

ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE AND CRANIO SACRAL THERAPY

The cranio sacral system consists of the bones of the cranium (head), the sacrum (bottom of the spine), the spinal column, the spinal cord and the spinal meninges.

The spinal meninges form a tadpole shaped sac that covers the brain and the spinal cord all the way down to the sacrum. Within this sac cerebro spinal fluid moves up and down. This fluid is extracted from blood in ventricles in the brain. The fluid serves as a protection to the brain and the spinal cord. The production of cerebro spinal fluid creates a pulse through out the body that is known as the cranio sacral rhythm. It's one of the body's rhythms like heartbeat and breathing. This rhythm is clearly manifested in a movement all through the body, but particularly in the bones of the skull and the sacrum.

As an Alexander teacher, I have a particular interest in the meninges, which line the skull and the spinal cord. There are three layers of meninges. The dura mater, arachnoid and pia mater, but in this workshop, for simplicity's sake, we looked mainly at the outer layer: the dura mater. Inside the skull we looked at the falx and the tentorium membranes.

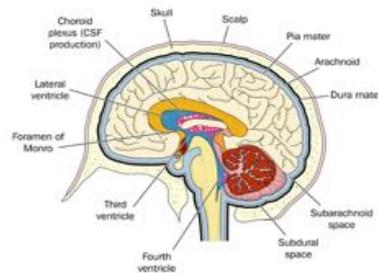
The falx membrane separates the left and right hemisphere of the brain and the tentorium membrane creates a division between the upper and lower part of the brain. Both membranes have attachments to bones of the skull at various points. They also join up with the dura mater which runs all the way down to the second segment of the sacrum. Displacement of the sacrum affects the head through the dura mater. A pupil with sacrum displacement may never be able to balance the head freely on the spine.

After nine years of working with clients who are recovering from severe head trauma, it is my personal conclusion that blows to the skull can cause (minor) bone displacement which in turn influences the falx and tentorium membranes which are attached to these bones. The membranes will hold tension and can actually pull the head back and down (or forward and up) from the inside. Such a pull interferes with the way the head balances on the spine, which is worrying to me as an Alexander teacher. We cannot address this imbalance through Alexander work. It requires cranio sacral knowledge to diagnose' the pull, as well as cranio sacral skills to release compressed bones and the falx and the tentorium.

Trauma that can prevent pupils from responding well to Alexander Technique lessons include:

- Dental procedures
- Broken nose
- Birth trauma
- head injuries
- whiplash
- blows to the pelvis
- surgery and scar tissue

The craniosacral rhythm and how it influences Alexander directions



Ventricles in the brain produce cerebro spinal fluid in a cycle of 6 to 10 times per minute. This fluid is released and moves down through the connective tissue sac to the sacrum and back up again. When the head fills with fluid the bones of the skull widen. In turn the body widens. The limbs move out, the head moves back, the sacrum moves up.

When the head releases fluid the bones of the skull lengthen. The body lengthens, the limbs turn in in, the head moves up, the sacrum moves down.

If one of the limbs, the head or the pelvis is blocked from the impact of trauma it will not move with the rhythm. It is my personal conclusion that tension transmitted through connective tissue of a blocked cranio sacral system has a deep effect on a persons ability to lengthen and widen.

An Alexander teacher can recognize cranio sacral imbalances in a pupil if one or more of the following occur:

1. Use does not improve as expected during a lesson or on a training course.
2. facial compressions (i.e. 1 eye smaller than the other.)
3. recurring spasms during an Alexander turn
4. Pelvic twists
5. Complaints about recurring headaches or pain elsewhere.
6. Complaints about an inability to focus (fogginess)

What horses taught me

In 2008, I trained as a cranio sacral therapist for horses. As I started to work with them more I was surprised to observe how much a horse's use improves when the cranio sacral system is encouraged to release.

Horses experience trauma to the cranio sacral system through the bridle and reins, the weight of the rider on the back, a blow to the head or the pelvis, or through surgery. Inexperienced and in sensitive riders cause pressure the horse has to deal with through his cranium and spine. This pressure affects the horse's primary control deeply, as his head is compressed onto the first vertebra .

(Insert figure 1 here)

This 22 year old pony was treated with cranio sacral therapy. The pony was not

forced to assume a particular posture but was allowed to stand the way he chose, as that reflected how he was most comfortable. Within two treatments, the pony chose completely a different way to stand (figure below). The head, neck, back relationship changed considerably. As you can see in the picture below.

(insert figure 2 here)

Observing over time how the horses use changed made me realise how important the connection between use and the cranio sacral system really is.



Elke Mastwijk

Elke Mastwijk (1967) took her first Alexander Technique lessons at age 23. Though she was never in pain herself, as a young child she saw a great deal of back trouble in her family and she was curious about methods that could help her to prevent it. After qualifying from ATON, Netherlands where trained with Arie Jan Hoorweg she attended a post graduate term at The Constructive Teaching Centre in London with Walter Carrington. Within five years of graduating she was teaching full time in Amsterdam.

She trained as a cranio sacral therapist at the Upledger Institute in the Netherlands from 2001 until 2003 and privately with Alexander Technique colleague and cranio sacral therapist Hil Boode until 2010. She works mainly with clients who are recovering from physical and or emotional trauma. She is an equine cranio sacral therapist

since 2008. In her spare time she loves to explore the application of the Technique to such diverse arts as belly dancing, self defence and horse riding.

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More information:

www.upledger.com

Books

"Your inner physician and you" / John Upledger

"The heart of Listening" Part 1 and 2 / Hugh Milne
