

The Alexander Technique

Posture training? Or mankind's next
evolutionary step?

Peter Nobes
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In October 2016 I delivered the keynote speech at Alexander Technique International's Annual Conference in Ardingly, UK. Much of it was done 'ad-lib' from notes, so here I have tried to write down the spirit of what I said. It was a speech, and not written for publication, so please don't judge it as a work of literature. There was humour, and lots of it was delivered with a smile. This may not come across as you read it, so I added 'smileys'. And I have put in **bold** the parts that I strongly emphasised.

The theme of the conference was 'Making Waves'.

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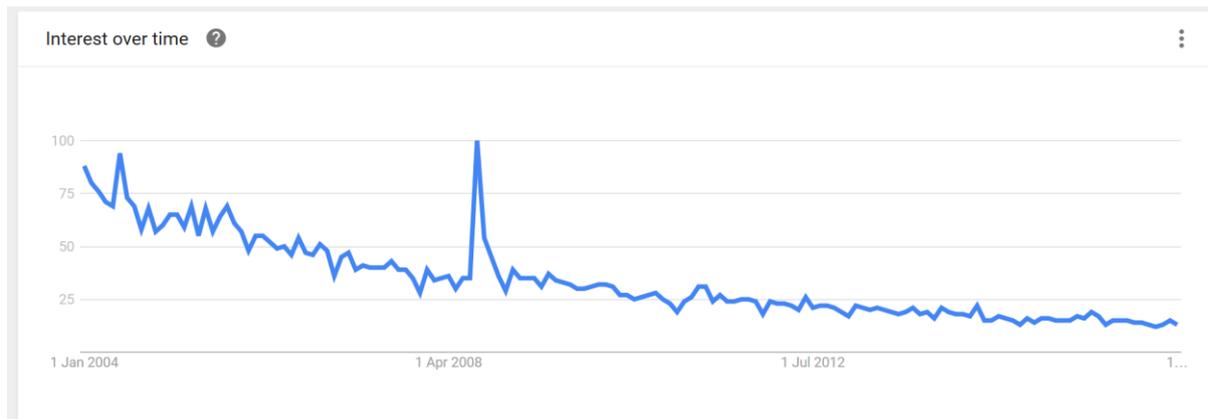
The Alexander Technique: posture training or mankind's next evolutionary step?

I asked a French Alexander teacher to read the first draft of this speech. Her English is almost perfect but she doesn't understand all our idioms. When we discussed what I had written I discovered she understood "ruffle some feathers" but not "set the cat among the pigeons". ☺

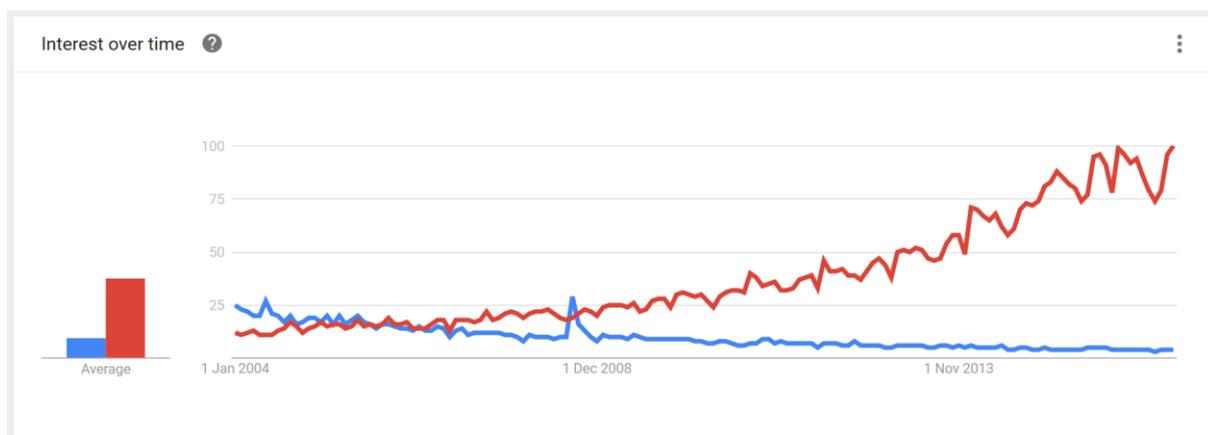
As I wrote a second draft I found myself taking out some of the more controversial things. This won't set the cat among the pigeons but will, I hope, ruffle some feathers. And I hope it will also make some waves.

