

EYEBODY

*The Art of Integrating Eye, Brain and Body —
and letting go of glasses forever*

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INTRODUCTION

Discovering eye, brain and body connections

Wearing glasses was for me a way of life — and a burden! I grabbed them as soon as I got out of bed, I used them while showering (was I checking to see whether I was really wet?), I needed them for getting dressed, and at school for both close-up reading and to see the blackboard clearly. I used special frames for swimming, running and other sports and they got in the way when I was first dating. I was totally dependent on them. I never questioned whether I could function without glasses; it never entered my mind.

I seemed to be equally dependent on stuttering and poor breathing, on my slumped posture and sore back. I was filled with a constant sense of anxiety. Certainly all my efforts to correct my stuttering came to nothing — in fact it got progressively worse. It never occurred to me that there might be links between my short-sightedness and astigmatism and my speech and breathing problems, my poor posture and back problems, the all-pervasive sense of anxiety I felt — and even my inability to learn and retain information.

To avoid compulsory military service in Germany I trained my eyes to get worse — and went through two pairs of increasingly strong lenses within six months, in the end getting what I wanted: I was exempted from military service because of my eyesight.

If I was able to worsen my eyes, was it possible to learn how to improve them? Years later I started to explore this and found the answer was 'yes'. I am very grateful for the guidance of the late Dr Janet Goodrich (1942–1999), whose teaching combined the Bates Method, principles of Reichian therapy and Brain Gym activities. Through my work with her I was able to free myself of prescription lenses in just 18 months — and from there discovered the links between my short-sightedness and lower back pain, my astigmatism and speech disability.

Being able to let go of glasses — although enormously freeing in itself

— was only the beginning. One day in 1992 I became physically aware of my cornea and acutely aware of sensation there. I found I could tighten and relax my cornea at will and noticed that my chest area responded. When I tightened my cornea my chest tightened and slumped. When I thought of releasing my cornea, my upper body started to straighten up and lengthen out and my breathing improved markedly. As long as I was 'in' my cornea I could do this over and over again, without fail. It was years before I understood the full significance of this experience.

In the years that followed I discovered that within the visual system resides a map of the human body in its entirety. I call this the *Eyebody Patterns*. The eyes themselves are similarly linked to corresponding structures in the brain. In addition, the visual system, including the eyes and their supporting neural structures, contains links to our autonomic nervous system (the reptilian brain), our emotions (the limbic brain) and our ability to think and reason (the neocortex).

Seeing is much more than meets the eyes. In fact, we do not see with our eyes; seeing happens in the brain. The eyes are merely the organs the brain uses to receive light.

All visual dysfunctions, like short-sightedness, far-sightedness, astigmatism, middle-aged vision (where your arms become too short to read the newspaper), glaucoma, cataracts and crossed-eyes can be traced back to corresponding dysfunctions in the eyes, body, and brain.

Many years experience with thousands of people in workshops, small groups and private sessions has confirmed the reliability of the interconnecting patterns, and enabled me to help people like you coordinate and integrate their entire visual system.

By consciously connecting the various components of the visual system, eye, brain and body functions become integrated. This strengthened visual system not only changes the physical structures of the eye over time but also integrates emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of our being. As the visual system becomes more coordinated the need for glasses or contact lenses is lessened and eventually disappears — glasses can become a thing of the past.

Let us find some common ground before I take you on this journey of discovery. We begin from the standpoint that as human beings we can operate at our highest potential by not interfering with our own natural functioning — optimal functioning is part of our natural mechanism.

By natural I mean 'in accordance with nature', or 'as nature intended', not habitual. Most of us get into habits that may or may not benefit us.

Our habits seem ‘natural’ to us, but that may not be the case. For change in counterproductive habits to occur there has to be an awareness and understanding of what we are doing — and where we would like to go. In terms of vision, this means understanding how we can function in a more efficient, effective, holistic way.

