

Transcription of Walter Carrington's
segments from the film:

“The Alexander Technique Today”

Monkey (13min, 35sec)

Walter: In the games that we have done previously, we've been working on the head balance, and the neck, and the trunk, and the use of the arms, and getting the lengthening and the widening. So now, what I want to do is to use the experience that's been gained in that for taking Charles into monkey.

Now, to go into monkey, you have to start- as we have started now- with the feet fairly wide apart, because we want the legs not to be stiff. We want the legs to be as free as possible. We want the ankles as free as possible. In fact, we want general freedom, but we need to get- before we start to go into monkey we need to get the direction. We need to get the head neck back relativity- so that the head is going forward and up and the back is lengthening and widening, so that the shoulders are coming apart from each other. Because, you see, when you go into monkey if you haven't got the direction really working as you come forward, there is a danger that you'll drop the neck forward from the base of the neck, there. And you remember we were working on what happens then, when that happens.

The other thing is that of course, in coming forward, the weight of the arms will tend to drag the shoulders forward. So, it's important to think of the lengthening and the widening like that, and then going up, you let your knees go in the ordinary way- right.

So then here we have Charles in monkey, and now what I'm going to get him to do is just to put the hands on the table, like that. So Charles, you can allow a little weight to come onto your hands just so that you can really free your legs some more, you can free the ankles, the knees, the hips- fine.

Now this brings us to what we're really- what I'm really doing this for. That is to say, getting the back working. And of course, what is particularly important is this part of the back. Now, with a lot of people, they pull the back in very very easily. When the back is pulled in, you've got a big hollow there and these muscles here on either side then stick out like cords. And you can be sure that when you can see those muscles sticking out like cords that you've got shortening. You've got tension, and you've got shortening, so the back can't work properly.

So what we want to do, is to get the head going a little forward and out- forward and out, forward and out. And then, as the head goes out that way, Charles can soften the back, he can just think of letting the back, letting all this be softer, and if you let,

Charles, if you let the hips go back and down, the knees go forward and away a little bit more.

That's it- there you go, there you go. Then you can see that the back is opening out- there we are. And of course we've got widening. There.

Now, people very often try to get this by pushing the back back. They think "The back ought not to be pulled in, it ought not to be hollowed." So, to correct that they push the back back- and it's quite easy to push the back back, but pushing back doesn't do any good. Pushing back only just distorts the whole picture. Whereas if you get the head neck back relationship, and then the directions of the- that's it- of the head forward, the knees forward, the hips back- like that. Then you can come back, Charles, just a little bit more onto the heels. And you can take the hands off- there you are. And now, he's in quite a deep monkey, but the back is in good shape and working.

So, I'd like everybody to try this out, and we'll just go around and see how we get on with it. Are there any questions about that at all?

Forward & Up (23min, 7sec)

Walter: I think that there was a very very important turning point, sometime before Alexander died, but equally shortly after I came back from the war. And that was when the various things had come together that enabled us to understand the physiology of the head neck back relationship much more clearly. You see, up to that point- I think Dart's paper, as a matter of fact, contributed a great deal to this, which came out in 1949. And the crucial thing was this- we talk about the head going forward and up, what constitutes forward? And what constitutes up?

And from everything that had emerged at that time, it became clear to me that what we meant by forward, or what we meant by backward was the movement from the atlanto-occipital joint -there. The nodding, you see. That being forward, and that being back- forward, and back. But the up was the effect of the total activity of the body. That when the neck was free, and the head was not being pulled back, then, of course, that release enabled lengthening to take place.

Now, I remember this as a turning point in my thinking, and I remember an absolute specific occasion- I can see it in my mind's eye- when I was able to talk to Alexander about this, and I put it to him. And I said "Now, when we talk about the head going forward and back we mean from the atlanto-occipital joint" and he said "Yes, that's quite right." And I said "But you can't go up from that joint," and he said "No, of course you can't go up from there. That's not possible, it doesn't go up from there, but the going up is the total effect of the whole body."

(Break)

Well, that of course- this exactly comes back to what I said about Alexander saying “I don’t want you to do anything as you understand doing.” Letting is very much a matter

of understanding. Now what you’ve got to understand is that all living things have got, built into them, machinery if you like, that is designed to counteract all the forces that will otherwise take them down. And of course the obvious physical force is gravitation, but there are other forces as well that will tend to get people down. Now that machinery is built-in, and its function is to counteract the gravitational force and other forces, and so take people up. And it works as reliably as the heart or the circulation or the digestion. But it does become interfered with. And when its interfered with, then it doesn’t work properly, and the main way in which we interfere with it, is by making muscular effort. By making too much muscular effort in different directions which causes contraction and stops the flow of the energy that takes you up.

