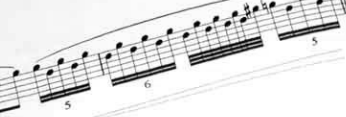


F. M Alexander—
aphorisms

selected by
NANCY CREGO





"When people are wrong, the thing that is right is bound to be wrong to them."

"You can't do something you don't know, if
you keep on doing what you know."

"Everyone wants to be right, but no one stops to consider if their idea of right is right."

"Change involves carrying out an activity against the habit of life."

"You are not here to do exercises, or to learn to do something right, but to get able to meet a stimulus that always puts you wrong and to learn to deal with it."

"You come to learn to inhibit and to direct your activity. You learn, first, to inhibit the habitual reaction to certain classes of stimuli, and second, to direct yourself consciously in such a way as to affect certain muscular pulls, which processes bring a new reaction to these stimuli. Boiled down, it all comes to inhibiting a particular reaction to a given stimulus. But no one will see it that way. They will all see it as getting in and out of the chair the right way. It is nothing of the kind. It is that a pupil decides what he will or will not consent to do. They may teach you anatomy and physiology till they are black in the face -- you will still have this to face, sticking to a decision against your habit of a life."

"You can't know a thing by an instrument
that's wrong."

"If people will go on believing that they
'know', it is impossible to eradicate anything;
it makes it impossible to teach them."

"As soon as people come with the idea of unlearning instead of learning, you have them in the frame of mind you want."

"When anything is pointed out, our only idea is to go from wrong to right in spite of the fact that it has taken us years to get wrong: We try to get right in a moment."

"The whole organism is responsible for specific trouble. Proof of this is, that we eradicate specific defects in process."



"You get away from your old preconceived ideas because you are getting away from your old habits."

"Doing in your case is so 'overdoing' that you are practically paralysing the parts you want to work."

"Everyone is always teaching one what to do,
leaving us still doing things we shouldn't do."

"Under the ordinary teaching methods, the pupil gets nineteen wrong and one right experience. It ought to be the other way around."

"The experience you want is in the process of getting it. If you have something, give it up. Getting it, not having it, is what you want."

"Prevent the things you have been doing and
you are half way home."

"Take hold of the floor with your feet. What can that mean to them? When they try to take hold of the floor with their feet, they take the foot off the floor with the tension they are putting on their legs."

"When I ask you to draw your tongue away and say "t", I mean you not to say "t". I mean you definitely to prevent it, to give orders, and not to say "t". I ask you to say "t" because I don't want you to say "t", because I want to give you the opportunity of refusing to say "t".

"They say, "I am going to lengthen," and then raise their eyes. Of course raising their eyes has nothing more to do with lengthening than their boots, but having done this from time onwards, their conception of lengthening will be associated with raising their eyes. Therefore when the idea of lengthening comes to them, they must at once inhibit the movement of the eyes in order to break the wrong association that has been built up, before giving themselves the order to lengthen."



"The difficulty for all of us is to take up a new way of life in which we must apply principles instead of the haphazard end-gaining methods of the past. This indicates a slow process and we must all be content with steady improvement day to day; but we must see to it that we are really depending upon the application of our principles in all our endeavours in every direction from day to day. You have been too anxious to be right despite the fact that you learned early in your lessons that your right was wrong. However you have done well considering your difficulties, and you will continue to improve in the controlled use of yourself if you work as steadily as directed."

"We are forced in our teaching at every point to translate theories into concrete processes."

"We are forced in our teaching at every point to translate theories into concrete processes."

"Trying is only emphasizing the thing we know already."

"All that I am trying to give you is a new experience."

"You won't energize to put your head forward and up, unless you feel the condition which you associate with the idea of head forward and up, which is, unfortunately, stiffening and shortening, the very opposite of forward and up."

"You want to know if you're right. When you get further on you will be right, but you won't know it and won't want to know if you're right."

"As a matter of fact, feeling is much more use than what they call 'mind' when it's right."

"Sensory appreciation conditions conception -
- you can't know a thing by an instrument that
is wrong."



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"Specific prevention is permissible only under conditions of non-doing, not in doing."

"You translate everything, whether physical or mental or spiritual, into muscular tension."

"Control should be in process, not superimposed."

"No one could be satisfied to go on every day getting no result unless he saw the way."

"The stupidity of letting children go wrong is that once they go wrong, their right is wrong; therefore, the more they try to be right, the more they go wrong."

"The important thing is what the child is doing with itself in its activities."

"The essence of the religious outlook is that religion should not be kept in a compartment by itself, but that it should be the ever-present guiding principle underlying the 'daily round', the 'common task.' So also it is possible to apply this principle of life in the daily round of one's activities without involving a loss of attention in these activities."

"Talk about a man's individuality and character: it's the way he uses himself."



"To know when we are wrong is all that we shall ever know in this world."

