

Introduction

“ Don't waste life in doubts and fears; spend yourself on the work before you, well assured that the right performance of this hour's duties will be the best preparation for the hours and ages that will follow it.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

We live in an era when the health of developed nations is compromised by poor lifestyles and chronic diseases prevail; the accelerated pace of life creates relentless pressures demanding instant response, with scant time for reflection and calm. The destructive consequences of flawed policy, impulsive action and uncontrolled emotion ricochet across continents. Increasing subspecialisation in medicine segregates the human organism into components while politically imposed targets dictate treatments; and there is creeping erosion of collective and individual freedoms despite the rhetoric of successive governments assuring us that we have a right to choice.

What then, if a method existed which could cultivate good habits instead of bad? An approach that could facilitate conscious and reasoned control of the human organism as a psychophysical whole? A means to poise and freshness in outlook and the possibility of freedom from stifling constraints, internal and external? Such a method *does* exist. It is the Alexander Technique.

The Alexander Technique can improve the way in which we use ourselves in any aspect of everyday living and may be applied throughout life; there is no end - point, as there is always potential for improvement. The Technique, when learned and employed correctly, is a dynamic and continuous process that can effect lasting change for the better. It is scientific in approach, its core principles derived from the study of both human behaviour and the human condition. It stimulates reasoned thought and encourages enquiry and self-reliance. We are creatures of both good and bad habits, and most of us are receptive to the concept that harmful habits need to cease for the good of the individual. Thus the Technique should provoke universal interest.

When the suggestion was made that I might benefit from lessons in AT (as it is known with fond deference amongst its students) it was met with an unhealthy cynicism rooted in the rigours of twenty years of medical training and practice and sculpted by 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'. Beset by significant mid-life crises, the harvest of a lifetime of 'getting it wrong', I had reached a point where I could not function efficiently in any aspect of my life. Disequilibrium predominated and contentment seemed unattainable. My attempts to improve my situation through available conventional means were only palliative. There was no lasting change for the better.

At the end of my first lesson with Tasha Miller, I was amazed at her certainty that if I continued lessons, all would be well. 'Short of death, get here!' she urged as we parted company. As lessons progressed and my faulty and imperfect condition was gradually exposed, my original ignorant dismissal of AT as 'some sort of eccentric alternative therapy to improve posture' transformed into respectful acceptance of a

method which is the best I have yet encountered for the promotion and improvement of health.

Looking back, I can now view my life before AT and relish the difference it has made; health problems have receded, my outlook and behaviour have changed. I can embrace my responsibilities and know their boundaries, accept my limitations without shame and communicate directly and honestly. I can say no and express my needs without guilt, coping better with adversity when inevitable. Increased empathy and efficiency have benefited my personal and professional life; unrecognised potential has emerged. At last, I am content.

Perhaps my best endorsement of the Technique was arranging lessons for my children; the prognosis for healthy living would be considerably more optimistic if Alexander's principles could be absorbed in youth, a point he often emphasised in his work.

My progress would have been less steady had I not read Alexander's books; these were essential for full insight and comprehension of the Technique. He wrote four in all:

- Man's Supreme Inheritance
- The Universal Constant in Living
- Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual
- The Use of the Self

They represent the remarkable life work and philosophy of a largely unsung genius; they are not, however, easy reading. Tasha Miller and David Langstroth perceived a need to communicate Alexander's work in a more modern and digestible style, hence the evolution of this book which explains the phenomenon of the Alexander Technique with vision and absolute clarity. The authors demonstrate the scientific basis of their subject and describe concisely a method summarised with precision by one student as 'subtle, yet profound'; they have succeeded unequivocally in conveying the essence of their vocation. The final chapter reveals their own philosophy and aspiration for the wider acceptance and integration of the Alexander Technique within our culture. For prospective students or those wishing to learn more about the Technique, here is a precious and invaluable resource; current and past students will discover an invigorating infusion of Alexander's principles and procedures.

Tasha Miller and David Langstroth are faithful and enthusiastic disciples of Alexander's craft; Tasha is an enlightened and charismatic practitioner of considerable skill and humour who teaches the Technique in its true and holistic sense. David is a quiet and gentle genius achieving across many disciplines. Their collaboration has produced an inspirational book deserving of wide attention and appreciation, a work that will hopefully raise awareness of an ageless and accessible Technique which is as relevant today as nearly a century ago, when Frederick Matthias Alexander wrote:

"It is my belief, confirmed by the research and practice of nearly twenty years, that man's supreme inheritance of conscious guidance and control is within the grasp of anyone who will take the trouble to cultivate it. That it is no esoteric doctrine or mystical cult, but a synthesis of entirely reasonable propositions that can be demonstrated in pure theory and substantiated in common practice..."

“It is essential that the peoples of civilisation should comprehend the value of their inheritance, that outcome of the long process of evolution which will enable them to govern the uses of their own physical mechanisms.... This triumph is not to be won in sleep, in trance, in submission, in paralysis, or in anaesthesia, but in a clear, open-eyed, reasoning, deliberate consciousness and apprehension of the wonderful potentialities possessed by mankind, the transcendent inheritance of a conscious mind.”¹

Dr Anne Hughes, MB BS
South Wales,
United Kingdom

31st October 2005