

Stillness and listening

Quite stopped, quite still

is the way Bill Williams, my first Alexander technique teacher, began his lessons.

At that time, I was just beginning my explorations into body awareness techniques. The effect was immediate.

It stimulated an ever-growing interest in the process of taking time to find stillness, and in this state of mental and physical restfulness, listening to internal sensation and the movement of mind.

In our rushed and information rich world, we rarely have time to stop and reflect.

It's easy for us to skim over the details of the many facts, figures, images, sounds and ideas that bombard us constantly. Often, a superficial passing over has to suffice.

As dancers, we often think that it's only through doing exercises that we can improve.

However, when movement patterns are superimposed on inefficient foundational alignment, needless tensions are created, that are activated whenever we move.

This is counterproductive to efficient use.

Making space and time for ourselves, daily, allows us to return to stillness.

In this stillness, we can guide our thinking in directions of centering and expansion.

The body can draw on its innate intelligence and return to a foundation of centered alignment.

We can allow movement to emerge and unfold out of this inner understanding.

Our moving then becomes integrated, easeful and articulate; creative expression that emerges from personal concerns is stimulated.

The practice of Constructive Rest

The Constructive Rest Position is a constructive way to rest.

In Constructive Rest, we lie on our backs with knees bent, feet either flat on the floor, or lower legs resting on a low couch or chair.

To make sure that the head is not falling back, we can place a book or small pillow under the skull, making sure to give the neck space, so it can lengthen.

From the head, we can breathe along the length of the spine, all the way down to the tail – spine, like a string of pearls, resting.

Arms can rest on the floor or on the belly; we can let the shoulders fall open and breathe along the length of the arms, beyond the fingertips.

We can watch the rise and fall of the belly on each in and out breath,

Letting thighs and lower legs hang from the knees, we can let the thighs sink deep into soft hip sockets.

We can watch heels drop and the front of the feet open, like fans, letting our feet feel the support of the floor rising.

Support rises from the floor into the whole resting body, so we can let go of weight and spend some time, observing our breathing.

As your resting deepens, begin to scan through your body, asking yourself the question:

Where do I seem a bit easy? when you locate a place, spend a few moments breathing into this place;

then, when you're ready, scan through your body again, asking yourself the question:

Where else do I seem a bit easy? when you locate another place, spend a few moments breathing into this place,

Do this a number of times. You can say the question out loud, you can whisper it, or you can say it silently, to yourself.

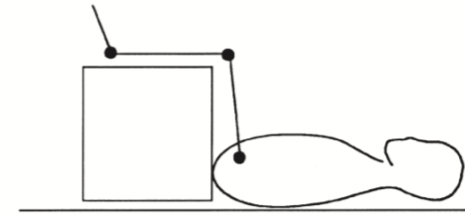
When you're done, take a moment before rolling onto your side and pushing yourself into sitting, if you're doing it during the day.

If you're doing it at night, you may even have fallen asleep.

(The wording of the question, 'Where do I seem a bit easy?' is inspired by The Cycle, the initial daily practice of Primal Alexander, the teaching system developed by Mio Morales.)



Photo of Barbara Clark taken in the Boston Natural Posture Studio, circa 1925.



Drawing from Barbara Clark's 'Children's Book' (from 'A Kinesthetic Legacy' by Pamela Matt)

The daily practice of Constructive Rest

Spend at least 10 minutes a day exploring Constructive Rest. Choose when and where you do it.

Good times are before falling asleep at night, or on waking up in the morning - it's an excellent way to end or begin the day.

You can also do it as the beginning of your warm up before training, or at the end of a period of moving.

Keep track of the times you spend in Constructive Rest by recording when and for how long you do it each day, and add a short comment.

We'll discuss your observations and questions when we meet online on April 24th.

See you 09:00 – 10:30 on April 24, 2020

Constructive Rest Diary		15 – 23 April, 2020	
	when	where	comments
Wednesday April 15			
Thursday April 16			
Friday April 17			
Saturday April 18			
Sunday April 19			
Monday April 20			
Tuesday April 21			
Wednesday April 22			
Thursday April 23			