"When an investigation comes to be made, it will be found that every single thing we are doing in the work is being done in Nature where the conditions are right, the difference being that we are learning to do it consciously."

















ON THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

The Alexander Technique is a subtle method of integrating mind and body in such a way that each functions with maximum efficiency and ease and minimum stress and tension. The Technique is an educational process which provides an individual with the means to identify and change habits and attitudes interfering with "the proper use of oneself."

The Technique was developed in the late 19th century by F.M. Alexander, a Shakespearean orator. Having lost his voice, Alexander undertook an intensive program of self-observation that lasted for nearly a decade in order to discover the source of his problem. In the process, he not only regained his voice, but also laid the foundation for the Alexander Technique.

Alexander practiced the Technique in England and the U.S. until his death in 1955. Among his students were John Dewey, Aldous Huxley, George Bernard Shaw, and Nikolaas Tinbergen (who gave part of his 1973 Nobel prize speech on the Technique).

How Does It Work?

A typical Alexander lesson is divided principally into two activities-- "chair work" and "table work."

Chair Work

The Technique uses the action of repeatedly sitting in a chair and then standing as a way to gain awareness of and eventually correct movement and postural habits. Since sitting and standing are among our most frequent activities, they serve as the foundation of the Technique.

During this portion of the lesson, the teacher generally guides the student in and out of the chair, providing the student with the experience of movement which is effortless and tension-free. Together, the teacher and student learn to stop or, as Alexander called it, "inhibit," habitual responses to the stimulus of either sitting or standing. By stopping for a moment before the action takes place, the teacher and student have time to use reasoning powers to assess which is the most efficient and appropriate way to perform the action of either sitting or standing.

Chair work allows students to learn what it is they do when moving. Special attention is paid to the relationship between the head, neck and the rest of the back, the relationship which Alexander noticed as primary in the performance of all movements.

Alexander spoke of chair work as follows:

"Boiled down, it all comes to inhibiting a particular reaction to a given stimulus—but no one will see it that way. They will see it as getting in and out of a chair the right way. It is nothing of the kind. It is that a pupil decides what he will, or will not, consent to."

Chair work is thus the basis for the students learning how s/he moves in any activity. Once awareness is gained in this single activity, the student acquires the power to control all reflexes in order to direct the body—the self—in a coordinated and balanced way.



Table Work

The other part of a lesson involves "table work."

Students lie on their backs with feet flat and knees bent in what is known as the semi-supine position, or the rest position. The teacher is encouraged to inhibit tension and remain alert. It is during this part of the lesson that the student becomes quiet to the external world so that s/he may give full attention to the self.

[Image: *picking up box*]

Table work is an effective complement to chair work since gravity has less influence on body movement and habits. It is a time when students may reflect upon their habitual patterns of movement but without the active demands of movement.

[IMAGE: *the startle response*]



Why Are Sessions Called Lessons?

The Alexander Technique, unlike other "body work", emphasizes learning. It does not attempt to "fix" a particular problem but rather to re-educate. Its focus is not on the particular but rather on the whole movement. The Technique encourages an experiential way of learning—including intuitive, sensory, and other non-cerebral ways of acquiring knowledge—so as to master new skills in the art of movement.

What Are The Benefits?

The Technique gives the individual an improved sense of well-being. Students enjoy:

Increased relaxation and coordination

Ease of movement

Heightened muscle strength

Increased flexibility

Enhanced equilibrium

Decreased physical tension

Reduced stress

Improved sensory awareness

The rewards can be deep and far-reaching. Students often achieve greater control over themselves and the events in their daily lives. They cultivate an increase in powers of observation and develop a much sharper sense of awareness.

How Long Does It Take?

As with the learning of any skill, such as the learning of a musical instrument, the process demands commitment on the parts of both teacher and student. Alexander prescribed a minimum course of 30 lessons, a period he thought necessary to acquire the basic principles of the Technique.

The length of time necessary, though, depends greatly on how much misuse the body has already received and how severe the problems are before the lessons begin. Lessons last approximately 30 - 45 minutes and are conducted on a one-to-one basis.

Nancy Crego
Toledo, Ohio USA

F.M. Alexander (1869-1955)

"Every man, woman and child holds the possibility of physical perfection; it rests with each one of us to attain it by personal understanding and effort."







ABOUT NANCY CREGO

Nancy Crego is certified as an Alexander Technique Teacher by the Urbana Center for the Alexander Technique (Urbana, Illinois), where she trained for three years with Joan and Alex Murray. She is an active member of the American Society for the Alexander Technique, AmSAT (formerly NASTAT).

In addition, Nancy has two Masters Degrees, one in English and the other in Linguistics and the Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL). She also worked on a PH.D in Comparative Arts where she continued her studies in music and piano.

Nancy began working as a teacher of the technique in the Northwest Ohio area in the spring of 1993.

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