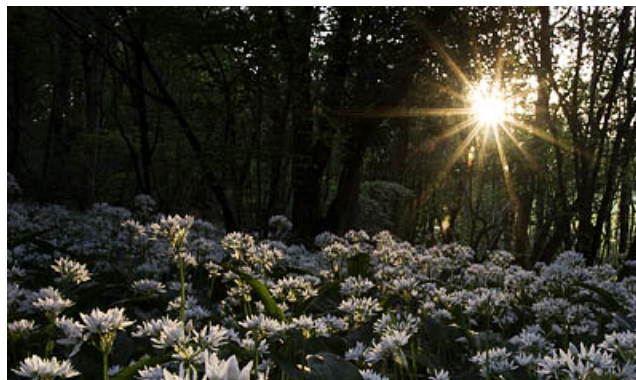


Articles

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STIMULUS AND RESPONSE THE SPACE BETWEEN

"Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and happiness" Viktor Frankl



Introduction

This is a very personal account of me becoming aware of my habitual way of being. I have tried to show how my thinking has changed, as I change. As I became more aware of an unconscious part of me, I then identified with that as being the only reality, and then, as I expanded more, it 'slipped' into an aspect of wholeness of my being.

Frank Pierce Jones wrote in 'Body Awareness in Action':-

"Having an unconscious response pattern pointed out to you by somebody else is not the same thing as perceiving it for yourself while it is happening. The Alexander Technique opens a window into the little known area between Stimulus and Response and gives you the self-knowledge you need in order to change the pattern of your response - or, if you choose not to make it at all".

Gurdjeff, the Greco-Armenian mystic and philosopher, once stated

"You don't realise your predicament: you're in prison, but if you would escape from prison, the first thing you must realise is that you're in prison: If you think you're free, no escape is possible".

And this was my predicament; somewhere deep down I knew I was an imprisoned being.

Pierce Jones stated in 'Body Awareness in Action':-

"By refusing to respond to a stimulus in a habitual way you release a set of reflexes that lengthen the body and facilitate movement. The immediate result of Alexandrian inhibition is a sense of freedom, as if a heavy garment that had been hampering all of your movements has been removed. The image that occurred to me after Alexander's demonstration was that of Cardinal Ballou in Louis XI's cage, a cage constructed so as to keep him from achieving his full length in any direction. It suddenly seemed to me that I had spent my life in such a cage and had just found the key to get out".

A Wild Flower

As a child I found a sense of deeper fulfilment and freedom by being with nature. As a teenager, I had had enough psychedelic drugs to see outside of and beyond what I thought was reality. I later felt, having come across the Alexander Technique, that I had found a key to help me escape from my own prison.

In this window that Frank Pierce Jones mentions, is a space wherein I have a chance to become aware of my traps, habits and patterns, that I exist in and believe is my whole life and way of being. Most of the time, this is basically a

reactionary state. First, I must become aware and conscious of how I become attached to my mind states; this coincides with a physical set of tensions, my roles and my myths - this is all my "stuff", and with it are complex patterns that seem to run right through my whole life, right back to my birth. In some moments of expanded space-consciousness (as in Alexander lessons), I have had glimpses behind the roles and myths that I seem to identify with and attach to my definition of my "self". This has provided me with the space for me to see where I am actually standing - I realised that if I project out from an unconscious, neurotic pattern, then I'm not truly seeing myself or anyone I'm relating with. I will also be caught in other peoples' projections and instead of being responsive, with my expanded, more open self, I will be mechanical with a more reactionary self. This manifests itself as a set tightness, physically, as well as a smallness, mentally.

So this is the beginning of my adventure with myself and how I can integrate into life with more consciousness. To me, this a very important aspect of this (Alexander) work; to take it into all areas of ones life; that it doesn't just become a shallow skill, but rather something that emerges from the depth of one's experience and experience of change. Out of this, many states have come to the surface of my existence - confusion, pain, despair, loneliness and fear.

