growing organization that promotes all forms of theatre education, including Alexander Technique. If you have online access you can visit their website at [www.asu.edu/cfa/atme/index.html](http://www.asu.edu/cfa/atme/index.html). If you have questions or want more information, you may contact me at: Teresa Lee, Dept. of Theatre & Dance, Appalachian State Univ., Boone, NC 28608. Email: [leete@appstate.edu](mailto:leete@appstate.edu) or Ph: 828-262-6376. If you would like to join ATME, please visit the website or contact: Dawn Arnold, ATME Secretary, 2970 N. Sheridan Rd. #102, Chicago, IL 60657.

ATME Mission Statement: The Association of Theatre Movement Educators is shaping the future of kinesthetic and aesthetic education by: promoting the highest possible standards for theatre movement training and the application of those standards to educational and professional theatre; facilitating collegial support, faculty exchange, and networking; promoting the recognition of theatre movement educators as vital and equal partners in the training of actors; and communicating the latest research, methods of skills integration, and career planning strategies.

## Editor's Page

*Continued from page 2*

As Alexander teachers, we work to open a gap between stimulus and response, in any psychophysical activity, finding no distinction in kind between reaction in playing the fiddle and reaction in talking with one's spouse. Our Technique provides us with a powerful tool for holding open that space between stimulus and reaction, and also for helping our students discover and dispute the assumptions upon which their reactions are based, reactions with which their daily activities have become identified.

What do I mean by "identified"? It is as if every activity—sitting, standing, playing an instrument, grieving, arguing, dancing—had a sandbag tied to it. The sandbag's name is "I must" and the person has come to feel absolutely that the drag of that sandbag on the activity is part of the activity itself, and even part of their own identity as a "good" person. "I must" can have many components, and all of them are contractive and interfering, and some of them are highly moralistic. How many times do we hear a student say, "It's too easy!?" Or "How will they/I know I care?" When a student applies the tool of inhibition and threatens to cut the cord that ties on that sandbag, those "musts" often pop out of out of his or her mouth in the form of a "But—!!" And those Buts bear some looking at. There's gold in them thar' Buts. For until the assumptions that raise those Buts are experientially challenged and refuted, they will continue to direct the student's reactions and behavior.

How do we go about challenging those Buts once they've popped out? Fortunately, as Alexander teachers, we have a number of ways to do this. And a good thing, too, because such robust, cultivated, well-practiced assumptions often need a multi-pronged tool to uproot them. Carrying out the activity without the sandbag is the classic Alexander approach, through inhibition, with or without direction or the teacher's helping hands. Another way available to us (particularly developed by our own David Gorman in his LearningMethod) is to look those Buts in the eye and ask them some very pointed questions, such as: "Sez who?" "Why?" "What happens if I don't?" "Is that true *now*, in this very moment?"<sup>1</sup> This last question is particularly important, because those assumptions will try their darndest to suck our student, and us, back into some version of the past, which is the only place they can still seem absolutely true. And what a small, tight place that is, especially for two.

Our Technique provides us with a powerful tool for holding open that space between stimulus and reaction, and also for helping our students discover and dispute the assumptions upon which their reactions are based.

We have one other powerful Alexandrian tool for remaining in the present while disputing Buts—what Frank Pierce Jones described as the "unified field of attention." I believe he was correct in asserting its power to restore free will as a serious component of experience and not just something we tip our hats to on the way to reaction. When we can remain *fully present* in the face of a stimulus, we are not only *present in the present*, we are *full*: expansive, filled with supportive information, and larger than whatever it was we feared might overwhelm us. We become aware of the world of information that contradicts old habitual assumptions. We have choices and options—and thus conscious, constructive control.

<sup>1</sup> Along these lines, Albert Ellis, in developing his Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy, has drawn on observations such as this one by the Greek philosopher Epictetus: "We are disturbed not by things but by the views that we take of them." For more on Ellis and REBT, visit the Albert Ellis Institute website at [www.rebt.org](http://www.rebt.org), or pick up one of his many books at a local library. ☺

## Mark's Story

*Jamee Culbertson*  
*Chair, Alexander Technique International*

Mark was a young boy of 10 or 11 years when I first gave him an Alexander lesson.

His mother, a friend of mine, talked to me about some problems that Mark was having at school. Every now and then Mark's temper would flare up and he made some of the other kids at school uncomfortable and he became uncooperative with his teacher. His aggressive behavior was also reflected in his relationship with his mother. They struggled to communicate and often ended up raising their voices in argument. She was at a loss as to what to do. Mark was really frustrated.