So, if you understand that, then you can say, “Now, I’m not going to do anything, but I’m going to let it happen. And of course, what I want to happen is I want to go up. I’ve got a clear conception in my mind of what’s involved in going up, and I’ve also had a teacher’s hands on me so I’ve had the experience. I know what it feels like, and that’s what I want. I want to go up. And I’m not going to move a muscle to do it, but I do want that. And it’s getting the will and the wish organized, in connection with that conception and understanding. And if you’ve got the wish for it to happen, then there’s absolutely no reason why it wouldn’t happen.

Interviewer: How do you see Alexander Technique in the next hundred years?

Walter: Well, I take a very optimistic view about this, particularly after the congress in America the year before last. Because we had there representatives of all the different schools, and approaches, and it did seem to me and to other people that I have talked to, that there was strong evidence that our common ground of agreement was very very much stronger than our differences. Now I think in all human things, in any group of people, there are bound to be problems and difficulties with people getting on with each other and having their own idea, and so on. But fundamentally, I’m optimistic enough to believe that the basic principles, if you like, the basic concept of Alexander, is very much alive and well. And I don’t think there’s a deep split. I don’t think there’s a fundamental difference of opinion there. I think that the differences that there are are very much more differences of emphasis, and also the purely human things of human interaction. So, I’m very optimistic about the future.

Saddle Work (1 hr, 14min, 45sec)

Walter: First of all, you see, you're sitting right back on the saddle at the moment. Now, I want to get you sitting in the saddle so that your sit bones are in the deepest part of the saddle. And what we're going to do is this- I'm coming around in front of you, and I'm taking your knees, and I'm lifting them up, and now you can take hold of the saddle with your hands and lift yourself right forward. That's it. And even a little bit further forward, so that you might think that that was too far forward, but we'll be alright because I just let your legs go- so. And I just then come and I just take your hips, and I

just bring you a tiny little bit further back on your seat bones and I think you're alright there aren't you- that's quite comfortable.

Now, having got you into the deepest part of the saddle, we're now ready to start work. And the first thing I do is I come around and I take one leg, and I take the hamstrings under the knees, with my fingers, and I lengthen the hamstrings. And you let me lengthen the hamstrings, you let the leg free like that. Now the hamstrings, of course, are attached to the seat bones, so that as I draw her knee towards me, I'm encouraging this right seat bone to come a little further forward in the saddle- a little bit more underneath her. And there we've got excellent lengthening there, and the leg is free. I put my hand underneath, like so, I turn the leg from the hip joint, and it goes down quite elegantly there beside the saddle. I now come and I do exactly the same thing as the other leg, and again its the hamstrings- that's it. From the seat bone, drawing the seat bone underneath, lengthening the thigh. And so, and so, and continuing to keep the length, I turn the thigh and the leg goes so. Now gravity will take care of the legs now, we're not interested in the legs.

Now, the next thing then, that I've got to do quite simply is to come around to the back. I now come and I put my hands on the crest of the pelvis, and I put my thumbs actually on the sacrum, and what I'm going to do, Lou, now, is I'm going to press. There, and I'm using quite a bit of weight and you're letting your legs go freely, you're letting your seat go. And I'm really pressing her seat bones down into the saddle. Right. And now, Lou, all you've got to do now is you're going to think of letting your head go forward and up, and you're just going to come back from the hip joints to my back hand- there you are. There we go. There you are. You see as you come back- there that's it- we get more lengthening there. You see just allow me to move you there now- there you are. That is now very free. We've got her organized from her seat bones. We've got the whole of her torso lengthening and widening, her head's going forward and up, and that's very nice. And the legs, you see, the legs don't come into it.

Now, the origin of this was we had a little girl years ago who got spina bifida, and consequently she couldn't stand or use her legs. And, in order to work with her we found that if we could sit her on a toy donkey she could sit rather like this, and then we could work on her in a similar sort of way.

Interviewer: Was this in the time of Alexander?

Walter: This was after the little girl had come to Alexander, but we had started to work on her in this way after Alexander died. And as she grew, we found that it was necessary to get something larger, so we had a wooden trestle made to continue to work in the same way. And then somebody suggested that if we were going to use the trestle, why not use a saddle, because saddles are made for that purpose. So that's how we came to get the saddle, because of course, the saddle does give the proper support to the seat bones, and then you can get just what I've demonstrated, and we find now-a-days, that this is a very good thing for people who've got leg problems. We can get more lengthening of the leg, more freedom of the hip joints, freedom of the knees, freedom of

the ankles, in this way than we can even working on them lying down. It's very very good from that point of view. And, of course, for people who are riders, or people who want to ride, if you can do some of this work with them before they get on a horse, you've got 50% of the problem solved before you begin. So, we have found this extremely valuable.