I think I only have a few controversial things to say.

Here's the first one: I think the Alexander Technique is doomed. Here is a graph of how often Alexander Technique has been searched for on Google since 2004.



There are a number of ways of interpreting this: Niall Kelly is going to say in his workshop that it isn't as bad as it looks because the graph isn't showing the actual number of searches, it's showing the searches in proportion to the number of searches for everything else. In that case this graph comparing AT with mindfulness is interesting – people are getting interested in mindfulness at an extraordinary rate. What's mindfulness doing that we aren't?



But if the graph is showing the actual number of searches, no-one will be searching for us in ten years' time. It's a tragedy. This thing that has changed our lives, this thing FM saw in terms of mankind's next evolutionary step is going to disappear. It will have lasted a hundred and thirty years or so.

Why? And why have other philosophies for living lasted longer. What has Zen got that we haven't? Stoicism is still going after two and a half thousand years. What are they doing right?

Why can so few of us make a living? At the start of my workshop in Bordeaux two years ago I asked who was making a living from teaching Alexander and two of us put our hands up. It's so sad!

I think we have difficulty promoting ourselves because we can't define what we do, and we can't agree on what the Alexander Technique is. Fifteen years or so ago someone set up a Yahoo group to promote and market the AT and asked us all to submit articles, posters and other publicity materials we could all share. Someone sent in an article saying the Alexander Technique was about release of muscle tension. I emailed the man who started the group to say it wasn't going to work; most of us wouldn't use it because we don't see the Alexander Technique as being anything to do with release of muscle tension. Sure enough, the group folded.

I think also the stuff we post online doesn't appeal to the public. A couple of months ago I was asked to do some presentations on the AT to groups of academics and office workers as part of a wellbeing day at a London university. The lady who booked me, Jane, asked me for a paragraph on the Alexander Technique to put in the publicity so I wrote something specifically for that audience and that environment. I wrote:

Most of our aches, pains and problems are caused by how we go about things. The Alexander Technique shows us how to **make new choices**: how to be **effortlessly** upright and to **move and think effortlessly**. It's 'mindfulness in action'.

But Jane had done her own research online and printed this in the flyer:

The basic principles of the technique are:

- How you move, sit and stand affects how well you function
- The relationship of the head, neck and spine is fundamental to your ability to function optimally
- The mind and body work together intimately as one, each constantly influencing the other.

Why would anyone go to a presentation on that? And that was cobbled together from Alexander teachers' websites. Surely we can write something more user-friendly than that! No one who is reading about the AT for the first time wants to know that the

relationship of the head, neck and spine is fundamental to their ability to function optimally. Why not just sell the benefits?

But Jane found the benefits. She went on to say:

The aim of the Alexander technique is to help you ‘unlearn’ bad habits (which may lead to back pain, neck ache, sore shoulders) and achieve a balanced, more naturally aligned body.

No it isn't. In my experience those are small side-benefits of the Alexander Technique, or the ‘yellow-belt’ benefits of Alexander lessons. Not the ‘aim’ of the Technique. So what is the ‘aim’? And what are the benefits? And if it isn't about release of muscle tension, and isn't about achieving a balanced, more naturally aligned body, what is it about? Let's ask Google and Wikipedia.

Google says it's

...a system designed to promote well-being by retraining one's awareness and habits of **posture** to ensure minimum effort and strain.

I suppose we can forgive the algorithm that wrote that, as it hasn't read FM's books. But real live people wrote the Wikipedia entry that starts with:

...an educational process that develops the ability to **realign posture** and to avoid unnecessary muscular and mental tension.

That's not what I'm teaching!

Let's consult two websites that should be able to tell us – AmSAT and ‘The Complete Guide to the Alexander Technique’. At the time of writing this AmSAT's homepage says:

- ...the Alexander Technique teaches how to unlearn habitual patterns that cause unnecessary tension in everything we do.
- It's used by people of all ages and abilities to enhance the performance of every activity and relieve the pain and stress caused by everyday **misuse of the body**.

