

Taking The Trying Out Of Being Alexander Newsletter September 2004

This newsletter is for people who don't wish to be hidebound by such considerations as Rod Stewart's assertion that 'blonds have more fun'.

We grow through your recommendation - please forward this newsletter to a few friends and colleagues.

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1. Our interpretation of the Alexander Technique

This month a new pupil asked us what our interpretation of the Alexander Technique is. Were we surprised, or were we surprised? You see, it's never happened to us before. Generally people simply want to know what it is and what is in it for them - understandably.

But it was a great question, and we shall endeavour to answer it as best we can for all our newsletter readers and pupils.

First and foremost the Alexander Technique is an experience delivered through the hands, words - and possibly model- of the teacher. The convictions of the teacher, inevitably, colour the experience of the pupil.

For the sake of clarity, the AT teacher's convictions can be subdivided into three categories:

- about the Technique
- regarding the pupil
- regarding themselves.

Our convictions around the Technique are that it is an incredibly powerful, yet gentle, tool for profound, limitless, ongoing change. It is also fundamentally safe. The purpose of the Alexander Technique is always to support change, never to force it.

Change is quite a scary concept for many people. The Alexander Technique is not intended to take anyone beyond the degree of physical or mental change that they can comfortably manage at any given time.

As regards our pupils, our convictions are informed by respect. Within 5 minutes of meeting us, most pupils tell us that their posture is appalling - or similar. Our role, as Alexander teachers, is simply to work with what is. Judgement serves neither our pupils nor ourselves.

Our pupils benefit most from our awareness, acceptance and receptiveness. We do not pretend to have superior knowledge of what needs to change and how it needs to happen. What we do have is sufficient skill to provide the stimulus for change. Our pupils' systems will process that stimulus as effectively as possible at any given time.

As regards ourselves, we are primarily catalysts (and, it has to be said, dogalysts) for change. Our aim is to enable pupils to step into the space that exists in the moment. It is only in the moment that you can, however fleetingly, put down the burden of past and future preoccupations.

In a slightly less elevated context, someone who - wisely - chose to remain anonymous observed: 'with one foot in the past and one leg in the future you can only urinate on the present'. Well, yes. This is - doubtless - physiologically accurate.

If we relate it, specifically, to the Alexander Technique, the observation would become: 'with one foot in the past and one leg in the future, you'll not only be anxious about your balance, you'll have to generate an awful lot of muscular tension to stay upright.'

We help people to find that ease that lies deep within themselves; the ease that starts to rise to the surface once the clamour of past and future preoccupations is silenced, however briefly.

2. Blonds fight back.

Clearly nobody has bothered to tell our pupils that August is the silly season. They have repeatedly challenged our pockets of unreconstructed thinking, without so much as a thought for the possibility that we might be giving our analytical brains their annual vacation.

This month, one delightful male pupil, who terms himself 'an ex-blond', has challenged our thoughtless exploitation of this cultural stereotype. Our justification that we too have been bottle blonds did little to appease him. (He was a natural one - allegedly.)

Even the assurance that we would try to find more innocuous material from the animal kingdom for our jokes did not satisfy him. Only when he heard our small wails of dismay did he admit that he had just been winding us up. (Honestly, how unblond can you get?!)

So, once again, we'd like to take the opportunity to say that we had no intention of causing offence. We, who are always singing the virtues of awareness and choosing our responses have been found wanting.

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Ultimately, that is what the Alexander Technique is really about: discovering and winking out the thoughtless behaviours that harm us - like sitting at the computer with our chin supported by our hand and sagging spine, or sitting or else lying in bed and putting a lot of our body weight through either one arm or leg. It's something we're so used to doing we don't even give it a thought.

Whereas thanks to our pupil's protest, we now cannot fail to see that we have been using 'blond' as a synonym for 'dozy'. We shan't try harder - because that is definitely not what the Alexander Technique is about. But we shall look for different ways of arriving at our desired result, which is a light-hearted illustration of the point we are making.

3. When re-education is better than prevention.

Q. Why do Black Widow spiders kill the males of the species after mating with them?

A. To stop the snoring before it starts.

As we have noted in a previous issue the AT helps you to stop impaling yourself on one of the horns of a dilemma.

Snoring - when it is one's partner who is doing it - is undoubtedly a difficult issue, and many of us will sympathise with the Black Widow spider's somewhat draconian approach. Further, even we can't say, in all honesty, that the AT will directly solve the problem of snoring.

What it will do is provide the snorer's partner with a new way of thinking that makes available a broader spectrum of options. The Alexander Technique does teach people to choose their reactions.

If, on mature reflection the snorer's partner then decides that extreme physical violence is the best option, well, at least it won't have been a knee-jerk reaction!

(N.B. We do not condone physical violence and would therefore suggest that snorers and their partners resort to purchasing ear defenders, clothes pegs for noses, herbal pillows and separate rooms - or, if necessary, separate buildings - rather than the baseball bat.)

4. Forthcoming events.

Madelene will be running an Alexander Technique Introductory class on Saturday September 25 2004 from 3pm until 6pm at Shine Holistic, 52 Stoke Newington Church Street, N16. Call 07939 347099 or Shine on 7241 5033 for more information.

Have a great September

Annie & Madelene

To receive 50 Top Alexander Tips or to subscribe to this free e-newsletter email:

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