

ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE AND YOUR EMOTIONAL LIFE

From a talk given by Walter Carrington

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Does AT deal with our emotional life? Definitely yes! My emotional life *is* my life. When I can stop and give myself a break and a pause, then things that are off-track can adjust themselves and work themselves out. For example: Imagine that you are very busy; you lead a very full, active life. During the day you've got lots of things to do, you've got appointments to keep, and you've got to remind yourself to do all these things. Then you sit down, have a cup of coffee, and look at all the notations in your calendar. These are pretty massive stimuli: are you really ready for it? "Oh, I have to do this and this and this today." What does it do to you? You pull yourself down. You restrict your breathing. Everything is affected.

One of the lessons of AT is the importance of having something to look forward to. FM said so. Just make sure you don't stiffen your neck and that you always have something to look forward to. In all cases when you stop to consider your physical state—how you are actually sitting; how you are pulling down; if you are in balance; and above all, how you are breathing—this mirrors your emotional life. Of course this changes with feelings like cheerfulness or anxiety. Many people live in a permanent state of anxiety. It's just sometimes a bit less or more. And of course it is bound to be like that, until you learn to stop.

Stopping is not easy. It takes some effort. Mostly, it involves the readiness to accept, to learn to be able to say to yourself: "I don't like this. Yes, I am unhappy. Yes, I am frightened. Yes, I am anxious." Recognize this and accept these negative things. If you are going to deal with them you've got to accept them first. Pretending that they don't exist or will go away will not work.

Say to yourself: "This is how it is" and recognise it. When you are very tense and very pushed down, it can be almost unbearable. But actually, if we face it, we can find the courage to bear most things. You've got to find the courage. And how do you find the courage? Stop holding your breath and pulling yourself down. Those are very important factors. You find a tiny bit of freedom, get your breath going—yes,

maybe it's only a moment and you don't feel it will last, but it's the moment that you are concerned with, that's what's happening now. A great deal of your problem is what happened in the past; you have allowed it to influence the present. Or maybe you are expecting the worst. Both of those variations of the present can be extremely harmful. No, you've got to accept the present, you've got to come into present time, and of course, that means acknowledging that things are as they are. Again, consider what physical effect this is having on you, particularly on the breathing. The state of your breathing will tell you a great deal if you observe it. Note that breathing isn't something you want to DO, it is something you want to let happen. If you think about your heart, of course you know without hesitation that you want it to beat, to beat regularly and quietly. But YOU can't beat it, you can't do anything to make your heart beat differently. There it is, it happens. You want it to happen and you hope it will happen as efficiently as possible.

You start to consider your circumstances in a more detached way. You know very clearly how your emotional life affects your breathing. You may also know how much it affects your digestion and blood pressure. You find that your feelings of anxiety, your worry, are reflected in all aspects of your functioning. Equally if you're fortunate enough to find joy and pleasure, you must acknowledge that they also have an effect.

FM had feelings of anxiety and fear, you know—deep feelings of questioning his own self-worth. After a little bit of research he began to fear it might be something deep inside himself that caused the problem. When we feel lonely, a great deal can be gained by the feeling of companionship, empathy, or just having somebody around. It can help you feel better up to a point, but it will not solve the problems. You've got to get back to the mirror and the stimuli, notice how you respond and inhibit the habitual response. It is comforting and helpful to get counseling to talk over your problems. I'm not in anyway against it. In fact, I'm in favor of it, as long as you recognise that the fundamental answer is taking responsibility for yourself.

And that is what we are teaching and learning in this technique.

Originally transcribed by Jantine Wijtsma. It has been further edited to aid the reader.