And the page tagged ‘The Alexander Technique’ says:

- By teaching how to change **faulty postural habits**, it enables improved mobility, posture, performance and alertness along with relief of chronic stiffness, tension and stress.

I'm not sure FM would recognise those descriptions of his Technique.

The Complete Guide starts:

- The **Alexander Technique** is a way to feel better, and move in a more relaxed and comfortable way... the way nature intended.
- An **Alexander Technique** teacher helps you to identify and lose the harmful habits you have built up over a lifetime of stress and learn to **move more freely**.

Lots of talk about bodies and posture but nothing about thinking. We all believe this is about mind-body unity, right, so why miss out the mind part? It's ironic that the "the Complete Guide" should be guiding us to only half of it: it seems somewhat incomplete to me! Reading FM's books it's quite clear he didn't think his work was about bodies and posture, it was about thinking. David Gorman told me that Erica Whittaker, one of the first-generation teachers, said that late in his life FM was "severely disappointed by the way his work was being turned into bodywork where for him it had been about thinking." And in *Freedom to Change* Jones says FM advised him in 1946 to avoid the word 'posture' in writing about the Technique.

And you don't have to delve far into the Complete Guide to find this quote about Dewey from *Freedom to Change*: "The greatest benefit he got from lessons, Dewey said, was the ability to stop and think before acting." **The ability to stop and think before acting**. Not, the greatest benefit was better posture. Nor a better aligned body.

I think there are only two reasons for Alexander teachers to say that the Technique is about bodies and posture. One is that they believe it is, in which case they have missed the point. I was visiting a STAT training course in Europe and asked one of the trainees "Shall we do some work?" She replied "I haven't been here long and still can't sit and stand properly." She'd clearly missed the point. I wondered how she could have got as far as training as still think that was what she was learning. As FM said: "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.” **Inhibiting a reaction to a stimulus...**

The other reason is that they know it’s about thinking but publicise the body and posture stuff because they think it will bring in the customers. In that case they’re doing the rest of us a disservice. Maybe they think potential customers will be put off if they talk about thinking. Actually, in my experience, all the talk of posture puts people off. One of my trainees said she didn’t try the Alexander Technique for her back pain for eleven years after she first heard of it – **eleven years!** – because she was told it was:

1. about posture, and she felt her posture was ok, and
2. about how to sit and stand correctly, and she felt she already knew how to sit and stand correctly.

A new client said to me recently he wanted to try the AT because he’d heard it was like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy – it is! – but he was puzzled because he looked online and found it was all about posture. And the man who said “How will improving my posture help my stress?” And a runner I met socially who had knee pain but wouldn’t come and try the Alexander Technique because she couldn’t see how changing her posture would help. I’m sure we’ve all had these conversations.

We’re underselling this wonderful, life-changing Alexander thing. I know an Alexander teacher who, at the end of their first-ever Alexander lesson, went down to the Thames and threw in their wedding ring. I taught a workshop for complete beginners somewhere in the USA and the next day one of the participants phoned me with some feedback. They said their father had died almost a decade before, and after my workshop they had gone home, gone to their father’s closet and taken all his clothes to the charity shop. **Real change! REAL CHANGE!** Maybe they also learnt to stand and sit correctly. But maybe that seemed trivial in comparison.

Alexander believed that if enough people learned his technique it could put an end to wars. He thought it had the potential to be mankind’s next evolutionary step. Good posture; standing and sitting correctly; they aren’t going to end wars. Feeling good and moving the way nature intended isn’t going to change the world. What the world needs is more people who can stop and make a new choice

before acting, or who can inhibit a reaction to a stimulus. Posture is such a first-world problem.

One positive development in recent years is that scientific studies are showing how effective Alexander is in helping people with back pain, neck pain, Parkinson's etc. But the big study of Alexander and back pain, published in 2008, did little to bring us in any work. According to that first graph, more people were searching for us before it was published than were six months later. And although a health economist concluded that the Technique is so cost-effective in treating back pain – I know, we don't actually treat back pain – so cost-effective it is within the range that the National Health Service should be paying for, the committee who make these decisions have got us down as exercise. So the NHS isn't paying. And until the mainstream recognise us for what we can do to help people we're going to be lumped with the alternative lot.

