My Unexpected Experience with The Alexander Technique

I could write about how the Alexander Technique dramatically reduces back pain. I could write about how engaging with the principles of the Technique actually modifies the deep muscle tone of your spine. I could write about how the simple strategy of stopping and thinking about the head, neck, and back can reduce the tendency of falling for a Parkinson’s patient and improve the gait of someone dealing with osteo-knee arthritis.

Randomized controlled trials have been conducted on all of these subjects and have found the Alexander Technique significantly effective.

I myself came to the Alexander Technique to alleviate chronic back pain when no other therapy was helping.

Engaging with the principles of the Alexander Technique has had profound influences on my life. It is the reason I no longer have back pain and it is also the reason I can still play the classical guitar. The Alexander Technique teaches me something new and important about myself every day and most importantly has given me a skill set to be the best I can be in any situation.

But for me, the most powerful experience with the Technique (and sadly a subject that hasn’t been extensively researched) has been its capacity to release emotional trauma with the release of excess muscle tension.

How engaging with the principles of the Alexander Technique not only aligns one’s bones and muscles, but by doing so, also helps align the mind and emotions.

How can an educational method whose focus is the connection between thought and action and improving the functioning of the head, neck, back in movement have such an affect beyond physical relief?

In my exploration to improve physical coordination and learn about the patterns that want to interfere, an unexpected journey began.

As I freed up the deep postural muscles of my spine, I began to learn that these holding patterns were not just reflections of a physical habit, they were protection mechanisms to something much deeper.

When I let go and realized my full height, a sense of power came from it but also a deep sense of terror. The release of tension allowed me to remember why I began to hold myself in that position to begin with. A flood of memories from past failures in my life, past difficulties and trauma began to overwhelm my mind. I was forced at that moment to either go back to my physical pattern that held these memories at bay, or allow them their say and finally contend with the past.

Many beliefs about ourselves and insecurities that we carry in adulthood, can be traced to something that happened to us in childhood. This was one of the concepts introduced to me when I joined a men’s group to gain understanding on my failed marriage.

Now, the memories revealed had the opportunity to be looked at through the eyes of an adult. And after experiencing the pain and spasm of contending with those moments I was presented with a choice. The choice to hold onto that pain, or let go of it and choose a different context to view the world.

In the Alexander Technique we use the word i*nhibition* to indicate a stopping of one act to allow room for a different one. It is a concept that begins in the mind, a giving up focusing on the goal so that you actually have space to think about the best way to achieve the goal.

I suppose the original intention of F.M. Alexander and for many of us who came to the Technique is to bypass a troublesome physical ailment.

An unexpected benefit for me was the power to inhibit life-long protection mechanisms that once seemed so necessary could now be seen for what they were. Illusions, false beliefs from the undeveloped mind of a child that served as paper shackles to the man that took his place. Beliefs if I chose to look at for what they were, could not stand the scrutiny of my investigation.

The truest power of the Alexander Technique, is not just its capacity to integrate the body, but to take with it all that it means to be human. It is a tool that can help provide perspective in a moment of suffering and help one learn what is true about one’s self. It is the option to take a break from what is bothering you, and notice the physical consequences of your thought process and choose a different path. A freer path, not an easy one, but a path to integration.