

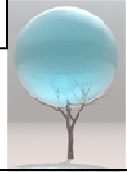


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## Human Fuel Efficiency - The Alexander Technique

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Holding tension in our bodies is much like driving a car with the emergency brake on. What happens if you drive your car with the emergency brake applied? The engine revs at higher speeds. You definitely guzzle more gas. The brakes and brake pads wear out quickly and the list continues... Most people tend to notice the emergency brake is applied via a bright red light on the dashboard. However, when and how do we notice that the emergency brake is applied in our bodies? For most people it is not until they have had a major trauma, accident or surgery that they begin to notice a less fuel efficient body. Perhaps they get a check up and find that their blood pressure is riding high, arthritis kicks in, or they are winded in climbing a few stairs. These things become the flashing red lights on the human dashboard system. Now what do I do? There seem to be endless recommendations. Exercise, eat better foods, make sure to get your antioxidants (you want to watch out for internal rust), take pills, rest, and watch your weight. One of the simplest and most profound things you could do is actually take the emergency brake off. How do you do that? One method that many have found helpful is using the Alexander Technique.

In the last issue we looked at exploring wholeness. Often we are stuck in our mind. The wheels of the mind go round and round, while the body is left behind. If we expand our awareness of what is going on in us, and how we respond to what is around us, we can actually become more fuel efficient beings versus doings.

Let's take a test. Think about your favorite place/resource that offers you calm amidst the chaos of any given day or week. Can you see or notice this place right now? Be in the moment to soak in and refuel. You may even decide to set this paper down and let yourself explore what your nervous system and body feel like with a very simple moment of noticing the now. Ahhh.... Yes, you are even allowed to breath.

If you haven't taken the time to pause yet and are still just reading, have you noticed any difference in your breath or neck muscles releasing? If not, the choice is yours to attempt pausing to the present for a moment again.

Now notice what happens in you, as you read the next part of this article. Read it aloud if possible.

On your mark... Get set... GO! Go, go, go, go, go, go -- go. RUN! Faster! Faster! GOOOOOOO! Now what are you noticing in your body? Did anything change? Are you holding your breath? Did you tighten any muscles in response to getting ready? We're definitely on the go these days. A normal day includes driving in traffic, talking on the phone, text messaging, work, running to soccer games, taking lessons, yard work, food prep, laundry... With frequency in doing any one of these activities we're often thinking about the next activity before we are even there. Endless "To Do" lists keep us constantly doing something. If we aren't doing something, than we might be perceived as doing nothing. Nothingness - what would that be like? Have you given yourself permission to not have a "To Do" list for any period of time lately?

The nervous system in humans is amazingly complex beyond most people's imaginations. Within the autonomic nervous system there are two primary divisions; the sympathetic and

parasympathetic. In simple terms, these typically function in opposition to each other or one could say they are complimentary. The sympathetic division is most active in times of stress and acts as accelerator which allows the fight and flight response. The parasympathetic division controls maintenance activities and helps conserve the body's energy and is known to allow rest and to digest. Although the body works extraordinarily well and always tends towards homeostatic balance between the two, there is a prevalence of staying more in the go and on the go without many refueling or resting moments.

One man, Frederick Mathias Alexander discovered that it is possible to allow motion in any given moment without adding excess tension in the body. Essentially, he learned how to drive his body without the emergency response of the neck muscles tightening, the head pulling slightly back and down, the spine shortening and gasping or holding the breath. He discovered a neutral balance between the fight/flight and the rest/digest extremes.

In the two experiments above, you may have noticed the calm and quiet versus the super charged highly accelerated momentum. I would like to invite you to try the experiments again with one added observation. Allow the palm of your hand to rest on the back of your head, on your neck muscles, just below the bump (occipital protrusion) on the back of your head. Try this now. Are you noticing the contact of your palm with head and neck muscles? Now, I'd like to invite you to expand your attention to the back side of your hand. As you just brought your attention beyond just the palm contact did you notice any different quality in movement? For me, I noticed that I had been slightly pushing on my neck muscles when thinking only of the palm contact. As I expanded the awareness to the back of my hand, it felt like I released the emergency brake of the neck muscles. My elbow released out and my whole spine moved in a slight upward direction. This is human fuel efficiency when we allow the muscles to move in relationship to the whole person versus holding on to them tightly. How can we move forward with the emergency brake applied? We can and do move all the time. The question is what is the quality like and how can we maximize it? We start by observing and then we choose if we want to move with added effort or with fluidity in motion. The choice is always available.

*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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