When I was a member of STAT my annual dues included insurance, and when I resigned I had to get my own. The company I use lists over 200 therapies, from Angelic Reiki to Zoopharmacognosy. Some of them probably help people "feel better", or "relieve the pain and stress caused by everyday misuse of the body", many of them, I suspect, simply through the placebo effect. But going through the list I can't see any that look like they will teach people how to liberate themselves, and how to take responsibility for their lives, which is what I believe the Alexander Technique is really about. And the scientific and medical people see us in the same group as Angelic Reiki, Healing Touch and Past-Life Regression.

Teaching people how to liberate themselves, and how to take responsibility for their lives. FM said **"For in the mind of man lies the secret of his ability to resist, to conquer and finally to govern the circumstances of his life."**

I think we would all have more work if we all agreed to take The 'P' Word – posture – out of our publicity and just tell the world what the benefits are. And the benefits are so much bigger than the ones mentioned on those websites. But I suspect it is too late and the phrase 'Alexander Technique' is now past its use-by date. Jeremy Chance is probably right when he says we need to re-brand. It's what I'm going to do when

my book comes out next year – I’m going to stop calling what I do the ‘Alexander Technique’.

And selling the benefits – maybe putting “Learn to govern the circumstances of your life!” on your website isn’t going to bring in the new business. So what are the benefits we could sell?

I’ve lost count of the people I’ve heard saying: “We should only ever do what FM did.” If we only do what FM did we’ll stagnate.

Because, surely, we need to keep moving forward. How can FM have discovered everything there is to discover about it, and every way to get it across to people? Maybe psychology should only ever do what Freud did.

A friend of mine was training with someone who said: “We should only ever do what FM did.” My friend pointed out that FM had written that he had taken his work as far as he could in his lifetime and it was up to others to take it further. The director of the training course said: “Don’t get excited – he only said it once.” It’s a bit like some religious people and the bible – they pick the bits they want to believe and ignore the rest. Interestingly, I don’t think what they were doing on that training was what FM did. They were teaching body and posture stuff and not thinking.

Some teachers believe they’re doing exactly what FM did, and try to preserve it, and frown at other people’s approaches, because the person who they trained with said that’s how FM taught. But none of us actually know what FM did.

HOW did FM teach? I don’t know as I never met him. I met two first-generation teachers – Elisabeth Walker, of course, and, once, Walter Carrington, and they taught differently from each other. I had some lessons with Shoshana Kaminitz, who was very close to Patrick MacDonald, and I have worked with many people from the Barstow background. And my first teacher trained with Dr Barlow – they all taught differently. I met another first-generation teacher – Buzz Gummere – but I have no idea how he taught because he came to one of my workshops. ☺

WHAT did FM teach? Penelope Easten’s workshops on what she learnt from Miss Goldie are very interesting. The biography of FM describes Miss Goldie as his ‘life partner’. Penelope believes they weren’t lovers. But either way, FM and Miss Goldie were very close. If she didn’t know what he was teaching, no one did. What I got

from attending Penelope's workshop, and getting her in to do workshops with my trainees, is that Miss Goldie was teaching people how to stop and make new choices. It was about thinking and not bodies. Also, for Miss Goldie, Penelope says, the Primary Control was not the head/neck/back relationship but the **ATTENTION/INTENTION/head/neck/back relationship**. Attention and intention – again, about thinking, not bodies.

Going back to all the different styles of teaching, fortunately for sponsorship candidates, I'm fairly agnostic about the style of teaching. ☺ I don't care if people think they teach **HOW** FM taught, as long as they teach **WHAT** he taught. And **WHAT** he taught wasn't about bodies. In Zen they warn how easy it is to mistake the finger pointing at the moon for the moon itself. The style of teaching is the finger. What it teaches is the moon.

What is end-gaining? End-gaining involves being organised by the end, whereas the “means-whereby” is about being organised by the process of achieving the end. What's the end? Usually, something in the future, or something ‘over there’. So when we're end-gaining we're being organised by the somewhere else in time and space instead of the here-and-now.

