

In “ExChange,” Volume 17, Number 3, and in his blog, Jeremy Chance reflected on a visit by Tommy Thompson to his school in Japan and invited Tommy to respond to his observations. Here is Tommy’s response.

Making Peace with Yourself is the Ultimate Use of Self by Tommy Thompson

I have been asked by ATI’s *ExChange* editor Eric Binnie to respond to Jeremy Chance’s blog article (see below and throughout this article) on my time teaching in Japan. I’m happy to comply, although, when responding to Jeremy’s article, I find it difficult to know where to begin. I’m reminded of the moment in Samuel Beckett’s play, *Waiting for Godot*, when one of his characters claims: “The end is in the beginning and yet we still go on.” So, maybe I should let sleeping dogs lie, if, in their dreams, they approve of my presence in their back yard. In other words I have no objections to anything Jeremy has written. On the contrary, when I first read Jeremy’s assessment of my work while still in Japan and teaching for him, even then I was quite moved by his reflections, I found his perceptions astonishingly comprehensive and insightful, and really quite accurate when assessing what I was attempting to convey.

Of course I especially liked his closing sentence (not included in his “cleaned-up” version of his original blog):

“If he [Tommy] comes to a theatre near you – get some tickets!” And with that said, need I reply? For a teacher, this is as good as it gets! And, for a teacher who was once an actor/director, for what more can I ask?

Nonetheless, I’ll try to respond. I believe the best I can do is to clarify certain choices I made when giving a particular workshop in Tokyo that Jeremy felt were contradictory to previous choices I had made earlier in the workshop. But, let’s keep my reflections about Jeremy’s reflections interwoven with my reply so that you, the reader, might go back and forth with ease and draw your own conclusions.

To do this, it is necessary to clarify specific ways that I view teaching Alexander’s key principles and concepts, which Jeremy, during the first day of teaching, found very much to his liking, but later and well into the second day, felt were contradicted by specific exercises I had introduced, focused on participants putting hands-on while not being involved in any specific activities.

Jeremy began his article with Tommy: Tommy would like to begin with Jeremy.

Jeremy is a highly thoughtful, deeply caring, one-man inspirational show; and he makes that show available to an unbelievable number of aspiring people. When you teach for Jeremy in Japan, you don’t just teach for 12-18 in a group. You teach, during his “Golden Week in Gotimba,” for 65 teachers, trainees and invited members of the public. Where else on the Alexander planet do you find that number of people available for learning all together? Jeremy is about as committed an individual when providing a venue for learning as I’ve ever encountered.

In Japan, during a previous visit, Jeremy and I had taken several walks together towards one destination or another, be it a workshop or dinner. I always found his take on life and the Alexander work compassionate and deeply committed. So, when I read how much what I taught meant to him, I was quite moved. Then, while reading his blog when he got into that little picky bit about my introduction of exercises, still feeling honored, silently, to myself, I immediately agreed with him, as I still do, albeit with a few reservations and clarifications.

“Yes”, I thought, in my first reading of his blog, “that does sound like I was contradicting what I’d previously advocated when teaching the day before.”

But, once upon a time in a galaxy far, far away, my other good friend, David Gorman, also did this to me. Always comfortable in nearly ten years of my teaching for him at his spacious studio in London, he once, in the presence of the workshop/trainee participants, questioned and challenged my present teaching on that particular day. I said, “Well, if you’re not going to let me teach what I want to teach, I’ll go home,” and nearly did so. Happily, I’ve matured since then, and happily David still remains at the top of the list of my trusted inquisitors.

Now, when what I say is called into question, I simply listen, and listen deeply because whatever is challenged, and however I am challenged, might be accurate and I might be slightly, if not altogether, flawed in my reasoning. I’ve found life works best when you don’t take what you say all that seriously: especially when teaching.

So, here is my best shot towards clarifying what I meant and why I chose to say what I said in Japan in May, 2009.

Today, I speak slightly differently from what I did then — for we move on. For me now, the Alexander work, with its particular manner of embodying universal concepts and principles, is at its best when through its practice a person makes peace with him or herself, and subsequently becomes at peace with themselves.

Think about it. This goes way beyond changing habits - which is also fun too.

