

Book Review: FREEDOM TO CHANGE by Frank Pierce Jones

By Tasha Miller and David Langstroth

Freedom to Change was originally published in 1976 under the title, Body Awareness in Action. Coming three years after Dr. Barlow's influential book, The Alexander Principle, it added significantly to the body of reliable information about the Alexander Technique. Jones covers the history of the Technique, his own personal experiences, the involvement of famous people such as John Dewey and Aldous Huxley and the context and content of Alexander's four books. On top of all this, Jones provides details of his own programme of research into the Alexander Technique, carried out at the Institute for Applied Experimental Psychology at Tufts University.

Frank Pierce Jones is one of the important figures in the history of the Technique. Yet, until his mid thirties he was a classical scholar, teaching Greek at Brown University in the United States. After meeting the Technique and experiencing its value for his own problems he took the decision to train as a teacher. Jones had the rare benefit of having lessons with both F.M. Alexander, the founder of the Technique, and his brother, A.R. Alexander.

Jones gives a good account of the famous libel case that Alexander brought in South Africa. A physical education instructor had written in a magazine that Alexander was a quack, and Alexander successfully sued him for damages. Expert witnesses, such as the eminent neurologist Sir Charles Sherrington gave evidence on Alexander's behalf, and although Alexander won his case, the judge, in summing up concluded that this did not mean that the Alexander Technique had been proven. Alexander always disagreed. The proof lies in putting the principles to the test and judging for yourself, something which the judge did not do. Nevertheless, Frank Pierce Jones set about in his own research trying to find that proof.

Jones focused on trying to find evidence of a different quality of movement between actions performed independently, or guided by an Alexander Technique teacher. He used multiple exposure photography, electromyograms, force platforms and x-ray photography. His data is clear and unambiguous and he is justified in claiming to have found the evidence he sought. His use of multiple image photography was particularly brilliant. This records a series of images throughout a movement. In doing so it avoids the danger of the standard photograph, which is to emphasise posture.

This book is well written, with lots of personal stories and anecdotes to bring it to life. As well as looking with precision at the narrowly defined parameters of his experiments he extrapolates outwards to consider the implications of the Technique for bigger issues such as nuclear war and mental health. The one failing of the book is that it could be better organised. Sections do not always run smoothly one into the next, and the Appendices at the back are confusing in that they are tacked on without explanation, repeating in some cases material that has been given before.

In spite of these flaws, this is a classic of the Alexander Technique repertoire. It is the sort of book which requires thought and careful study, and is probably not ideal as an introduction to the Technique. Yet for those who want to know more it is highly recommended. It should certainly be in the bookshelf of any serious student or teacher.