End-gaining takes three forms. Trying to be someWHERE that we're not. Or trying to be someWHEN that we're not. Or trying to be someONE that we're not. So choosing the ‘means-whereby’ is simply choosing to be who we are, where we are, now. It's about being our authentic selves, living in the moment.

‘Chairwork’ isn't about sitting and standing correctly. That's the finger. The moon is something much bigger and more life-changing. Until people have an Alexander lesson they don't think much about how they stand or sit. Then they find they have choices about *how* they stand and sit. Yes, it is surprising how effortless it can actually be, but the point is that they have to *choose* to do it the new way after many years of doing it the old way. And the choices aren't about how they do things ‘with their body’, they're about ‘getting out of the way’ and allowing their body to do things naturally. Listen to what one of my trainees said he's got from the Alexander Technique: “It has given me a growing amount of **freedom to choose how I do things** – sit, stand, walk, **even think**.”

Freedom to choose how he does things! In Alexander lessons people discover they have choices about things they didn't ever realise they had choices about. And once they can choose *how* to do something, they can choose *whether* to do it. But they have to be conscious – mindful – to choose. You can't make choices while you're in your head, or daydreaming, or on automatic pilot.

My daughter is an aspiring theatre director. On Wednesday she introduced me to the author of a play she's directing. The conversation went:

“What do you do?”

“I teach the Alexander Technique.”

“Oh – spines!” she said, lifting herself with an invisible string from the top of her head. I despair! How has this thing that teaches freedom and choices got reduced to “spines”?

I heard a play on Radio4 where two actresses were being bitchy about a third one. The only positive thing they found to say about her was that her posture was good as a result of the Alexander Technique.

“She's so old she probably knew Alexander himself.”

“I heard she shagged Alexander. Imagine what that would do for your lower back!” ☺

But why did they choose lower back? Because, like everyone else, they think the Alexander Technique is about lower backs; about ‘spines’.

Imagine what knowing FM well would do:

- for your freedom to choose
- for living in the here-and-now
- for being mindful
- for being your authentic self.

At the beginning of this speech I wondered: “What's mindfulness doing that we aren't?” The answer is – nothing, except getting more searches on Google. We ARE teaching people how to be mindful. And yet the world thinks we're about ‘spines’.

And what's Zen got that we haven't? Nothing. As Marjorie Barlow, FM's niece, said in the first ever FM Alexander Memorial Lecture, back in 1966, "Alexander has rediscovered the secret of Zen for our time."

A retired school teacher once came for a first Alexander lesson with me. Within a few minutes she said: "This is 'Having No Head'. I've been looking for this all my life." The next week she brought me a copy of the book *On Having No Head: Zen and the Rediscovery of the Obvious* by Douglas Harding. She was right – it is *exactly* what I am teaching. Harding found that he didn't have to think – or, more precisely, he didn't have to *do* anything to think – and he didn't have to do anything with, or about, his body.

I read a blog by a Zen master who said when she loses her attention she can feel her body compress. So, presumably, when she switches on her attention her body decompresses. Sounds a bit like Miss Goldie's primary control: ATTENTION/INTENTION/head/neck/back relationship.

Listen to Harding on the benefits of switched-on attention. It's a long paragraph so I've edited out some of the more poetic bits.

...an enlivening of the senses... and... a complex of inter-related psychophysical changes – including a sustained 'whole-body' alertness in place of the 'heady' intermittent sort... a reduction of stress, particularly in the region of the eyes and mouth and neck... a progressive lowering of one's centre of gravity... a striking downward shift of one's breathing... And, balancing this descent, a general uplift, including a sense of exaltation (as if one were perfectly straight-backed and as tall as the sky), an upsurge of creativity, rising energy and confidence, a new and childlike spontaneity and playfulness, and above all a lightness.

That's a perfect description of the benefits of the Alexander Technique!

He also quotes various Zen masters:

- 16th century Han-shan: "I took a walk. Suddenly I stood still, filled with the realisation I had no body or mind. I felt clear and transparent."
- 12th century Dogen: "Mind and body dropped off!"

- 19th century Hakuin: “All of a sudden you find mind and body wiped out of existence.”

