

There's light at the end of the carpal tunnel: how I live my life with the Alexander Technique

I am a writer by trade and as such dependent upon being able to sit upright for hours pounding computer keys while performing mental acrobatics in a state of intense concentration. I'm also a perfectionist and do everything the hard way, with far more effort than it really requires.

So far, I've had two brush-ups with intense pain - a very dramatic episode of [sciatica](#) in 1997, when I lived and worked in almost constant pain for nine months, and a much milder, but still very scary and unpleasant, case of carpal tunnel syndrome in 2002, which lasted for about five months.

The sciatica episode was frightening - the doctors were baffled and I was daily faced with the possibility of losing my livelihood - causing me to deploy every resource at my disposal to find a solution.

“Even after I started doing Alexander work, there was no visible improvement for months, but there was something about the work that I trusted and that helped me persevere.”

The Alexander Technique is all about HOW - how you do what you do, in painstaking physical detail. And how to allow a new, different way of doing it. Some teachers are more visually oriented than others and will work with mirrors a lot, which incidentally makes you face your body image issues (I still find that aspect of the work quite daunting).

It's also about "losing it" a lot and making your peace with the fact that you will fall

back into doing things "wrong" (and then right yourself again) for the rest of your life. New situations constantly challenge you, while the organism's inbuilt preference for stability makes old patterns very persistent.

One of the most difficult work-related habits for me was (and is) *straining to concentrate*, which I accomplish by training the eyes upon a fixed point, holding the neck rigid and fixing the breast bone. That mental activity requires repression of movement is a cultural belief we are taught almost from the cradle (Einstein, who furnished his study with a couch for laying down and a large rug for pacing, knew otherwise!)

Another tricky one is the rapid scanning eye movement we use such a lot in diagonal reading or otherwise searching for visual information (net browsing!) which also tends to go hand in hand with a fixed head-neck configuration. And I'm currently looking into what happens in my throat, neck and jaw when I speak in public, and how I physically shrink into myself when using my thinking function to solve problems.

At its best, the Technique is for me a daily gentle reminder of what is possible. The primary control affects every system in the body. It affects the whole spine and all the joints. It affects the breathing. The breathing in turn affects the emotions. When I “come up into my full uprightness,” I access the natural support of my whole body and I'm no longer so hemmed in by all my tight and fearful places.

by Ana Simeon

Communications Coordinator
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