

Patterns

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by Bruce Fertman

My eyes can dimly see the pattern of my life and the puzzle that is me.

Patterns by Simon and Garfunkel

We often use the word 'habit' in our work. We are usually referring to unconscious habits that don't serve us well. Our goal is to make the unconscious conscious, the invisible visible. We want to be free to choose what we want to do and how we want to do it. We also want to be free not to do something. We want the control to begin to do something when we want, or not, and we want to be able to stop doing something when we want to stop. Completely.

As Alexander teachers we can easily fall into the habit of looking primarily for postural and movement habits within ourselves and our students. That is fine but if our work is to be about more than posture and movement, if it is to be about how we relate to ourselves, others, and the world, if it is to be about the quality of our lives, then we need to open our parameters to include other types of habits.

Rather than using the word habit, I prefer using the word pattern. People tend to associate habits with being bad, shifting them into the world of right and wrong, a world offering too much judgement and too little information. The word pattern holds less negative charge.

Patterns are good because they are precise and they repeat themselves, making them recognizable to an observant outsider. *And they are full of good energy.* Patterns, whether helpful or unhelpful, use energy, and as William Blake says, Energy is Eternal Delight. Our energy, when well directed, imbues us with vitality.

When I teach I look for patterns other than postural and movement patterns. Any unconscious pattern, once identified and made conscious, provides us with good material for applying Alexandrian principles and processes. We can use any pattern to exercise our ability to stop, to become conscious, to develop and exercise our kinesthetic and proprioceptive senses, allowing us to see a pattern expressing itself through our entire body from head to toe and out through our fingertips. We can give ourselves the time to understand this pattern physically and emotionally. Then, once we know where we are and what we are

doing and how we are doing it, we can choose to see what would happen without it. Who would we be without the pattern? What would happen if we chose to unplug the pattern, if we left it out, if we left ourselves alone? Where would the energy fueling that pattern want to go, how would it redirect itself?

A person comes to me and I notice they say 'you know' a lot, or 'like' or 'ah' or that every sentence they utter has the inflection of a question. A verbal, vocal, communication pattern.

A person comes to me and as he begins to speak about his frustrations at work, I notice how he drops his hands and slaps them on his thighs in exasperation. A gestural pattern.

A person comes to me and every time they have a new and powerfully positive kinesthetic experience their minds jump into the future saying how they will never be able to do this themselves, or into the past saying how they have been doing everything wrong for so many years. A learning pattern. A thinking pattern.

I ask a person to quickly walk around the room and then to come back and tell me what they've taken in. One person says mostly what they saw, another mentions several things they heard, another what they smelled or touched. Sensory patterns.

I notice how a particular person always appears cheerful, optimistic and energetic. Another person's clothes are always exceedingly neat and always worn too tightly. Another person always looks forlorn, often complaining about others. Another takes up a lot of space, spreads out and is prone to challenging, disagreeing and arguing with me. Another who is always trying to help me, complimenting me excessively. Another who continually cracks jokes. All patterns. Persona patterns.

It's important for us as Alexander teachers to be able to distinguish between principles, processes, and procedures. Once we have a clear understanding of Alexandrian principles and processes, i.e., sensory consciousness, inhibitory choice, direction and redirection of energy, primary movement/pattern/control, critical moments, what I like to refer to as moments of opportunity, the relationship between means and ends, etc, we can choose, at times, to experiment working outside of Alexander's classical procedures, i.e., chair, monkey, lunge, whispered ah, etc. and simply improvise with Alexandrian principles and processes within a larger arena, within the ultimate procedure, how we proceed in living our lives.

After eight years of study in Chanoyu, the Way of Japanese Tea, I informed my teacher, Mariko LaFleur, I would be traveling and teaching intensively for a month and would have little or no time to practice. She said to me, "Bruce, that's fine. Essentially Chado is not about the form. It's only about how we exist in this world as a guest and as a host. It's about gratefully receiving what we are given. It's about how we

welcome, receive and serve others. Remember Bruce, the tea room is everywhere. Practice Tea everywhere you go, wherever you are, and with everyone you meet. Enjoy your trip.”

Working within formal structures is assuring, confirmative. It's familiar. Within them we know the rules, we're comfortable. We know what to do. We know where we are. We're home.

And then there is the wide world, the unfamiliar, unpredictable world where there are no clear cut rules, where we are at times uncomfortable and know not what to do or what to expect. It's our first time around. We're continually in a place we have never been and will never be again.

We meet people along the way. We want to welcome and receive them, in their entirety, as our guests. We don't want to reduce our guests to their posture. We don't want only to watch how they move. We want to see who they are, how they live, so we can discern how we can best serve.

The more we see and understand our students in their entirety, the more our students see and understand themselves in their entirety. And since, ultimately, we are all mirrors for one another, reflections of one another, we come to see and understand ourselves, the puzzle that is us.