That’s what I’ve got from Alexander!

So, we’re offering what Zen offers. What a pity we’re not as well known as Zen though.

Choices. Being mindful and making choices. I also said: “What’s Stoicism doing right?” They’ve been going since the third century BCE, and ‘Stoicism’ **gets searched for more on Google than ‘Alexander Technique’**. There is even an annual ‘Live like a Stoic Week’. By coincidence it was last week.

Contrary to popular belief, the Stoics didn’t have miserable lives and just put up with everything. They believed the secret to happiness lay in mastering themselves and putting up with anything they had no control over. Mastering themselves? That sounds a bit like FM’s “governing the circumstances of your life”. It gets better. What they meant by mastering themselves was that every action should be from **conscious choice rather than habit, appetite or emotion**. That could have been lifted from one of Alexander’s books.

Zen, Stoicism... What else? Listen to this description of the Taoist concept of *wu-wei*.

The ideal of ‘effortless action’, or *wu-wei*, refers to the dynamic, unselfconscious state of mind of a person who is optimally active and effective. People in *wu-wei* feel as if they are doing nothing, while at the same time they might be creating a brilliant work of art, smoothly negotiating a complex social situation, or even bringing the entire world into harmonious order. For a person in *wu-wei*, proper and effective behaviour flows automatically and spontaneously from the self, without the need for thought or exertion.

That sounds identical to our non-doing, right?

Zen, Stoicism, Taoism... Is there more? Well, yes.

Existentialism. “A philosophy that emphasizes individual existence, **freedom and choice**. It is the view that humans define their own meaning in life, and try to make **rational decisions** despite existing in an irrational universe.”

I haven't got time to go further into the parallels between Alexander and Existentialism tonight – if you want to know more, come to my workshop tomorrow.

I'm not arguing that the Alexander Technique is identical to Existentialism, or Zen, or Stoicism. But I am saying firstly, that, when we have such similarities with enormous, well-known and long-lasting schools of philosophy it is a pity that we're going to fade to nothing because the world thinks we're about "spines" or release of muscle tension.

And, secondly, philosophical ideas are all very well, but what we offer is a MEANS-WHEREBY to achieve them, to make them real. To **embody** them or **incorporate** them. Aren't those interesting words!

We also offer a means-whereby for looking good and staying youthful. And a means-whereby for putting into practice all those things we read in self-help books. *The Inner Game of Tennis* is exactly what I'm teaching, but the book doesn't tell you **HOW** to achieve it. *The Power of Now* – lots of theory but little help with **HOW** to put it into practice. Alan Watts' *The Wisdom of Insecurity* is, in my opinion, a better book on living in the here-and-now, and is also exactly what I'm teaching. It's a wonderful philosophy for life, but Alexander has given **me** the means-whereby to live it.

I think the Alexander Technique is the road to enlightenment, so I was interested to see that RJ is doing an early morning session on Thursday called 'Working towards Enlightenment'.

Enlightenment. What's the opposite of enlightenment? 'Enheaviment'? We certainly help people who are stuck in heaviness to achieve lightness. Or 'endarkenment'? We help people who are stuck in 'thinkiness' to come out and experience how bright and beautiful the world outside their heads is. One of my visiting teachers said what she got from the Alexander Technique was: "Suddenly there has been a much wider view and a lot more light in my life..."

A Zen Buddhist I was teaching told me that a description of someone who is enlightened is identical to a description of someone with good use.

I'm going to throw in here that for me, if I want to want to know what someone's Use is like I look at their eyes, not their necks or backs. Sponsorship candidates take note!

☺

So how can we promote the Alexander Technique in a way that does justice to its life-changing, wave-making potential without putting people off?

The secret of Zen for our Time, or The Secret of Taoism for our Time? That won't work because, although there are a lot of people who think that anything ancient and eastern must be good, there are as many people who think the opposite. There are also a lot of people who are put off our work by the perception that there is something 'pure' or 'spiritual' about it. I was packing up my stall at a local street festival when one of my regular clients came up and introduced me to her husband. As we shook hands I said: "I'm trying not to breathe on you because we've just been to the beer tent." The next time I saw her she said: "He's thinking of coming for lessons with you now he knows you go to the pub." He did! ☺

The Secret to Stoicism for our Time? People will think we're going to teach them to put up with everything and be miserable. ☺

Existentialism for our Time? They'll think they have to sit in cafés drinking strong coffee, be promiscuous and find hell in other people. ☺

Maybe we could sell what we do as mindfulness. What I teach is mindfulness in action.