My life has always been tough; I felt myself to be an unwanted baby and believed my upbringing as a child to be harsh and unkind. I was classified as emotionally disturbed and backward. This was an identity I grew up with and thought of as being "me". Along with this was a strong sense of unworthiness and no right to be alive. As I grew older I felt like an outcast, and I felt a strange isolated sort of aloofness. I felt very separate from people (I used to think I came from another planet really) and as if I wasn't human at all.

So as an unconscious, reactionary person, I seem to be projecting from this sort of place, unless I manage to step out of that reactionary mode.

Frank Pierce Jones goes on to say,
"Habitual tensions that have grown up over a long period of time limit development and prevent the free expression of personality".

What I have realised through becoming aware of these aspects of my personality is that it is very easy for me to get sucked into the content of what was an unconscious part of me: This can be very seductive; I'm then reactionary instead of just "letting it go".

Realizations

Most of my thinking every day is so deep in my unconscious habits of being that it feels completely real. As I keep opening up and allowing my patterns of use to change I have more space to see how I'm manufacturing the habitual structures of my life. Now I'm beginning to see the ways my mind recreates my own existence. As I open this up more and become more aware of deeper patterns and more subtle ways, I re-entrap myself.

F.M. Alexander wrote in 'Mans Supreme Inheritance':-

"I believe...the first and greatest stumbling block to conscious self-control, (is) 'rigidity of mind,' which results in the fixed habit of thought and its concomitants - the functional and muscular habits passed on to subconscious control".

F.M. also went on to say in 'Mans Supreme Inheritance':

"The truth of the matter is that the majority of people fall into a mechanical habit of thought as easily as they fall into the mechanical habit of body, which is the immediate consequence".

My own stuck habitual place is safe (the devil I know) so my mind will want to reinforce, in whatever way it can, to keep entrapping my self.

The next level of my understanding of myself involved an awareness of being imprisoned by my own traps. The freedom I experience from the changes I go through with Alexander work, I can still interpret in terms of my own prison, or mind traps, habits etc, which is another way of rejecting and denying. I can now work with this aspect since finding an awareness of the habit of my being at a deeper level.

It seems as if my intention, from a conscious place in my being, is not so caught up in responses to feelings of who and what I think I am. Here I find a place of relative freedom, in which my conscious choice can allow me a completely new experience of who and what I am, in response at that moment.

Frank Pierce Jones said in 'A Mechanism for Change',

"By means of kinaesthetic cues the student learns to be aware of his reactions as regular patterns and to control and direct them by releasing latent powers of consciousness. In the process, consciousness expands and as it does so becomes itself the instrument for further change".

Having a light appreciation of my habits/mind traps etc., and to keep throwing out every idea, ideal or whatever I try



to hold on to, is the way I can move to freedom in the next moment, which seems to leave me nowhere I know of in a knowing sense.

Experiences

Here are some past experiences from Alexander lessons, and how I've chosen to interpret them at that time.

Re-experiencing what was going on in a lesson earlier the previous day. 5 am. 22 Oct '89.

The essence of my lesson seems very clear now. Cutting through many defences - to the real issue of my being - to a point that I won't, or can't inhibit or direct, or be aware of where I am with this moment - this point in myself I cannot face; I go through hell and terror inside, but cut my feelings out so I can't feel. (I wonder if this is connected to the time in my childhood when I cut myself out of the world and was classified as emotionally disturbed). It seems to be the only way to survive!



As my body jerks and leaps about I realise that the abuse, pains and horrors that I felt from my childhood is not the issue here at all; it is what is behind it all together with the way I dealt with it, which was taking my heart out of life, that I have to come to terms with. The teacher seemed able in a greater sense to connect his heart to mine with a universal love that has come through him as a human being, to me. Out of these moments came immense sadness that I was unable to feel before. He connected his heart to me again and my response was to pull back with such pain and anger; I was filled with the biggest loneliness and emptiness I'd ever felt. I felt cut off and alone and at the same time guilty for just being; alone with a terrible fear of rejection, a feeling of not deserving to have any love or life.

