

On Unlearning

Our Essential Task

(written in the long, infamous style of F. Matthias Alexander)
(revealing footnotes included)

Our essential task
as teachers and students of
the Alexander Alliance and The Movement School
is to bring about a conducive atmosphere
for learning and unlearning,*1
thus increasing the opportunities
for sensory intelligence
wherein our habitual patterns of being and doing
can become conscious, accepted, known,
and experienced as potential energy,*2
allowed to disintegrate positively,*3
simultaneously re-integrating in such a way*4
that energizes "the true and primary movement",*5
thus bringing about a surprising change
in our proprioceptive sense,*6
as we proceed to function,
to act, to live,
now,*7
interacting with deeper contact,
risking feeling wrong,*8
responding with greater freedom*9
than we ever imagined
possible.

Foot Notes

1. Compassionate attitudes that allow people to learn and unlearn:

Non-diminishment: It is of no help whatsoever to diminish either yourself or your students. *"Moses laying his hands on Joshua may be compared to one candle lighting another, no light is lost to the former."*

-Rabbinic Midrash on Numbers 27:18.

Non-objectification: I refuse to work "on the body." I choose to work with people, with this particular person, and that particular person.

Non-forcing: I refuse to use force to bring about grace. I choose to bring kindness, intelligence, and skill to the situation at hand. *"Fluid as melting ice: Do you have the patience to wait till your mud settles and the water is clear? Can you remain unmoving until the right action arises by itself? If you realize that all things change there is nothing you will try to hold onto. Less and less will you need to force things."*

-Lao Tzu/Stephen Mitchell

Non-isolation: I choose to observe and accept the truth: that we are always in relation. I refuse to be aware only of myself at the exclusion of others and the world. I refuse to be aware only of others and the world, in exclusion of myself.

"Within, but not enclosed, Without, but not excluded."

-Abbess Hildegard of Bingen.

"Existence Is Co-existence."

-Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Non-endgaining: How we are doing what we are doing as we are doing it is more important than just getting it done.

Non-correction: Correction is usually too quick, and often founded upon a lot of judgment and too little information. I choose to become curious, conduct experiments, make suggestions.

Non-concentration: Rarely is it desirable to give more than 25% of your attention on the figure of an action or event. Background is beautiful, orienting, restful, meaningful. Think about the distribution of attention of a driver behind the wheel for the first time, staring between the steering wheel, eyes fixed upon the hood of the car, and that same driver having driven for years, listening to Bach, or Ben Harper, enjoying the road and the countryside, in lively conversation with the person sitting next to them... I choose to *"expand my field of attention to include a simultaneous awareness of myself-in-relation-to-my- environment."*

-Frank Pierce Jones

Imperfection: I choose to look for "the way", not "the form." I am interested in deepening the quality of experience, responsiveness, and attention. I am interested in deepening appreciation, understanding, acceptance, skill, and growth.

Unhurried: "As Alexander Alliance and Movement School teachers, we give people our time. We give time. Time is life, not money. *You can't change a habit if you are in a hurry.*"

- Marjorie Barstow.

"Festina Lente." Celebrate slowly.

2. Our habitual holding pattern is our true and primary pattern, incognito. *"Energy is eternal delight."*

- William Blake.

3. Alexander's "inhibition and direction", Barstow's "a redirecting of energy," are expressions implying that *the energy of the old and the new are one and the same, and that this energy must relinquish expressing itself one way, before it can do so another way.*

4. Implying that the change to which Alexander Alliance and Movement School teachers refer is tremendously subtle and delicate, a blending of sensitivity, keenness, kindness, knowledge, wonder – too difficult, or perhaps too simple, to describe.

5. That energizes the primary control, the head/neck/back pattern, the primary pattern, the organizing pattern, the dynamic pattern of reciprocal interactions and interdependent co-arising, the life-force. Said most simply: Vitality.

6. Read Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales*, Chapter Three, "*The Disembodied Lady*," for a truly moving account of proprioception.

7. *"Structure is the record of past function. Function is the source of future structures."*

-Ludwig von Bertalanffy.

8. F.M. would sometimes begin a lesson proclaiming to his student, "*Let's hope something goes wrong!*"

9. Receptivity and Responsiveness. How we let in and respond to the myriad stimuli from within and without.