We have to find an answer to this or we're doomed. Maybe all the Alexander teachers who think it's about bodies, posture and spines should go and have lessons for a few years with the ones who teach freedom, choices and authenticity, and then we can all get together and find some way of describing what we do.

But I'll tell you what I think the essence of this work is. Alexander, Zen, Stoicism, etc, they are all fingers pointing to the same moon. That moon is **Happiness**. I believe the Alexander Technique is the answer to happiness for our time.

When I ask people to name someone who might be enlightened they all say "the Dalai Lama". Have you seen how happy he is? And he says the **purpose of life is to be happy**.

When we stop being a bundle of habits, opinions, needs and strivings we become our authentic selves, living in the here-and-now. We become free to make **REAL** choices. We can choose things that make us happy. Existentialists believe that we have freedom to make choices, and choices lead to freedom and happiness.

Alexander teaches people they have the freedom to choose. To choose not to carry on doing that job that they hate, or to end that relationship that is dragging them down. They can choose to throw their wedding ring in the river. And they can choose to spend time doing things they love.

I find it interesting that the last chapter of FM's favourite book – CCC – is called 'Sensory Appreciation in its Relation to Happiness'. And his description of the child happily engaged in activity sounds very like the *wu-wei*: "Proper and effective behaviour flows automatically and spontaneously from the self, without the need for thought or exertion."

Everyone is responsible for their own happiness. Alexander gives them a means-whereby to achieve it. When FM's trainees arrived looking miserable he would send them to walk round the block until they had a smile on their face. So I wonder about Alexander teachers who aren't happy. I've known some teachers for a long time and never seen them laugh. Have they missed the point? Or just got stuck somewhere and not got as far on the Alexander journey as the happy ones?

The teachers I invite to teach on my training are the happy ones, and the ones I laugh with. My trainees love them.

But not all trainees love their trainers! I visited a school in the UK and I'd only been there 10 minutes when one of the trainees whispered in my ear "We're all terrified!" WHAT?!?

Trainees: if your teacher shouts at you, or you're scared of them, go and train with someone else! If they are not happy they've got stuck somewhere or missed the point.

Teachers: if you get grumpy with your students or trainees, or if you never smile, this work is far too important to be taken seriously. No matter how experienced you are, go and have lessons with a happy teacher.

I think the Alexander Technique is the answer to all life's problems, and anything it isn't an answer to a cup of tea is.

I asked some of my students, trainees and visiting teachers what they had got from it.

- “It has freed me up to be myself.”
- “Everything is far more enjoyable.”
- “It's given me freedom and aliveness, where before I felt trapped in a deadening life of habit and routine.”
- “I can look people in the eye. I am myself at last. I like myself, I like others. I've joined the human race.”

You've all heard these things from your students and trainees, right? So why does the world think we're about 'spines'?

What's Alexander done for me? Not much for my posture! 27 years ago an eminent Alexander teacher told me the curve in my back would go “in a year; maybe five years.” 27 years later it hasn't gone. ☺

But for me, and I hope for you, the benefits of Alexander keep unfolding. In my late fifties I find myself increasingly full of humour, creativity and confidence. I'm more youthful than my peers. I use my time well and my life is full of riches – not wealth, but things that I love to do; laughter; people that I love to be with. I wake up every morning happy with my life. My body is so effortless I can't feel it and I have no awareness of my thinking processes. Like the Zen masters, I feel clear and transparent.

It is said that people on their deathbed don't wish they had spent more time in the office. I've had plenty of time to think about my death and what I might be thinking when my time comes. I certainly won't be lying there thinking “I used my life well – I learnt good posture and taught good posture to lots of people.” I'm going to be thinking: “I'm so glad I learnt this Alexander thing that changed my life in so many positive ways. And I'm so glad I made my living **teaching people how to resist, conquer and govern the circumstances of their lives. I taught them how to make choices that made them happy.**”

It would be wonderful if the next generation of teachers could go a step further and, in thirty years or so, look back on their lives and think “I

helped the world's consciousness evolve. I was part of the movement that lead to the end of wars.”