In that moment my body is pulled in - in every sense. My back closed round, my shoulders pulled in, my legs pulled up tight inside me, my arms sucked into my torso, my hands became fists and my head pulled down in front of me - every aspect of me wanting to protect my heart. (This is just what I was like as a child, I would never look up, never smile, I was very withdrawn and cut off from people).

My mind seems to find initial experiences of love, which seemed only possible with animals and nature. I had no sense of worth or happiness. The only relationships I was able to form with trust and reality were with insects and animals. Any animal I had as a pet and formed a strong connection with, I think I was able to love freely, but those relationships seemed always to be to be destroyed. They were killed or got rid of. My chest would feel like it was being hammered and stabbed at the same time; the pain was unbearable. No wonder I shut it out of my consciousness (and then carry on denying myself for the rest of my life).

So at this moment in time this seems like the key to me connecting my heart to myself. Maybe when I can open my heart to myself I will be able to open it to the world. Instead of shutting and closing myself away and keeping my pain locked inside me. This comes over to me in a dream-type state in the night, it seems to be a sub-conscious coming into consciousness (maybe this is where I do a lot of learning).

In the few lessons I had with this teacher, we cut through so much, down to the basics of my use, that even in the night I wake up clutching and clawing at myself, or even when I react in a lesson by literally holding onto myself with my own pulled-in hands, he showed me how in that moment I can turn that round and open my hands out to give myself, rather than close in on myself with my own 'use' and then beat myself with myself. This to me is an awareness of my use, myself and my being in a deeper sense. I can see the patterns of my life and have the space to inhibit and direct out of them and I then become aware of the past experiences that I've held onto in my muscles and my thinking, which is every aspect I believe and feel to be myself.

But moments later my old patterns of thinking are coming back thick and fast, it's like a war going on inside me - a lot of confusion.

13 December '89.

First week back this term - what a week, the fight I've been going through resisting and not connecting with some aspect of me is coming to an end. Finally I've allowed the teacher to help me and free up a huge area in my chest, the feeling that came out seemed to be huge in depth, that is the only way I can describe it, as if caverns in my heart are opening up. Incredible warmth and connection come out of me.

Then the after-effects are incredible:- guilt and confusion of self. My relating to people is affected, I feel more open, more warm, more giving. Later in the evening at home I sit in quietness and tears, and try not to analyse the despair I feel, because the newness of my heart is an aspect of me that has been so hurt, disconnected and vulnerable. I can

see how this connects back to the psychological shit from my childhood and it is hard not to get bogged down and caught up in all that, and go off in some negative direction, along with all the confusion.

Coming to a larger awareness, which I must respect in my self, I see how I can use this new warmth in me for my own healing.

18 December '89.

A very good lesson: incredible connection through my whole system, realising myself more and more and even more of my heart area (so that becomes more part of me) - an amazing sense of wholeness, like I'm just growing/expanding from my centre, like a new bud opening into flower. With no judgement, a sense of my self being part of the environment. A real oneness....with love to myself.

Frank Pierce Jones wrote in 'Body Awareness in Action':

"There is one division, however that is seldom questioned - the division between the self and the environment. It is regularly assumed that attention must be directed either outward into the environment or inward into the self".

He also wrote: "Information about the state of the body and the state of the environment is being recorded in the brain at one end and the same time. Attention is ordinarily directed either one way or the other but there is no reason why this need always be the case, since the organism is capable of selecting the stimuli to which it will respond".

I was so overwhelmed by this blissful state, I must just allow it for allowing sake, not analyse. I felt I couldn't be with other people's atmospheres; I had to be with nature again. I needed to feel the wind, sun and earth - this is where I feel my connection of love, freedom and inner strength; this is where I have space to allow "me".

