

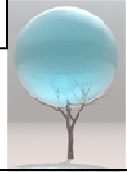


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## Exploring Wholeness with the Alexander Technique

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Do you ever find yourself tongue tied or tripping over your very own feet? These are simple examples of how one might get in their own way. Sometimes too much effort is applied and things can get tense causing one to lose their footing or tighten their tongue. There was a Shakespearean actor, FM Alexander, in the early 1900's, who noticed that just the mere thought of performing could cause an instant reaction in his whole self. Alexander observed a pattern that involved his neck muscles tightening, his head going back and down, his back shortening and a gasping for breath. This pattern might also be known as the startle reflex syndrome. He found this to be very limiting as it caused voice loss. Alexander decided to explore the connection and found that there are ways to use our whole self to allow for more ease, less tension and a deep sense of presence.

What happens when we allow our whole self to be present regardless of who may be around or what the activity may be? People are frequently surprised. At first it may feel like we are letting our guard down. This may feel very different as we are used to holding a certain amount of effort to perform tasks. Many people experience a freer, more fluid sense that is often experienced as lightness.

Absence of tension is lightness... Try this -- make a very tight fist. Hold it. Now stop tightening your fingers. What do you notice when you let go of that effort? Where do you notice this letting go in you? Was it just in the hand or was it further along the arm, shoulder or even the neck? What is the value of this? Do we benefit from holding tight neck or back muscles or knots in our stomachs? What could happen if we let these holding patterns go? What would we hold onto? Where would the support come from if we didn't have tension to stabilize us? In exploring these questions, it is interesting to observe young children as they are developing walking skills. There is quite a bit of weeble and wobble, yet tension doesn't seem prevalent. Young ones topple over then tend to bounce back up in the moment.

Adults usually have a different pattern. Why? Does the mind kick in and say tension needs to be applied here to stabilize motion or salvage dignity in a possibly embarrassing situation like falling? Mind and muscles are seemingly exceptionally powerful. Just the thought of falling can cause an intense amount of muscle tension. This in itself can throw the balance off and then add to the falling potential. What choice does one have to fall or not to fall? Does the drunken person usually get hurt? Why not? Their muscles remain free and fluid as their mind is not getting in the way. (Drinking is not recommended here).

Many people want to know what they can "do" to perform better, run farther, get stronger, or even meditate longer. Indirectly Alexander found that it was the "doing" that was getting in the way. He noticed that there was a sense of preparation involved in doing any act, even speaking. If we do not get ready to do a specific thing, we open ourselves to respond in the moment versus react or prepare for something. Reacting tends to initiate the tension cycle with the neck, head, back and breath. How can we allow ourselves to be present and respond? Noticing where we are in relationship to an activity can be an essential resource to explore in responding with less effort and more ease.

Let's illustrate noticing right now. In reading this article perhaps you are sitting in a chair. Take a moment to notice your space. Is the chair closer to one wall more than the other? If so, notice the space between where you are and the distance of the walls. Is one arm thus closer to one wall? Are you holding any extra effort/doing in that arm? What happens in you as you notice yourself in this space? Did you notice anymore space in you as you moved your awareness beyond just reading this article? Observing the conditions present allows one to notice more of the whole self and then indirectly choose to include or not include extra effort that may be limiting the capacity to connect fully in all activities. Sitting is rather simple; now imagine the increased effort applied to playing an instrument, walking, gardening or public speaking. Allowing space to move, think and be in relation to stimuli at any given moment creates an awakening of the senses that can seem like a completely new experience each time. This is presence. Observe and be surprised by wholeness...

*Christie Johnson helps people discover their unique patterns of thinking and moving in relation to all that they do. She helps executives and performers mitigate stage fright, seniors and surfers improve balance, gardeners and golfers improve range of motion, pregnant women and their partners expand their comfort, and riders and runners to release muscle tension. Free your Form, Function and Flow.*

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