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DO LESS TO GET MORE

An Introduction to the Alexander Technique

“In order to progress in his training the horse must learn to carry himself in good posture. It is however essential that the rider himself learns to acquire a firm, relaxed posture. A slack or stiff rider has on the horse the effect of a foreign body, impairing balance and hampering movement”. So wrote Udo Burger in 1959 in his book ‘The Way to Perfect Horsemanship’ *. He believed riders should have “firm, erect, relaxed backs”.

He also believed in the qualities of “attentiveness” and “self-awareness”, saying “It should be realised that more self-control, equanimity and generosity are needed in the sport of riding than in any other sport”.

The Alexander Technique can help you acquire all these qualities. The technique is a way to connect mind and body in such a way as to produce greater equanimity and equilibrium: resulting in equipoise between horse and rider.

Much of our behaviour is a conditioned response: it is habitual. We react unthinkingly and without awareness to any outside stimulus (be it physical, mental or emotional). So you and your horse can end up in a cycle of these conditioned responses (don't forget your horse has his habits too). What can you do if you want to change or improve something in his way of going? As the supposed leader in this situation maybe the time has come to take a step back and observe your own way of going instead, your own use.

At exactly the times when greater freedom is needed we often end up trying too hard to achieve something and creating more tension instead, tension that interferes with mental and physical balance. Learning to let go of this tension, or better still to inhibit its creation in the first place, leads to greater ease within the whole person, and consequently in the horse.

The Technique is taught on a one to one basis. The teacher uses her hands and verbal explanation to make the pupil aware of how muscle tension is held in the body. The rider learns a new coordination of the head, neck and back. With the head more freely balanced, the spine is able to lengthen and the back widen. As a result breathing improves, legs can move more freely and arms connect into the back in a different way, enabling a release of tension in the wrists and hands. The seat becomes more independent and more effective. The horse responds by using himself more freely and correctly. The rider also learns to be more in the moment, riding each step with awareness, ‘thinking in activity’, a phrase used by FM Alexander, who was himself a horseman. Rider/horse communication becomes clearer and more subtle at the same time.

To sum up, the Alexander Technique gives you a new method of breaking free from old, ill-judged habits and restoring the body to a stress-free, toned but relaxed and effective posture. Ease and greater freedom of movement are accompanied by a greater ability not to over-react in stressful situations. AND YOUR HORSE'S USE WILL IMPROVE TOO.

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Call me for more information, 01497 831447, or visit the STAT website at www.stat.org.uk.

* The Way to Perfect Horsemanship by Udo Burger originally published in 1959 in Germany. First English edition published 1998, J.A.Allen, translated by Nicole Bartle. Udo Burger (1914-1980) was a highly respected German equine vet, an accomplished horseman and an observant animal psychologist.