Oh, by the way, the Rumi quote is actually from me, not Rumi. I used it first in a workshop on “The Beloved in Teaching” in Switzerland years prior. So, although not directly from Rumi, my inspiration was indeed from Rumi.

Here follows Jeremy’s article interspersed with Tommy’s responses.

In May 2009 Tommy Thompson visited Jeremy Chance’s training school in Japan. That visit inspired the following reflections from Jeremy.

**Tommy Thompson’s teaching Visit to Japan
by Jeremy Chance**

*I will never try to know you. I will always long to see you.
Rumi, quoted by Tommy Thompson, Tokyo, 2009.*

JEREMY: I have been trying to get Tommy to come to teach in Japan for many years, and so many reasons held up the process, but finally in May 2009 he made it—and his visit was everything I expected it to be and much more. I think Tommy offers a unique model of Alexander’s discoveries, a way of “languaging” the work that I had not encountered before—and let me tell, I have had a lot of teachers visit Japan over the last 10 years since I have been running a training here. These impressions are mostly taken from my attendance at Tommy’s two-day workshop in Tokyo at the conclusion of his visit, and have been revised from my blog where I first published them.

I trained twice as an Alexander Technique teacher: first in London in the chair work/table work, hands-on, experiencing-before-thinking model; then 16 years later I trained again, this time with Marjorie Barstow in Lincoln, Nebraska, in Sydney, and in London, in the activities, “talk a little/ touch a little,” thinking-before-experiencing model. I have also been a practicing Buddhist of the

Tibetan tradition for longer than I have been in Japan. All these previous experiences definitely inform my reactions to Tommy's work.

Writing now after witnessing the final workshop of Tommy Thompson in Japan, I am hugely impressed with the way Tommy has given a voice to Alexander's discoveries that totally accords with the Buddhist view of "Self" – the lack of anything inherently existing from its own side. In my comments below, I may be misrepresenting Tommy's viewpoint, so please hold the idea that these are my impressions of Tommy's ideas.

Tommy's view is that there is no "number one" as my beloved Marjory Barstow – whom I hope needs no introduction to ATI folk – often cajoled us: "*Who is the most important person here? The student? No. The teacher? Yes.*" For Tommy, there is no "number one" person – there is a relationship, inter-dependency between you and I, which creates us anew from moment to moment in *the "ongoing, forever moving present, which is the only place where change can happen."*

TOMMY: Jeremy has interpreted my view completely accurately, and this view of the interrelatedness and interdependency I have long held to be the cornerstone of teaching this work. My deceased wife, Julie Ince Thompson, would often chide me questioning, "Where is the beginning, when do things begin, – and where do they end?" In other words, who sets things in motion when learning takes place, the teacher or the student?

If the teacher is number one, fine, but in so reflecting, the student is told directly or indirectly what is best for them, rather than guided into the potential of what might be possible for them as an appropriate response, given their true commitment to themselves.

So it is neither about the teacher nor the student. When people come together in assigned and mutually agreed upon roles, the teacher, neither number 1 nor any other number, is hopefully enough of a 'Teacher' that they don't have to insist that what they have to say is hoarded and practiced by their student.

Instead, the teacher while still remaining enough of a student to witness choice emerging simply supports that choice rather than suggest anything, teaches from his or her own constant state of learning. The merit of a teacher in my view is when the teacher is learning proportional to what they have to teach.

Frank Jones told me once, that while giving a lesson to a woman, she remarked to him, "I think you're learning more in this lesson than I am."

"I think so too," Frank replied.

Whatever truth might emerge when the fog of habit is lifted during that new moment of insight transpires between the teacher and the student. It is both seeded and born from their relationship. Neither teacher nor student can claim exclusive sovereignty for the presence of this moment, nor should they.

Just to be grateful for being present for the other's awakening is sufficient. This truth is momentary, ongoing and not to be taken as a better course of action [because inspired by the teacher] than the appropriate course taken by the student just at their moment of realization.

So, “Yes,” Jeremy, I do very much depend upon the nature of relationship as my guide with the student towards that moment of mutual recognition. Hopefully, the two of us arrive at the same time just as the two of us leave that moment and enter the consequence of these new choices with all their possible ramifications. The student leaves the lesson remembering there is more to them than meets their proverbial “eye,” having experienced making a discovery.