Come on people let's get out there and make ENORMOUS WAVES!

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I trained with STAT, graduating in 1993. In 2013 I resigned from STAT and started a 'part-time' training course.

I have taught one-to-one, workshops, and on training courses in ten countries in Europe, North America and Asia. So I have done more traveling to teach Alexander, and have mixed with Alexander teachers from a wider range of backgrounds, than almost all the UK teachers I know.

Some of the best teachers I have come across, but also some of the worst, have been from part-time courses. Some of the best teachers I have met trained at 1600-hour, mainstream STAT courses, but also some of the worst. I have met STAT teachers who, if they had come to me to be 'sponsored' – assessed for an ATI teaching certificate – I wouldn't have signed. From my wide experience I can assure you: **it does take three years to train as a teacher, but you don't have to give up work to do it. Part-time training courses do work.**

This is the complete, unedited paragraph from Harding's *On Having No Head*:

Typically, these will include an enlivening of the senses (raising the screen which muffles the plangency of sounds, dims the glow of colours, blurs forms, and filters out the loveliness shining in the 'ugliest' places) and, (to go with the sensory awakening) a complex of inter-related psychophysical changes – including a sustained 'whole-body' alertness in place of the 'heady' intermittent sort (as if one were poised through-and-through to run the race of one's life), a reduction of stress, particularly in the region of the eyes and mouth and neck (as if one at last were letting them go), a progressive lowering of one's centre of gravity (as if losing one's head were finding one's heart, and

guts, and feet, which are now rooted in the earth), a striking downward shift of one's breathing (as if it were a belly-function), and in fact a general come-down (as if all the good things one had vainly strained after in the heights were awaiting one in the depths). And, balancing this descent, a general uplift, including a sense of exaltation (as if one were perfectly straight-backed and as tall as the sky), an upsurge of creativity, rising energy and confidence, a new and childlike spontaneity and playfulness, and above all a lightness (as if one were not so much gone with the wind as the wind itself).

This is the full description on the 'Alexander Technique Overview' page of AmSAT's website, www.amsatonline.org:

What is the Alexander Technique?

The Alexander Technique is an educational method used worldwide for well over 100 years. By teaching how to change faulty postural habits, it enables improved mobility, posture, performance and alertness along with relief of chronic stiffness, tension and stress.

Why do people study the Alexander Technique?

People study the Technique for a variety of reasons. The most common is to relieve pain through learning better coordination of the musculoskeletal system.

Another reason people take lessons in the Alexander Technique is to enhance performance. Athletes, singers, dancers, and musicians use the Technique to improve breathing, vocal production, and speed and accuracy of movement.

The most far-reaching reason people study the Technique is to achieve greater conscious control of their reactions.

Most of us have many habitual patterns of tension, learned both consciously and unconsciously. These patterns can be unlearned, enabling the possibility of new choices in posture, movement and reaction. During lessons you'll develop awareness of habits that interfere with your natural coordination. You'll learn how to undo these patterns and develop the ability to consciously redirect your whole self into an optimal state of being and

functioning. Through direct experience you'll learn how to go about your daily activities with increasingly greater ease and less effort.

This is the full description of the Alexander Technique on the front page of 'The Complete Guide to the Alexander Technique', www.alexandertechnique.com:

The **Alexander Technique** is a way to feel better, and move in a more relaxed and comfortable way... the way nature intended.

An **Alexander Technique** teacher helps you to identify and lose the harmful habits you have built up over a lifetime of stress and learn to move more freely.

The **Alexander Technique** is for you if you are ready to feel more comfortable in your own body.

The **Alexander Technique** can also help you if:

- You suffer from repetitive strain injury or carpal tunnel syndrome.
- You have a backache or stiff neck and shoulders.
- You become uncomfortable when sitting at your computer for long periods of time.
- You are a singer, musician, actor, dancer or athlete and feel you are not performing at your full potential.