

A Testimonial

By Robert Sewell

To fully demonstrate the positive effect of the Alexander Technique (as taught by Tasha and David) upon my life, it is first necessary to explain the circumstances, which led to me learning it.

I had been living in London for four years and had a career, which I had pursued successfully, in the absence of a specific vocation. Over the years I had spent in London with my will unquestioningly bent on progressing at work, I had accumulated a number of physical problems. These included an agonising bad back, recurrent iritis, a duodenal ulcer and chronic sinusitis.

By 2001, partially as a consequence of the above I had also become extremely depressed. All my energy was occupied in keeping my symptoms at bay and performing at work. My world was shrinking and darkening before my eyes and I could see no way out. More worryingly, had I been able to perceive a positive future, I was exhausted, in pain and terrified by the reality that I simply wouldn't have been able to summon the energy to pursue it.

I spent huge amounts of time and money with Doctors, Specialists, Physiotherapists, Osteopaths and Chiropractors with negligible results, leaving me with an increasing feeling of desperation. I was 25 and it had become apparent that my body was shutting down.

In the midst of all of this it became clear I had to make a change. I decided to the horror and incomprehension of many of my friends, to resign, move to Cardiff (where I had spent three years at University) and pursue a less hectic life in the hope that it would help.

In some ways it did. But having moved in April 2002, and taken three months off work my back was still precisely no better at all. So the desperation returned, but this time I had more room for manoeuvre.

It was at this point that I started learning the Technique. It was in fact my Osteopath who had, with admirable frankness suggested there was nothing more he could do for me and maybe I should try it.

I read, investigated and duly booked time with Tasha whom I first met in August 2002. I remember the following three things making a substantial impression on me during my first few lessons:

- That Tasha struck me immediately as being one of the most eminently competent and assured people I had met. I think I would've been inclined to have supreme professional confidence in her whether she had been an Alexander Technique teacher, a bank manager, a taxi driver or a traffic warden. At the time I remember this being very important to me, at the start of something, tentatively attempting to embrace that which is not known.

- The motif of 'if you always do something in the way you have always done it, you will always get the same results'. The above was oft repeated, explained and demonstrated to me in different ways; slowly it became established in my mind and began to inform my thinking and movement.
- The concept of the body as a psycho-physical organism. My decision to focus on work at all costs and to the exclusion of everything else represented a fixed idea. For four years I refused to examine my motivations or the consequences of them. I determined to overcome all obstacles and would not entertain the thought that there may be an alternative or different way. Because my mind was chastened, obscured and closed my body had started to shout, when I clutched even tighter to my fixed idea, it screamed, deafeningly. Tasha never told me this per se, but over the course of my lessons it became apparent and more than anything else made perfect sense to me. The Alexander Technique is not a healing system it is a process of re-education and continuing education.

There was scepticism. I remember trying to articulate the benefits of the Technique to an American friend and failing. "Well, I can get you in a room for an hour and tell you to stand up and sit down again and I won't charge you 80 bucks!" But for those who had seen the state I was in prior to starting the Technique there could be no scepticism about the results and all were silenced.

I had a lesson a week. After six weeks there was a significant improvement in my back pain and a corresponding lightness in my mind. Within three to four months my back pain had been reduced by about 60%, the continuing improvement was emphatic and the 'merely' physical benefits had begun to be superseded by the psychological ones.

I began to challenge myself again. Why does that sort of person always manage to make me feel bad? Why do I always end up in this sort of relationship? I don't think this is right, why do I never do anything about it? What can I do to prevent this happening again? What happened to me that I should ever have accepted this for myself in the first place? How can I reach my potential?

I became determined that these questions should not become rhetorical. Not easy. Challenging your core beliefs and habits is revelatory and beneficial, but not always pleasant. Ultimately I found that it's about reaching a place where you can take a clear view, accepting what you find, whether it colours you fair or not and taking responsibility for your own actions. I had been so used to making excuses, binding myself to them and a perpetual stalemate, the biggest feature of which was no forward momentum.

The difference now was the Alexander Technique as taught by Tasha and David. I came up against all the familiar physical and psychological enemies, but now I had a system, a process, which enabled me to step back, think, make a conscious decision and do something differently. Simple, but incisively effective. The Alexander Technique facilitated the start of my personal evolution.

Tasha and David emigrated toward the end of 2003, but I was not bereft. Fortunately I had been able to benefit from enough of their teaching to attain a basic grasp of the main principles, which have enabled me to continue to work and develop from it unaided.

My back pain was banished and never returned. Neither did any of my other symptoms. Early in my learning Tasha pronounced that 'people who study the Alexander Technique don't get colds or flu'. At the time, I didn't for one minute believe her. I have asthma and I smoke and historically I caught three or four colds and at least one gale force flu per year since childhood. I haven't had a cold or flu since the end of 2002.

Since 2004 I have trekked across the Himalayas carrying a seventeen kilogram pack, which would have been unthinkable before the technique. I then spent a further five months travelling through South East Asia, returned to the UK, changed careers and have plans for the future.

I am however under no illusions. I still make so many mistakes, indiscretions and inadvisable choices. I still have so many things to address. I still have problems and issues to resolve, but my system is self-perpetuating, adaptable, responsive and potent. I can't imagine now feeling hopeless or redundant in the way I did before. Where I am, is firmly on my 'divine and perfect path'. I would optimistically estimate perhaps only fractionally down the path, but I can perceive a future and am aware of my own newfound ability to have more than a passive impact upon it.

I have returned to London but plan to teach and travel semi-permanently through Asia and South America as soon as is practicable. For the first time I have a clear idea of what I would like to do and what I would like my future to hold. Having said that I hesitate to commit my plans to paper because there is always the danger they could become a fixed idea.

I am quite certain that had I not found the Alexander Technique my life would be considerably smaller and darker than it currently is.