

# Motherhood and the Alexander Technique

by

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(Written for the Hambleton District Branch of the National Childbirth Trust)

"What's happened to my body? What's happened to my mind?" How many times do these questions flash across the demands and pleasures of motherhood? Pelvic floor and tummy tightening exercises, brewers' yeast and Guinness, naps and relaxation tapes are all strategies to help you cope with the adjustments you have to make in becoming mothers. Another is the Alexander Technique.

Motherhood confronts you with a myriad of new stimuli:

- Repeatedly bending over the cot
- The agony of sore nipples during the first couple of gulps
- Being woken from sleep - again and again and again . . .
- Worry over baby's health
- Competitive parenting at NCT coffee mornings
- A profound sense of love
- Depression
- Walking up and down with a colicky baby on your shoulder.

The Alexander Technique can help you to influence how you react to such stimuli. Alexander (1869-1955) realised that a reaction to stimulus is not simply physical or simply psychological but is a reaction of the total person. He realised that anything, and everything, we do is performed by each of us as a "psycho-physical unity". He spent 60 years of his life teaching people how to use their "psycho-physical unity" in such a way as to promote well-being.

Unfortunately, it is all too common for people to use their psycho-physical unity in such a way as to interfere with their well-being. To take couple of examples:

1. Baby has a high temperature and is distressed. You are worried, unsure whether to telephone the Doctor. The "shall I, sha'n't I?" swings to and fro, your upper arms and knees tighten, your breathing becomes constricted, your neck tightens and making a decision seems impossible. Familiar? Within yourself, too much is happening in every psycho-physical way imaginable.
2. 2.30a.m. Baby cries. You get out of bed, pull on a dressing-gown, and go to lift her out of her cot. You are half-awake, jaw tight, arms stretching down into the cot, legs locked, neck stiff, wondering how long before she'll be asleep again, when will she sleep through the night like the baby in the village 4 weeks younger than her already does. Again, the psycho-physical self is too busy.

You cannot avoid the stimuli of motherhood but you can be in conscious control of how you react to those stimuli. You can begin to let go of some of the unnecessary elements of your own reaction patterns. As you jettison the unnecessary work, you discover ease, simplicity, a clarity that can be awe-inspiring. For some it may mean freedom from lower back pain or headaches, for others being able to handle the tantrums of a two year old. It enabled me, in 1975, a new mother of eight days, to endure the pain of being told by my husband that he was having an affair. For Alexander, it enabled him to solve a vocal problem that mystified his Doctors and was threatening his career as an actor.

So what is the Alexander Technique? How does it work? It is a process whereby we each individually learn firstly to be aware of those habits we use as we react to stimuli. Then we learn how to stop using those habits should we choose to do so. Finally we learn to refine the ease we discover underneath layers of habits. The physiological key to the process is the relationship between the head and the top of the spine. It maybe this which leads many writers to classify the Technique as posture training. They've missed the point!

You learn the Alexander Technique as a pupil not a patient, in lessons not treatments, from a teacher not a practitioner. The Technique is an education process through which you are learning to change. The role of the Alexander teacher is to help you change using the principles of the Technique but not to treat you in a medical sense. Indeed most Alexander teachers are not medically qualified. Lessons are usually individual and would include some work sitting, standing, walking, bending and lying down. There is "hands-on" work that isn't massage, isn't manipulation, isn't healing - it's the Alexander Technique!

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