I offered to give Mark a lesson in the Alexander Technique, that maybe it could allow him to feel more at ease with himself. She said sure, let's give it a try.

In meeting with Mark he told me that he could see what he was doing but that he couldn't help it. Sometimes he would just get mad.

We kept it simple. I put my hands on him while I talked about a particular balance point that he could find in the relationship of his head to the rest of his body. I guided him in discovering this while at the same time asking him to remain aware of his surroundings. He could sense what I was showing him inside and described it to be like a 'bubble of space that moved.' He saw how he could create this space himself and he smiled.

We discussed how he might choose to allow for this 'movement space' whenever he found himself getting angry and that it might offer him a choice in how he responded rather than always being controlled by his strong feelings of anger and frustration. He seemed to like this idea a lot.

The next time I saw Mark was a few months later. We were at his little brother's soccer game. I asked him how he was doing and he said that whenever he thought about the 'bubble' he smiled and said it made him feel easier, it was really cool. Sometimes he would forget about it though, especially with his mom. I asked him if he wanted to explore it some more and he said sure.

We stepped aside from the soccer field a bit. I placed my hands on him and asked him to remember what we had done the last time he had a lesson and to look around the soccer field and watch the game some. He talked about how, in his perception, the playing field started to change

## Mark's Story

and he felt more comfortable, more of a sense of belonging. He said he felt taller and lighter too. "Cool!" he said smiling.

After a while I asked Mark if it was okay with him to invite his mom over as a part of the lesson. He didn't mind. She walked over and I asked them to stand facing each other a few feet apart. I made contact with each of them at the arm as this was simply the easiest contact point for me to reach both of them at the same time. I asked Mark to 'allow for some of that movement space' while looking at his mom.

I coached his mom to be aware of her reactions to Mark in simply standing there. I asked her to look at Mark in this moment rather than only through her familiar perception of Mark that included their recent struggles. She said that she could feel herself wanting to 'lean into him' to tell him what to do or in readiness for an argument.

He could sense what I was showing him inside... like a 'bubble of space that moved.' He saw how he could create this space himself and he smiled.

I helped her to explore for herself the space that Mark was finding for himself. She began to feel more relaxed and Mark began to feel less pressure. He said he didn't feel any of the buildup of energy that made him want to fight. Before long they both stood looking at each other, each on their own two feet with a newfound respect. They could let something new happen between them, and they both smiled. ☺

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## New ATI Member Directory

As of this writing, the new Directory is almost ready to be mailed out to all members. *Please take a moment to check your entry for completeness and accuracy, and report any changes or corrections to BOTH [membership@ati-net.com](mailto:membership@ati-net.com) AND [webmaster@ati-net.com](mailto:webmaster@ati-net.com)!*

Membership handles updating our member database, but the webmaster does not have ready access to it for updating the ATI website. If you call or mail your changes in to the ATI office, please help us as our new webmaster and administrative assistant get their bearings by mentioning that your information needs to be changed in the database as well as the website.

Thanks! ☺

## Powerful Written Goals in 7 Easy Steps

*Gene Donohue*

The car is packed and you're ready to go, your first ever cross-country trip. From the White Mountains of New Hampshire to the rolling hills of San Francisco, you're going to see it all. You put the car in gear and off you go. First stop, the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.

A little while into the trip you need to check the map because you've reached an intersection you're not familiar with. You panic for a moment because you realize you've forgotten your map. But you say the heck with it because you know where you're going. You take a right, change the radio station and keep on going. Unfortunately, you never reach your destination.

Too many of us treat goal setting the same way. We dream about where we want to go, but we don't have a map to get there. What is a map? In essence, the written word. What is the difference between a dream and a goal? Once again, the written word. But we need to do more than simply scribble down some ideas on a piece of paper. Our goals need to be complete and focused, much like a road map, and that is the purpose behind the rest of this article.

If you follow the seven steps I've outlined below you will be well on your way to becoming an expert in building the road maps to your goals.

*Life consists in what a man is thinking of all day.*

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

1. Make sure the goal you are working for is something you really want, not just something that sounds good. The important thing to remember here is that your goals must be consistent with your values.
2. A goal can not contradict any of your other goals. For example, you can't buy a \$750,000 house on an income of \$50,000 per year.
3. If you need help from someone in achieving your goal, will you have their cooperation? If you plan on opening a business with your friend and he has the marketing know how and you have the money, but he doesn't share your goal, you need to change your goal.
4. Write your goal in the positive instead of the negative. Work for what you want, not for what you want to leave behind.
5. Write your goal out in complete detail. Instead of writing "A new home," write "A 4,000 square foot contemporary with 4 bedrooms and 3 baths and a view of the mountain on 20 acres of land."