Hopefully, the teacher leaves the lesson filled with wonder that they were present with their student when their student left former constraints of their remembered past and entered the amazing world of remembering the present and experienced who they are, apart from who they thought they should have been. In this brief moment of deep relationship both are revealed as they are and not as they think they should be. In the absence of fixed identity, there can be no Number One.

Here, I should probably elaborate a bit about my view of habit and identity.

For years I have tried to find a working definition of identity both for me and for the student to practice; something a bit more tangible than the ‘ego’ which is little more than a concept.

Most of the time identity remains pretty illusive. Few people actually embody who they are, seem to be, or want to be. In other words, I think “That is me.” Or I describe me to myself, claiming, “This is me.” But how often do I actually experience “This is me?”

In the practice of experiencing a more fluid sense of “identity” -- and all habits are “habits of identity,” it is quite useful when teaching to suggest to a given pupil, that to have the full measure of a sense of self they need to be at peace with who they are totally and completely right then and during their practice of letting go of holding onto to who they think they need to be, to be their “Self”: fluidity is the key.

All information received from that which is exterior to a given individual lands somewhere in their body if only for a brief moment; and all information and even raw data is embodied somewhere within them, but is usually ignored in favor of immediate reaction. In other words one seldom responds from where one is most affected or most touched, leaving one disembodied from the experience.

I gave a talk recently at Harvard University in Cambridge Massachusetts on “Embodying Faith.” The talk was prompted by a young minister at Harvard who was chaplain to Harvard Graduate students. On one occasion one of my trainees happened to be having lunch in a cafeteria where this minister was present. He asked what she was doing in her life and she explained that she was teaching music and training to teach the Alexander Technique.

“What was that?” he queried. Part of her explanation was about how one could actually embody their experience of life and themselves a bit more deeply and truthfully. Curious and interested, he asked if when looking around at the church congregation she thought the people were embodied in their faith. My trainee suggested they didn’t necessarily look embodied in their experience.

All the more curious, he visited my training course and we explored how one embodies faith by practicing where one’s response to stimulus lands in one’s body, and then to speak or act from where it lands and where it sits waiting to be acknowledged. As he was a minister, I suggested that he sit and enter prayer, and that I would work with him while he was in prayer, the purpose of which would be to give him a sense of an embodied sense of being in prayer. To offset placing him on the

spot in front of the training group, I invited everyone to join. I had everyone sit in a circle. For those who wanted to pray, I suggested they pray; for those who wanted to meditate: to meditate, for those who wanted to simply sit in silence: they sat.

Then I suggested that they pay attention to wherever the experience they were having showed up in their bodies; and then to pray, meditate or sit in silence from an awareness of that place. Their sense of who they were or how they identified being the person they recognized in prayer, meditation or silence became far more embodied; deeper, more meaningful if you will with more resonance and overtone. Their sense of who they thought they needed to be to be in prayer, meditation or in simply sitting in silence expanded. While I used my hands to disperse the localization of muscular tensional habits associated with who they felt they needed to be in prayer, meditation and sitting in silent observance, their allegiance to any fixed sense of identity dispersed as well.

Jeremy suggested: Tommy uses his hands to “disperse your commitment to who you think you need to be” so that your “Self” truthfully emerges moment to moment, depending on the conditions present. His version of *inhibition* revolves around this idea: we have an “identity” that we are “committed to.” In Buddhist terms, I consider this to be the concept of a fixed, inherently-existing “Self,” that inside me there is a “Jeremy” to which I am committed. This idea of a fixed “Jeremy” (and that is all it is, an idea which is given expression by tensional habits that interfere with the natural function of *primary control*) is merely a habituated summary of the person I think I need to be; or, as Lama Yeshe put it, —a projected hallucination. In Tommy’s terms (as I interpret it) this habituated identity is built on the false notion that I can not be who I am being in any moment, but instead must manufacture a person that I consider “you need me to be.” And the primary “you” of that equation is, of course, my set of parents or primary care-takers, followed by peers, cultural customs, the lure of advertising, and all the other influences that are telling me day and night who I need to be in order to realize happiness.”

