

## Two Letters in 'Health for All'

Margaret Goldie

THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

Letter in the *Health for All*, 1957.

In *Health for All*, Aug., 1957, an article, by Leslie Korth, D.O., M.R.O., pays liberal tribute to the discoveries of the late F. Matthias Alexander. Mr Korth points out basic principles of Alexander's teaching, but he goes on to advocate inconsistent procedures in such a way that the uninformed reader might excusably infer Mr Korth's procedures to be an exposition of Alexander's teaching.

As Alexander's executrix, I wish to protect his name from being associated with procedures inconsistent with his experimentation and teaching.

Alexander's disconcerting discovery of the unreliability of sensory appreciation led him to seek reliable means whereby faulty use of the self could be changed and the wrong pattern of energizing redirected. From these researches evolved his concept of the human creature as an indivisible *psycho-physical whole*, whose misdirection could be changed and redirected by the simple means of a decision to stop, i.e., the inhibition of the habit response – the prevention of the misdirection of the primary control (head-neck-back relativity). The associated redirection of energizing to which the *inhibition* leads is a conscious decision, not a doing - the conscious direction of a constantly improving employment of the primary control as the means-whereby activity is allowed to take place. These reasoning procedures require sustained attention to the *means-whereby* instead of to the *end*; means inevitably lead to and produce their own ends, whereas *end-gaining* diverts attention from the means and permits one to revert to the old responses which it is desired to change.

The existence of a primary control should in any event render unnecessary all specific instructions of an end-gaining nature such as Mr Korth advocates. In fact Alexander's experience was that such instructions, based as they are upon 'feeling' and 'doing', and ignoring the indivisible psycho-physical nature of the totally integrated self, can be dangerous and

harmful. A technique whereby one learns oneself consciously to prevent misdirection and consciously to direct the constantly improving employment of the primary control supersedes the concept of a 'correct position' and a 'correct feel' with its implication of the fixed and finalized, and its exclusion of further progress.

The skilled teacher enables the pupil to make experiences of *non-doing* (prevention of the wrong messages responsible for the unwanted habit responses of head-neck-back) as approach to activity, imparting with his hands to the pupil sensory experiences associated with the new decision for the head-neck-back direction. The teacher's hands are no substitute for the pupil's decision, which must be steadfastly maintained. The teacher's hands continuously reassess the changing psycho-physical conditions as manifested by the pupil's increasing ability to withhold response to stimuli and to maintain the conscious decision for the improving head-neck-back relativity. As there is no fixed 'correct' posture, the teacher's function is to initiate change in an improving direction which becomes a constant, and whereby 'an endless process of growth is initiated' (Dewey). The pupil learns not to rely on the new 'feel' imparted by the teacher's hands, but to gain experience in the new approach to activity which in due course becomes a constant in living.

When asked why, after re-education, the sensory register should not be relied upon once again, Alexander would ask why, having once gone wrong, the sensory register should not go wrong again. He would then contrast a retrograde reliance upon *feeling* with the evolutionary significance of developing on to the *conscious plane* through the reasoned use of the principle of inhibition and conscious direction of the primary control as a constant in living, and remind one that the great John Dewey had spoken of Alexander's technique as 'thinking in activity' and as 'freedom in thought and action.'

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#### THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

Letter in the *Health for All*, February 1958.

May I confirm Mr Eric de Peyer's assurance to your readers (Readers' Letters, January 1958) that the technique of F. Matthias Alexander can be taught successfully to young children and to persons of poor education,

and may I acknowledge gracefully Mr de Peyer's indirect reference to my experience in working with children with Alexander in his (Alexander's) little school?

Alexander often expressed his conviction that, ideally, the proper sphere for the application of his technique is with young children, so that in growing, and in learning and learning to do, they should make the best and fullest development of their potentialities. The application of Alexander's principles, as the basis to daily living as well as to the more orthodox educational activities, is simple to those who accept and apply his commonsense approach in its simplest terms. The children themselves readily observe this approach to be a helpful means to activity, to learning and learning to do, at all levels: consideration of the more subtle points and deeper implications is for the teacher and the serious student.

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