Our brains have the capacity to think outside our habitual patterns. What we usually call ‘thinking’ occurs in the frontal lobes of the neocortex and is what I call ‘two-dimensional thinking’. But there is another sort of ‘thinking’ that has its origins toward the back of the neocortex, an area I call the upper visual cortex. I associate this area with conscious, three-dimensional thinking. By activating this kind of thinking from this part of the brain I am able to apply my mind in a non-habitual way. Changing habits is, as you probably well know, not easy. It requires commitment. But we can learn to use our brain in a different way.

To illustrate what I mean by commitment, imagine you are in a new partnership. At first there is the honeymoon phase, and any frustrations or criticisms of your partner are overlooked. Then little things can start to bother you. Commitment is needed to overcome these ups and downs. As one workshop participant in France succinctly put it: “Commitment is doing what I said I would do, long after the feeling I had when I said it has passed.” Feelings change constantly; commitment can continue to grow as the process unfolds.

The ideas of Frederick Mathias Alexander (1869–1955), whose work has made a vital contribution to humanity, have been integral in the development of my own method and personal process. Part of my earlier professional training was to become a teacher of the Alexander Technique. Alexander, an actor, solved a voice problem through observation and mental direction. He went on to apply the same techniques to improve other difficulties like poor posture and concentration. Through my work with the Alexander Technique I started observing my own habits of thinking and doing in relationship to the process of seeing.

I also wish to acknowledge the work of William H Bates (1860–1931), a New York ophthalmologist whose work is the precursor of modern natural vision improvement methods. His willingness to question the need for glasses and even visual dysfunction itself opened up a debate which continues to this day.

In a sense I am continuing on a journey begun by writer Aldous Huxley (1894–1963). A seeker of truth in many modalities, Huxley was a student of both Alexander and the Bates method. In his elegant, comprehensive

book *The Art of Seeing*, he synthesizes Alexander's principles and Bates' practical methodology and belief system in a way which seems so natural that it comes as a shock that such thinking continues to be unorthodox over half a century later.

My findings come out of years of personal experiences and investigations in experiential anatomy and physiology. I am not a neurologist or neuroscientist, nor am I medically trained. I hope that in years to come scientific studies will be undertaken to support the validity of my findings. But meanwhile let's explore what I have learned working with myself and with the thousands of people I have seen from many different backgrounds, cultures and countries.

This book was inspired by many of my students and clients, who wanted to read more about my developing work and by numerous people interested in the subject even though they had never experienced first hand the processes involved.

The first edition of this book provides an overview both for the interested reader and those already engaged with the Eyebody Method. It may also offer some insights to my colleagues working in the field of eyesight and vision improvement and somatics. It is a work in progress. As I continue to discover new relationships and deepen my understanding, my findings will be included in subsequent editions.

A personal story: Letting go of glasses forever

Let me tell you how I threw away my glasses, learned to see naturally and came to understand the connections between eye, brain and body.

I was born in Germany in the late 1950s. When I was three my mother — noticing I frequently tripped over — took me to an eye specialist. Poor eyesight runs in the family; both my mother and father are short-sighted and astigmatic. So, it turned out, was I. There I was, at age three, with my first glasses — those little ones for little children. Aside from being stuck behind a pair of specs, I was stuttering badly too. Apparently I took a long time to learn to talk, and when I did, it all came out in a jumble.

The glasses became progressively stronger and thicker. Sometimes I needed two new prescriptions a year. How I dreaded those visits: being seated in front of a monstrous machine, the cold drops which made everything blurry... I felt so vulnerable, and somehow invaded. “Is this line clearer?” the specialist would ask as he changed the lenses. I’d quickly say: “Yes, that’s clearer” — anything to be finished and out of there!

Now imagine me as a teenager, stuttering, and boxed in by glasses. My posture had started to slump, with the lower back curved and the shoulders narrowed in. I had learned to manage in life without being able to see or speak clearly — things most of us take for granted. Do you know anybody who stutters? The problem with stuttering is that the listener knows what you want to say before you get it out. It wasn’t easy for me to relate to friends. I restricted my friendships to people who had enough patience to wait for me to speak. Others I avoided.

If I can make my eyesight worse, can I improve it too?