I reply, “Yes, this is in fact what I believe I am doing.” When using my hands to disperse tensional patterns which do interfere with controlling head neck reflexes, I believe that I am also helping the person to disperse their commitment to who they think they need to be to be them.

Because in the absence of the known and expected, there is a different sort of knowing that belongs less to one’s allegiance to identity and more to who one can be when in a far more neutral and available state. This opens a window of opportunity to respond in an entirely new and different way free from any self-imposed limitations and expectations.

And, this may or may not have anything to do with a given person pinpointing themselves as who they are, based on what they think or feel they need to be to satisfy the other, as Jeremy implies is often the case.

First, you cannot be whoever you feel you need to be, to be you apart from the other whether the “other” is friend, parent, peer, or the lure of advertizing. No one exists out of relationship. This is fundamental. It is just that we usually do behave as though we only exist in relation to our intentions, our goals and desires.

Thirty years ago, when teaching, I often said if you have no desires, then like Buddha you have no problems. You’re at complete peace with who you are so long as you do not allow one blemish to define you for the rest of your life.

Identity is fluid when confronted, measured, weighed and applied. Only in the moment surfacing between stimulus and response, is it possible to meet yourself being yourself; and only then can you decide is this the self I wish to be?

Just by practicing being in relationship consciously and recognizing that you always exist in relationship to something greater than, or at least apart from, your immediate desires while satisfying that one special desire, do you tend to be less fixed and more fluid. You don't have to see that something exists "greater than" "apart from," or "more than" to *know* that it exists. You cannot feel or see gravity, but you know it's there and it surely helps to be reminded of a deeper neuromuscular integrative state of unity when involved in living one's life "with all that flesh is heir to," in the young Prince of Denmark's famous words. Life is simply easier when you experience being supported. In the presence of more universal support (the integrity of our interactive design, a support that belongs to us all based upon millions of years of evolution) the moment of inhibition is extended for a longer time than usual, thereby fostering fluidity of identity.

Then my friend, you will change without effort because at that moment you have left the world of doing and are favoring the world of being, and within this healthy dialogue between the being you and the doing you, there is no conflicting duality, as Jeremy wondered whether or not there might be.

I don't think so.

Why? Because we are hard-wired to be and hard-wired to do. Neither is independent from the other. We just behave as if they were, as if we cannot do something without being or be us without doing. The unifying feeling experienced in an Alexander session gives us back that experience of being fully embodied, and restores our practice of the interdependency of being and doing. But I do understand Jeremy's reasoning below:

JEREMY: DUALITIES

What a wonderful way of giving voice to Alexander's notion of "Self." It neatly sidesteps the whole conversation of "body" and "mind." It is interesting to note that although Alexander himself did talk about "psycho-physical" unity, so imbedding this duality in the creation of a new, hyphenated word; he also insisted that there is only a "critical moment" into which our *use* of our "Self" enters moment by moment (See Alexander's introduction to *Universal Constant of Living*). Tommy morphs this holistic way of considering the work into an alternative language, devised to guide people into a new experience of who they consider themselves to be by "dispensing their commitment to who they think they need to be" which is their habituated "Self."

However, a different kind of duality starts to emerge in that the "Self" is created not only by environmental conditions, but by vows, decisions, promises, intentions, goals, and the like, which abide within our consciousness of "Self." These are not such material things, but they are real in the same way that thoughts are real. Mother Teresa states it: "Love is not a feeling. Love is a decision." So who I am, emerging as I am, moment to moment, is partly shaped by my "others" — other people and environmental conditions — and partly shaped by these "ideas and promises." Are these in the same nature of "belief" as in "I know myself," or do they differ?

I do think there is something different between, say, a vow not to kill any living thing, and a belief that there is no God. Both exist very thinly within my consciousness, but one is based actionally directly in nature, the other is more a basis for making decisions — a premise upon which to build a vow, rather than a promise to behave in a particular way.

Anyway, fascinating as this is to me, I am off the point. The idea I started out exploring concerned another kind of duality that emerges from Tommy's model—which is the distinction between "doing" and "being." Tommy says that "intention dominates our action when we move

in the direction of the focus of our attention,” and in so doing I “leave where I am” or “sacrifice my being.” This is Tommy’s version of Marj’s “I am number one,” and it is still dualistic, albeit in another way. I do not need to leave where I am to follow the focus of my intention, I can preserve a quality of “being” while “doing” whatever I am “doing.” Whenever I do depart from this quality of “being,” I am *end-gaining* as Alexander called it, or “letting the focus of my intention dominate my action,” as Tommy puts it.

