

The Alexander Technique and the Myth of Ageing

By Tasha Miller

One of the few things that are certain in this world is that we are all getting older. The process of ageing is natural and inevitable and brings both change and development. Yet instead of welcoming our growing maturity we tend to resist it, to deny it or to despise it. This is not altogether surprising as we live in a culture that idolises youth, and we are easily persuaded through constant repetition that the best years lie behind us. And it is confirmed when we see all around us the physical and mental degeneration that are common accompaniments to ageing.

The list of age related problems seems endless, including arthritis, difficulties with movement, breathing, circulation, digestion, postural problems, emotional problems, senility and so on. But why do some people suffer more than others? And why do some rare people live to a ripe old age without suffering these problems at all? The answer lies in the fact that most of these problems are not a result of age itself, but are a result of our particular habits. The accumulated effect of repeating these habits over a lifetime brings about the decline in health that we have come to associate with old age. The idea that decline is a natural part of ageing is a myth; it is more often a result of our own actions.

These habits are what the Alexander Technique is all about. They are subtle habits of tension or collapse which we repeat in every act of sitting, standing and walking; habits which are so familiar to us we are not even aware of them, but which over the course of a lifetime gradually become fixed and rigid, interfering with every part of us from our circulation to our digestion, from our emotional state to our ability to think clearly.

The Alexander Technique is a proven way to change these habits. When the cause is thus removed a great many illnesses and problems improve, at any age. It does not involve exercises or regimes, special equipment or homework. It is simply based on developing the skill to think about what you are doing. It is gentle, non-intrusive and educational more than therapeutic, although the benefits to health are often remarkable. When people first experience a new way of doing ordinary activities, outside of their usual habit, there is often a feeling of lightness and ease, as if a great weight had been removed. But this is not magic, it is simply the way any well co-ordinated person should feel. Over time, and with lots of instruction this good co-ordination will become more and more familiar.

I have been studying the Alexander Technique for over twenty years. I have been teaching it for more than fifteen. Based upon my personal and professional experiences I can confidently assert that studying the technique will ensure a very different experience of the ageing process. Ageing becomes related to improvement, something to look forward to rather than something to resist. At 44 I enjoy a standard of health and a quality of lightness and a fluidity that I could hardly imagine in my youth, and every year I get better. All my long term students experience the same process. Of course it is better to start as early as possible, prevention being better than cure, but we can begin at any age, and improve the quality of life from the age of 40 onwards.

I first realised this possibility in my first Alexander Lesson. I was amazed at my teachers who were then in their 60s, how good they looked and how easily they moved. Their brightness, lightness and ease made me, at the age of 26, look and feel much older than they did. My teacher, Jeanne, is now 80 years old and she is still improving. She lives in Scotland and goes off climbing mountains.

The Alexander Technique is based on a scientific investigation of the influence of habit upon functioning. It has been around for over 100 years and has been used by a great many people both ordinary and famous, from George Bernard Shaw to Nikolaas Tinbergen, the Nobel prize winning physiologist. It is taught around the world and increases in popularity year after year for the simple fact that it works. If you would like to know more about it and what it can do for you, call Alexander Technique Atlantic on (902) 346-2037 (www.alexandertechniqueatlantic.ca).