In those days military service in Germany was compulsory for males. I was nearing 18, the usual age for going into the army, but being a pacifist,

didn't want to enlist. My older brother told me that if his vision had been a bit worse he could have avoided military service. Maybe I could get out of it that way, I thought... but a visit to the eye specialist assured me my vision was adequate. As my birthday came closer I became quite depressed and collapsed in my body. I wrote the appropriate letters to appeal for a social service exemption and at the same time began consciously trying to make my vision worse. In six short months I succeeded; I had to have two new prescriptions as my vision went from bad to worse.

Finally the dreaded day came for the army medical examination. I was nervous and shy as I waited with a bunch of other guys my age. The eye test came first. Immediately afterwards the optometrist said, "I'm really sorry, but you cannot be accepted with such poor eyesight." It was like winning the lottery! The months of slumping and feeling sorry for myself disappeared instantly. I was given an official letter stating I was unable, on account of my vision, to perform military service. When I inquired about alternative social service duties I was told that if I didn't qualify for the army I would not qualify for social service either. On the way home I suddenly thought, if I can train my vision to get worse, perhaps I can improve it, too? But you know how youngsters are. It was years before I gave any further thought to improving my eyesight.

I completed my formal education and set off travelling: Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and then India. If you have visited India you know how different from the Western way of life everything there is. The Indian sense of the spiritual, especially the daily submersion in prayers and worship, was extraordinary to a young German traveller. After several months there I became very sick — nothing unusual in India. My stomach didn't know whether it was up or down, and my intestines and liver didn't like the experience either. It took months to recuperate from hepatitis, resting up in a little hut on the beach. I drank nothing but boiled water and ate only a little rice and fresh fruit. My nervous system slowed down tremendously. It was as if I was letting go of the accumulation of years of frenetic Western life. I ended up feeling refreshed and energized, and well enough to travel again.

The extraordinary art of seeing

As I settled into the last seat on a local bus, something very strange happened. Seeing from the back of my skull and the middle of my brain, my surroundings became completely clear and three-dimensional and

the colours extraordinarily vivid; I felt I was seeing inside people and clearly perceiving their true nature. I experienced a wonderful mental clarity. I was completely connected, merging with this 3-D world. It was an experience I was not able to switch off even if I had wanted to. I felt peaceful and calm, yet emotionally totally present and alive. This experience lasted the rest of the day.

Next morning this way of seeing and being was still as fresh and alive as the previous day. Whatever it was, it persisted for months and I enjoyed every moment of it. Every day I woke with this clarity of vision, thought and focus, and a heightened awareness of myself and my environment. No sense of fear, anxiety or anguish, no wandering thoughts, no judgements of myself or others. During this time I felt fearless, yet extraordinarily loving, kind and well connected. I felt totally present, content with myself and my surroundings. It was a completely mind-altering experience — without drugs. I was in slow motion, seeing both the big picture and the little details at the same time. I was still stuttering, I was still slumping, and I was still completely reliant on my glasses, but somehow my awareness transcended these shortcomings. One morning I woke up knowing I would one day see clearly without my glasses. It was a very deep sense of knowing: *One day I will be able to see.*

I continued my travels in Asia, still seeing with this heightened sense of awareness, fearless and at peace. Then one day it ended as abruptly as it had begun. I was resting on a hilltop and had closed my eyes to focus on the sounds around me. When I opened my eyes minutes later, everything had changed. The sense of aliveness and connectedness I had felt only moments before had gone. Gone with the flick of an eyelid. How could this happen? And why? I was flooded with emotions. I felt angry and betrayed. All my old fears and anxieties had returned. I cried.

Months of grief followed. I came to really understand the saying, ‘the higher you go the farther you fall.’ At the time I had no idea the impact the experiences of the previous seven months would have on my entire life: that I would one day learn to consciously access this quality of seeing and that I would teach the techniques to others.

By the time I reached New Zealand I’d been on the road for three years. I was tired of travelling and decided to stay.