TOMMY: In the paper I gave on Frank Pierce Jones in 1986 for presentation at the first Congress for Alexander teachers in Stony Brook, New York, I looked at the presumed duality of being and doing as a false conundrum.

I suggested that the inhibitive state was, in Eugene Herrigel’s words, the *moment of highest tension*, where at the moment you are most likely to hold on to any fixed sense of who you felt you needed to be, to be you, that instead, you let go of doing that which you are most likely to do. Then, neither expressing nor suppressing the “self” you know best and believe in, you are poised for transformation without effort.

Hamlet’s question, “To be or nor to be?” is actually nearly a useless exercise in thinking.

Simply, you are, and I am.

We simply cannot “not be” unless we check out entirely.

But you can still ‘*not do*’ and live happily ever after.

You can’t “*not be*” but you can always “*not do*.” Herein lies the strength of Alexander’s teaching.

You want a glass of water. You sense at that moment how you exist relative to that desire to quench your thirst. You then act to fulfill that desire, ignoring while you act that you existed and exist in relation to something apart or greater than your desire.

With the absence of the familiar world of activity which satisfies your commitment to how you believe you need to behave to feel “you” are you, there is the ever present support of the integrative action of the human nervous system. This integrative action of the human nervous system always seeks homeostasis between familiar responses and those responses to stimuli which will foster the execution of that which is completely new, different and unknown.

To illustrate this marvelous moment of just how much “inhibition” reigns above all else in the life practice of Alexander’s teaching,” I’m going to tell my dog story for the first time in print.

Previously I have always told it to illustrate how I see the role of direction and inhibition and why I favor the latter as a practice for self realization. Today, I’d like to expand.

In 1978, I was an avid runner, running sometimes seven miles a day. On that day in 1978 my wife, Julie, and I were running together near my sister’s home in Greensboro, North Carolina. While running we were discussing whether or not I would continue teaching the Alexander work. I had not trained to teach in the manner others had, and I was receiving a reasonable, if not unreasonable, amount of flack for this transgression. You might say (in Jeremy’s view) that my sense of who I was was being affected by wondering whether I was behaving as others thought I should behave.

These were the issues Julie and I were discussing as we ran along country roads in North Carolina, when suddenly; seemingly out of nowhere, we were attacked by two very large Rottweiler dogs.

The entire incident lasted maybe a few seconds, but within that context of time, all my questions about who to be in order to be me were about to be challenged by inhibition as direct experience. No time to rapidly run through the “directions” in the face of immediate attack. At the point of assault my knowledge of what direction might offer was sufficient.

My initial experience of the event was that of terror, both for myself and for my wife. However, for the first time ever, at the moment I experienced terror, I also sensed kinesthetically my pulling my head backwards and down into my shoulders.

“Far out,” I thought, knee-jerked back into 1960’s jargon. I’m about to be mauled by these dogs, and I’m feeling myself register the neuromuscular pattern associated with the startle reflex. I was astounded that I could consciously register extreme fear while feeling at the same time how I was “using” myself to respond to the attack.

And, my response was appropriate, being part of the ‘fight or flight’ neuromuscular pattern associated with the startle reflex. But as much as this reflex is a fear response, the startle reflex also orients one to new information. To act from the conditions present, including the startle reflex, I would either have to fight two large dogs bent on my destruction, which would be insane, or run from them, which I was doing anyway and it wasn’t doing me any good. So, reason would seem to suggest that if I were to choose the action appropriate to this atavistic reflex I would have to express myself suitable to the reflex: either fight or flight?

Fight: My understanding that I simply did not have the wherewithal to fight two dogs ruled out the first option.

Flight: This would mean I would run a few more steps with both dogs on my back and neck chewing away. Moreover, if I were I to choose neither and suppress this reflex I would have little choice except to curl up and take whatever consequences both dogs should mete out?