Anyway, later in the evening I have the flip side. It seems as if out of all that openness and allowing, I have feelings of abuse, being used, being dirty and empty. Having no support in myself or the environment around me. I feel really bad, distrusting and lost and boy is this strong and negative.



So here I am trying not to fight, trying to accept this state for its own sake and notice my use. The tightness and pain seem centred in my solar plexus area, this is the last thing I want to do. I put my own hands on myself and see if I can release and allow my releasing to accept myself, accept all my pain as me and try to open to loving myself. This is hard and I see I have a long road ahead.

No summing up

As I become aware and conscious of my patterns of habits, I also become aware of how I can re-create these patterns in any form (unconsciously). As my awareness deepens within this awareness, it seems as if I have to expand way beyond any sense of self at all, for me to have freedom within 'self'.....???

Frank Pierce Jones says in 'Body Awareness in Action',

after his experience of Alexander work: "The significance of the experience can be grasped only if it is followed up and used as a device for self examination and for initiating a program of change".

My dilemma at this time is, how do I function in the world with this?? I often feel I have no sense of self at all and when I now peer out of the void, I find only fear - "a fear of being". So this fear seems to be the greater habit I have to deal with. (No wonder I found it so hard to be in the world and connect with people). I always felt I am nothing and having nothing to give; of course my psychological childhood experiences reinforce this, as my adulthood has done too. But to get caught in thinking I'm just those experiences is again reinforcing the habit. It's also history and not what is happening in this moment. With the choice of expanding out of what seems like "reality", I can allow and accept a "self" beyond that: I then lose all my history, and can "be in the now".

The smaller I am, the tighter I am and the narrower my sense of self is. More contraction = more separateness = feeling of isolation:- that's more buying into self- hatred, guilt, anger etc. The more I open, and expand experientially, I see how I am one flow with nature, the universe etc., one mind moment and one thought seems like a sort of universal energy. That context of self as part of the all, does not get caught up in the melodrama of my narrowed contracted separateness - then I seem to be opening to the 'beingness' we are.

All this seems to be in the space between response and stimuli, as I open into this space and just open, not contracting back into my habitual mind sets. I just become part of everything else, and just am in that moment of life for it's own sake.

A place behind thought
Is a place of Peace
A place of truer
experience of Being.

In each moment of my life, whatever the situation I'm in, the stimuli that are there give me my choice:- Do I open or close?

Do I have the truth of my real experience of myself, or do I tighten and contract into resistance that keep me separate and in Hell?

Integrating this awareness with myself and life, I come up against my resistances all the time and this seems to be my main habit of "being fear". Fear of being close; fear of being wrong; fear of my own self; fear of fear; this is the tightness in me.

When the stimulus is strong, the tension in my body is greatest and the fear in my mind the strongest, this is the hardest time for me to release, but of course the most valuable. It is the difference between Heaven and Hell in one moment of life.



'Fear' - A terrible enemy, treacherous and difficult to overcome. It remains concealed at every turn of the way. Prowling, waiting, and if a man terrified in its presence runs away, his enemy will have put an end to his quest. And if a man runs away "He will never learn, he will never become a man of knowledge".

The answer is very simple. He must not run away, he must defy his fear, and in spite of it he must take the next step in learning and the next, and the next. He must be fully afraid and yet he must not stop. That is the rule! And a moment will come when his enemy retreats. The man begins to feel sure of himself. His intent becomes stronger. Learning is no longer a terrifying task".

Don Juan

Physically the core of my fear seems centred in my chest. When releasing out from that the difference is like darkness or light, coldness or warmth. Fear or Love.

To make the choice to release is:-

Like the sun, whose rays warm
the flowers to smile, and makes
the land glow with a special sort
of light.

I feel I start to smile and glow from deep inside, in that moment of being, which seems to be out of time and space.

I don't feel as separate from the world after all.

To see the world in a grain of sand
And Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity is an hour.
William Blake

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