

**On Breathing  
And  
The Alexander Technique**

**A Particular Silence  
By  
Bruce Fertman**

*The wind bloweth where it listeth  
and thou hearest the sound thereof  
but cannot tell whence it cometh  
and whither it goeth.  
-John-*

*I find, at last, when I don't breathe, I breathe.  
-F.M. Alexander-*

Like Adam, when we come into this world, we don't take our first breath, we don't breathe, God, or the world, breathes into us.

For a long time we never think about breathing. It just happens, when we are awake, and when we are asleep. As a child, I remember thinking one afternoon, while sitting next to my mom, as she drove me to my grandparent's house, "I wonder how long can I hold my breath? Let's see!" But I soon find out that I didn't have as much control over my breathing as I had hoped.

Breathing is mysterious and allusive. It can be influenced by our will, but it is an act of grace, that is, given, reflexive. *We are breathed by forces deep within us and all around us.* And just exactly *when* these forces cease breathing us is, to a profound degree, not within our control. We are vitally bound to the One that breathes us. Breath is like a frail bridge swaying through the night.

*In order to let someone, or some force help us, we must first be able to stop insisting on doing everything ourselves. In order to let someone, or some force help us, we must first be able to stop insisting on doing everything ourselves.* Unknowingly, we often interfere with breathing without understanding how or why, or even when, we do it. So first we must become aware of the particular ways in which we interference with breathing.

As it turns out, this is not so easy. As soon as we begin to set about studying our breath, this *very* act of studying it, begins to change it. Because *immediately* we want to breath right, or well, or fully. *Instantly* we superimpose our attempt to breath better, whatever our idea of that is, on top of our habitual way of breathing. It's as if our habitual way of breathing were intensely shy, like a deer in the woods that does not want to be seen or like darkness itself which disappears the moment light is caste upon it.

See what happens if, without shining light onto your breathing, you just sit quietly in the dark and gently *decide neither to hold your breath, nor to take a breath*. Just let air enter you. Don't decide how much air you need, how big or small a breath should be, don't determine its rhythm.

Leave yourself alone. Whenever breath wants to leave, just let it leave. It's as if you were the bag pipes, and that God was playing a song. There's nothing for you to do, there is nothing you can do.

You can only be where you are, and what you are, and let that air come in and go out, not at your will, but *at its will*. Can you cease breathing for yourself? *Do you know that air is not for the taking?* Are you aware that your air is not exclusively your air?

Seeing that breathing defies being studied directly, our only recourse, if we want a way into the mystery of breath, is to study it *indirectly*. And this brings us back to a look, not directly at breathing itself, but at *the conditions that surround our breathing*. Breathing responds to pressure of any and all kinds.

External pressure, for example, altitude, pollution, over stimulation, under stimulation, danger, as well as safety, comfort, love, a cat in your lap. Breathing responds to internal pressures as well, like exertion, hunger, fatigue, time, standards, disease, thoughts, sensations, emotions - be they painful or pleasurable.

For everyone, certain internal pressures become constant, chronic, like the continuous 60 cycle hums of our computers and refrigerators; they either eventually drop below consciousness, or they drive us crazy. So *internal* pressures turn out also to be allusive. Wouldn't you know it. No wonder its so hard to change. Still, it is possible. And still.... is what we need to become.

*To become still, we need to stop*. To stop, and to listen: ..... to learn to sense the pressures and tensions that vibrate in us below the surface of consciousness,,,,,,to listen to those 60 cycle hums. To hear, however painful, what they are saying, to follow them, and discover their source, find their outlets, and then to safely, gently release them, unplug them, letting them fall.....*and then..... to listen and to sense the silence all over again*. You may find your breathing, responding even to the thought of this deeper silence.

What is it that I can let fall?

Self-pity, quietly falling  
(the silence of gratitude).

Complaints, quietly falling  
(the silence of patience).

Depression, anxiety, quietly falling  
(the silence of acceptance).

Entitlement, quietly falling  
(the silence of fairness).

Fear, quietly falling  
(the silence of courage).

When,  
through the course of this year,  
you choose, and succeed, to quietly stop,  
whatever it is that you need to stop,  
you will hear a deep and particular silence.

And that silence will be the silence of God breathing life  
into you, into me, into us.  
Allow yourself to become the breathed,  
and for God to become the breather.  
Come back to the One who breathes you.

Come back often to the sensing and motion of breathing  
without efforting,  
as you number and move  
through the days that have been given to you.  
Ask yourself now and again, and then again,

"Who is breathing?"

"Who is breathing?"

"Who is breathing?"

*"I find, at last, when I don't breathe, I breathe."*

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drawn to the interplay between Alexander's work,  
nature, art, and culture.

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We are proprioceptive pathfinders,  
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making certain everyone's feet rest comfortably  
upon common, and solid, ground.

We are artists of attention,  
drawing out a delight in sensory consciousness,  
in simple pleasures, within our everyday lives,  
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deep, naturally organized patterns of vitality  
within ourselves and our students.  
This groundswell of energy strengthens the will  
to live, love, learn, and work  
generously and freely.

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