However, Alexander’s three part discovery provided another way of viewing response. Having identified the habit, you can keep it; choose something else, or do nothing at all and the integrative effect remains present for your consideration to then be creative and do something unexpected. In other words I could also use my awareness of this reflexive response, re-orient myself to new information and see what/who shows up.

I knew that at the basis for any emotion there was a movement of energy that could be suppressed or expressed. And in the absence of neither expression nor suppression, transformation was possible.

Then I did something I’d never done in the face of supreme danger.

Knowing that if I were to act from the startle pattern -- the neuromuscular pattern that accompanies the reflex that my actions would be partial and incomplete. So, I chose not to respond from *startle*. The kinesthetic recognition of the neuromuscular pattern provided the cue, the reference point, if you will to inhibit. Neither to express nor suppress I believe my nervous system then organized itself around my intention to preserve life and limb and aligned me with all the conditions present.

I let my neck muscles lengthen rather than remain contracted and at that moment I sensed myself moving upwards and downwards at the same time — like Alice having eaten her cookie — then further, an expansion in all directions from within completely “tensegrative” to the onslaught of attack. I was poised,

totally in relation to the circumstance. I felt an overwhelming sense of peace and, in Krishnamurti's words, I acted from choice-less awareness: I truly cannot remember actually making the choice to do what I did.

I raised and extended my arms towards the lead dog that stared me in the face with his large angry mouth and tightly clenched teeth that I can still visualize today, and I uttered a martial arts cry: "HAAA!"

Today I still don't know what provoked me to choose sound over any other response when choosing neither to express nor suppress my response and allow transformation to take place. In other words I lived the moment of inhibition directly in response to being attacked, trusting that the self who would be revealed as me, deeply potential and appropriate to the circumstances might appear.

And it did.

At that moment to my total surprise, both dogs were thrown to the ground by the vibration of my voice. They lay still, and stunned on the ground. I was truly amazed, and gave them another "HAAA" for good measure when Julie said, "What do we do now?" both of us looking down at the dogs. I said "I don't know, keep running," and so we did, while looking back occasionally at the dogs, which lay stunned on the ground.

Inhibition does indeed reign. In its practice there is no duality between doing and being.

JEREMY: From this follows the idea of *attention* – Tommy is primarily interested in observing this, asking the question: how is the person's *attention* interfering with the efficiency of *primary control*? Tommy does not observe *the use of the self* – he remarked that that is only "periphery" to his interest – instead he observes the person's *attention*: what kind of relationship does the person have to their intention/activity? This is of paramount importance, because we always exist in relationship to someone or something else.

TOMMY: For me "use of self" and the way a person is attentive are synonymous, simply one and the same. The use of a person is reflected in the quality of their attention given what they are doing and the interaction they are having with their environment.

Likewise, the quality of one's attention is reflected in their "use of self". When you greet a person, unless something about their body attracts your interest, usually what you are really drawn to see and interact with is the quality of their attention reflected in their body – in movement. That is their "*the use of self*."

So, Jeremy, I never meant that I don't observe use of self; I do. It's just that I do not see *the use of self* strictly as something physical and the misuse of oneself identifiable only in one's body. Undeniably, it is through our bodies that we experience self.

For me it is a matter of emphasis.

Our awareness of habitual "*use*" opens the door to a vast world of possibility. Such awareness signals a point of reference about who we actually are and can be. The recognition that we are prey to habit is a good thing if viewed within the context of change and potential. Again, it affords us the possibility of meeting ourselves being ourselves, so that we can decide who we wish to be.

And, we are our choices, are we not, in the ongoing, *forever moving present, which is the only place where change can happen*.

Isn't it all about choice?

One's life is a composite, a tapestry of never-ending, moment-by-moment, expected and unexpected experiences, whether wanted or not, in response to which we act (or react). Response distinct from reaction involves choice. These choices define us, but only in the moment. If we can welcome the outcome of these new choices we gradually change as a result. However, if we're satisfied with the habitual choices we make, we are likely to stick to who we believe we are and move merrily along fostering who we've been until the next opportunity knocks on our "expanding self" door, when we might then be ready to welcome a different choice.

