

## Wanting or Wishing for a free neck

John Dewey pointed out that, unless you're lucky enough to possess Aladdin's magic lamp, then you will have to find some way of gaining your ends by turning them into means. (*Human Nature and Conduct*, 'Habit and Will') For instance, you may want a Rolls Royce or a luxury yacht but, to fulfil your wishes, you will have to ensure that you have the necessary *means whereby* or it will never happen. Walter once joked that he might want to be Wimbledon Champion, but he'd first have to deal with a lot of things to ensure that he had the necessary means!

Similarly, there's a world of difference between *trying to free* your neck and having the necessary means to allow your neck to be free. Alexander explained in *CCCI* that his pupil's habit of stiffening his neck was not an isolated defect but was connected with other harmful habits in the way he was using himself (Mouritz, p. 103).

So, it's useless to ask your pupil to free their neck directly until more general conditions have improved. Alexander explained that the pupil's job is to inhibit and to wholeheartedly *wish* for a free neck giving time for the teacher to make the necessary adjustments to restore a more integrated (co-ordinated) functioning.\*

He writes:

"If [. . .] the pupil forgets to inhibit, and . . . tries to relax [the neck] *by direct means* (i.e., according to his own idea of relaxing it), he will in this attempt [. . .] do exactly what he has always done with his neck (i.e., stiffen it)" (*CCCI*, p. 103).

Walter makes this important point – to give your directions or orders in the form of a wish – in *Thinking Aloud*:

"When you look at fairy tales, it must strike you that one thing that no body every worries about is how the wish is going to be carried out" (pp. 16-17).

Alexander wrote *CCCI* in 1923, yet Walter writes that he only realised the full implications of asking a pupil to free their neck – rather than simply wishing for a free neck – in 1946:

"At tea FM said that he had, at last, decided that we must cut out in future teaching all instructions to order the neck to relax or to be free because such orders only lead to other forms of doing. *If a person is stiffening the neck, the remedy is to get them to stop projecting the messages that are bringing about this condition* and not to project messages to counter the effects of the other messages. He said that the implied contradiction had worried hm for a long time but, after working on Hallis this morning, he saw that it must be changed so all orders in future will be framed so as to emphasise 'non-doing'." Carrington, W.H.M. (1996). *A Time to Remember*. The Sheildrake Press, London: p. 59. [italics added for emphasis]

In other words, if you ask your pupil to free their neck, you are inviting them to do something in order to try to free it. Yet, you don't want them to do something extra. All you want them to do is stop unconsciously doing whatever is causing the neck to stiffen in the first place!

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\*Of course, you'll get people objecting that it must be possible to restore conditions without a teacher's help, but Alexander explains that lessons can considerably reduce the time needed and improve the chance of success.