## Powerful Written Goals in 7 Easy Steps

6. By all means, make sure your goal is high enough. Shoot for the moon, if you miss you'll still be in the stars.

7. This is the most important, write your goal as though it is already accomplished. For example, "I own the largest printing company in the state that specializes in business cards."

So your goals are written down. Now what?

First of all, unless someone is critical to helping you achieve your goal(s), keep your goals to yourself. The negative attitude from friends, family and neighbors can drag you down quickly. It's very important that your self-talk (the thoughts in your head) are positive.

Reviewing your goals daily is a crucial part of your success and must become part of your routine. Each morning when you wake up read your list of goals that are written in the positive, already accomplished form, out loud.

Visualize the completed goal, see the new home, smell the leather seats in your new car, feel the cold hard cash in your hands. Then each night, right before you go to bed, repeat the process. This process will start both your subconscious and conscious mind on working towards the goal. This will also begin to replace any of the negative self-talk you may have and replace it with positive self-talk.

Every time you make a decision during the day, ask yourself this question, "Does it take me closer to, or further from my goal?" If the answer is "closer to," then you've made the right decision. If the answer is "further from," well, you know what to do.

If you follow this process every day you will be on your way to achieving unlimited success in every aspect of your life.

The difference between a goal and a dream is the written word.

*reprinted with permission from [www.topachievement.com](http://www.topachievement.com) ☺*

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**"If you are not careful, you just might end up in the direction you are headed."**

***ancient Chinese proverb (from Jim Bedard, Lotus in the Fire)***

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## An ATI Wish List

We're happy to repeat the news from the Communiqué: Bob Lada of Massachusetts, USA, has kindly stepped up to the plate as Webmaster. He can be reached at: [webmaster@ati-net.com](mailto:webmaster@ati-net.com).

Also, Bérengère Cusin, a member of Tommy Thompson's training course, will be taking over as Administrative Assistant. She can be reached at the ATI main office (1-888-668-8996) or [membership@ati-net.com](mailto:membership@ati-net.com).

Nominations are open for the following positions: Assistant Chair, Treasurer, and an additional Board Member, and will be voted on and filled by October 25, 2001. For information about the requirements of those posts, contact our Nominations Co-Chairs Kay Hooper and Kathy Sarra at [nominations@ati-net.com](mailto:nominations@ati-net.com).

The Interchange Yahoogroups forum is in need of a Moderator. Basic computer knowledge is needed. For information, contact Bob Lada at: [webmaster@ati-net.com](mailto:webmaster@ati-net.com).

To get the best out of it, ATI's new phone system needs some simple programming and occasional maintenance, which can be done by phone from anywhere in the USA. To review the system that we are using, go to their website, [www.bigplanet.com](http://www.bigplanet.com). For more information, contact our new Communications Chair, Rebecca Lisak, at: [communications@ati-net.com](mailto:communications@ati-net.com).

And the Exchange is always eager for your input! We would like to include line drawings in upcoming issues, too. If you're feeling literary or artistic, send your creations along. For submission information, see page 2. ☺

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## Worldwide Offices of Alexander Technique International

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**Norway**  
Nesttunbrekka 26  
52222 Nesttun  
(+47) 55.13.08.60  
(+47) 55.13.08.61 (fax)  
[norway@ati-net.com](mailto:norway@ati-net.com)

**Sweden**  
Hälsans Hus, Fjällgatan 23 A  
S-116 28 Stockholm  
(+46) (0)8.641.0086  
(+46) (0)8.34.99.18 (fax)  
[sweden@ati-net.com](mailto:sweden@ati-net.com)

**Switzerland**  
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CH-4056  
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[switzerland@ati-net.com](mailto:switzerland@ati-net.com)

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66-C Thurlestone Rd.  
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London SE27 0PD  
+44 (0)7071 880253  
[uk@ati-net.com](mailto:uk@ati-net.com)

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](http://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.



## Worldwide Offices of Alexander Technique International

### Main Office, USA

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1-888-668-8996  
usa@ati-net.com

### Australia

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Darlinghurst, NSW 2010  
(+61) 02.331.7563  
australia@ati-net.com  
www.alextechnique.cjb.net

### Austria

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A-4020 Linz  
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