So, contrary to what I might have mistakenly inferred with regard to my feelings about "use of self", what I've come to understand is: working with this vast "*selfness*" potential that is never exhausted seems far superior, than spending enormous periods of our lives refining our "*use*" thinking we're "wrong." We've just gone astray from who we truly are. We're not 'wrong', we're just a mite bit bewildered. And I believe this with every lesson I give.

And "Yes" I do give exercises that sharpen one's skills and sensitivity while sensing tensional changes interfering with primary control. Always, however I favor introducing any possible new look at oneself in context with what is actually going on in one's life at any given moment. Witness my example of working with the minister in prayer. I'm in your camp entirely. But let our readers read on. Maybe they'll have something they wish to add in the next issue of *ExChange*.

JEREMY: Do we need to explore and know the component elements that make the whole experience possible?

An example of this is in knowing how a person is using themselves. Tommy insists we look first to see the infinite potentiality of our pupil—so we are "being present to being in relation to something that is bigger than our desire"—but my nagging question around this is: how do we see such a thing? Perhaps we don't, perhaps we do – I have no real answer to that. But I do know when it is not there, because I can see how a person's coordination is expressing their fear, ignorance, and attachment within. This is what I see, what I understand is the possibility available beyond that.

Tommy reminds us that we are working with that person's potentiality for becoming other than what they are currently committed to "being" – this is so much more preferable to working with a person's "habit of use" in the negative sense. We don't work with the habit, we work with their potentiality – and I loved being reminded of this so clearly. It is an essential reminder that I was due to hear!

What lets me understand a person has some kind of ignorance, irritation, or obsession operating within them—and that is causing them a harm they do not want—is the detail of my *observation* of their movement. Often a tiny gesture or aberration has been my only clue in uncovering a profoundly deep idea that needs undoing for a person to move into a new idea of the possibility of "Self."

Perhaps my need to do this—which seems to contradict Tommy's disinterest in even seeing habitual *use of the self*—highlights one of the key differences from my own work: rather than give an experience, I seek to introduce an experiment within a person's thinking so that they can give themselves a new experience of who they are "being." But for this, Tommy uses his hands to support a person "dispersing their commitment to being who they think they need to be." Tommy's idea of *inhibition* involves this: withholding definition of "who I am committed to being" to allow in new information that informs the experience I am having of me. It is a truly wonderful approach, and helped me learn another way of communicating to any student in a situation that calls for it.

Another possible source of difference between our approaches is that also I am always curious to find the activity that doesn't let the old habit take place—that is chosen and thought out by both student and

teacher, not constructed by the intervention of my hands. This experiment is set up before my hands touch. My touch is not there to open up choice, or to allow a person to accept information other than the information that their habit is committed to, although that can certainly happen; rather my hands are there to give confidence to their new choices, to support the possibilities that a person is courageously asking of themselves. Student and teacher are not linked in waiting until the confidence or experiential support is there; we are jumping off the cliff together, to a place where this habit is no longer in existence.

Tommy's work has been fabulously stimulating, causing me to question and re-decide about fundamental aspects of my own work: to change some of my long held ideas, to confirm others, and, most importantly, to continue to allow myself to receive new information of any kind in the exciting adventure we call life!

If he comes to a theatre near you – get some tickets!

Life is an exciting adventure or nothing at all.

Helen Keller

TOMMY: In other words I have no objections with anything you have written, Jeremy, because I appreciate the inquiry and the process of learning from each other's personal perspectives and experiences. So, as long as we are still able to question each other, grow and move along, never claiming to have "The" answer, even if we might infer that we do, we are safe. Our safety lies in our recognition that change is desirable no matter what exercise one uses to illustrate it. We all have questions and as long as our answers are evolving and changing we are changed and growing thanks to the experience. There is nothing to lose and everything to gain, when experiencing the absence of who we feel we need to be to be us, in favor of who we might be and probably actually are, given this absence.

Tommy,
Cambridge, Massachusetts.
2010

Biography

Tommy Thompson was co-founder and past-Chair of ATI, a former Assistant Professor of Drama at Tufts University, co-author of *Scientific and Humanistic Contributions of Frank Pierce Jones*, and has for 35 years given over 300 workshops for Alexander teachers and students in the US and throughout the world. Since 1983 he has directed a Teacher Training School for Alexander teachers in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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