

<http://www.freeyourneck.com/html/secrettousingyourbody.html>

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## **Review**

### **The Secret To Using Your Body A Manual for Looking Better and Feeling Younger with the Alexander Technique**

Leland Vall, PDF Ebook, 122pp, over 50 illustrations, January 2009. \$19.95.  
[www.freeyourneck.com](http://www.freeyourneck.com)

Review by Gil Bomber

When I was asked to review this book my first instinct was to recoil from the idea of reading an ebook. Then I agreed, thinking that it would present an ideal opportunity to practise inhibiting my habitual response to that stimulus.

Leland Vall has excellent credentials for writing such a manual. He had his first Alexander lesson in 1982 and since 1996 has been teaching across a wide range of disciplines and running a private practice in New York. He is a former editor of AmSAT News.

As one would expect from someone with editing experience, his writing is clear and simple, although I had problems with one or two descriptions and some of the terminology.

The Manual is designed, as it says in the Introduction, as "a workbook that uses a daily 15-30 minute experiential exercise to teach you the fundamental principles of the Alexander Technique, step by step. Use the book on your own or as a supplement to lessons with a teacher." It indeed takes you step by very careful step through what Leland Vall calls throughout "The Exercise". This is one of the terms I found confusing: "exercise" is not a word I associate with the Alexander Technique and I would have found the word "procedure" or "process" more useful.

The book is divided into ten main parts, each progressing through a different aspect of the Technique. Each main part is divided into shorter sections which the reader is intended to work through daily, for 15-30 minutes, over a long period of time. As you become familiar and confident with one section, you move on to the next, still incorporating all the previous sections into the process. Vall says: "As you add Section 2 and other sections, the amount of time you spend does not need to increase. As the number of

sections increases, you will spend less time with each individual section and the sections will begin to flow together." However, I do wonder how this would work out in practice.

The manual takes you through working lying down, coming gradually into the vertical, sitting, standing and bending and then takes the whole "Exercise" into daily living. There is a useful section on working against a wall - something neglected by many books on the Technique.

The book is cleverly laid out so that the new work, which includes illustrations, is on the right-hand page (when viewing the book as a two-page spread) and on the left is a reminder of the previous section, together with useful photos and diagrams, many with arrows indicating directions of thinking.

Apart from these helpful arrowed illustrations, I found some of the thoughts very effective, in particular "gently point the top of your spine as if it were reaching past the back of your head." And the section on the ribs threw a whole new light on that area for me.

As a teacher, I found several ideas in the book for working with pupils, and it would provide a useful supplement for someone having lessons. I am not certain how someone new to the Technique, with no teacher available, would find working through it.

I liked the book but I did have a continuing problem with the format. Having managed, with some difficulty, to inhibit my negative response to reading an ebook at all, I then found it almost impossible to hold the instructions clearly in my head. Although I knew most of what was being asked of me, I still felt that I needed a printed version to refer to as I moved through "The Exercise".