Out of the slump and into the Alexander teacher training

The couple caught my eye at a healing festival. They had something in their walk — grace, lightness and lift that I certainly didn’t have. I told

them, stuttering, how much I admired their walking style. To my surprise they immediately commented on my stuttering. People were usually too polite to comment, and I had managed to avoid thinking about my stuttering for years. They told me that if I read a book called *The Use of the Self* by FM Alexander I would find clues to manage my stuttering, as well as improve my walking and general coordination. I went to the library and borrowed the book. I didn't understand a lot of it, partly because my English was still in its infancy. But I was intrigued by the chapter on stuttering, where Alexander wrote about helping someone to overcome stuttering and improve his general health. I wanted to know more.

A few months later I was in Sydney, Australia, attending a weekend workshop on the Alexander Technique. I was fascinated. By the end of the weekend I felt much freer sitting, standing and walking, and my back ached far less. I also felt a tingle of anticipation: maybe there was something in the Alexander principles which could take me back to that longed-for way of seeing and state of being I had experienced in India. In India it had just happened, but maybe I could find my way there again, step-by-step...

A few weeks later I had started the three year Alexander Technique teacher training. A journalist who interviewed me for an article about the technique a couple of months into our training asked why I was participating. I told her I hoped the technique would help me overcome my lifelong stutter. A few days later her article was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. She mentioned me in the article, concluding that the work had already helped me, as I had hardly stuttered during the interview. When I read this I realized how much my speech had improved without my noticing, and I felt much more at ease communicating with people. The impulse to stutter was still there, but it had lessened and over time the pattern dissolved more and more.

How did this happen? Remember I was slumping really badly: this meant my voice box was being pressed down and my whole structure and gut area was slumped and tight. The Alexander Technique helped me recognize this and undo the downward slumping. This in turn allowed my whole body, including my voice, to function as it should.

During my training, the American Alexander teacher Marjory Barstow (1899–1997), who visited Australia for a month every year, became a source of inspiration. She was then in her late 80s and still very dynamic. She had an extraordinary ability to communicate Alexander principles

with clarity and understanding and some of her communication skills are very much present with me to this day.

After graduating from the three year Sydney training I stayed on to work with William Brenner and Rosemary Chance. I learned a great deal about working in groups and presenting to large audiences. This time was vital in the development of my speech.

The conscious experience of the blur

One day in 1989 I decided I wanted a pair of contact lenses. With contacts no one would know I couldn't see properly, so I went and got a prescription. But in the days of waiting for them I began to ask myself whether it might be possible to improve my eyesight the way I had my speech and posture. My experience in India came flooding back to me — the sureness of that moment when I knew one day I would see clearly without my glasses. I felt once again the truth of it.

The following weekend I attended a fundamental course in Natural Vision Improvement lead by Dr Janet Goodrich. I was filled with doubts. Was it really possible to improve severe myopia and astigmatism? I had only 40 percent vision in my right eye with the strongest lenses and my left eye was only marginally better. Could I reduce the strength of my glasses — perhaps do without them altogether? The room was full, everyone with different vision problems. Some had been myopic from early childhood, others needed reading glasses for presbyopia after turning 40; some were coping with squints or the effects of eye operations in their youth, others were considering eye surgery; there were participants with astigmatism, glaucoma, cataracts and retinitis pigmentosa. Here were a whole range of visual malfunctions gathered in one big room.

In the first few minutes Janet asked us to take our glasses off. "Welcome to the blur," she said. And she was right. I could only see 10 centimetres in front of my face. The rest was a total blur. I could distinguish no colours or forms, only light and darkness. I felt alone in the room, totally cut off from everything and everybody, yet with a strong sense that here was something to learn, something connected to that previous knowledge that one day I would see without my glasses. The weekend was one of many discoveries, not the least being an experience of my own eyes. I had had no sense of the eyes behind my glasses! That first weekend workshop was certainly an 'eye opener' to me...

The first day without glasses

On the Monday after the workshop I was sitting calmly in the suburban train taking me to the Alexander studio at Milson's Point across Sydney Harbour Bridge, when I suddenly went into shock. I felt paralysed and bewildered. I realized I had forgotten my glasses! For the first time in my life I had forgotten my glasses. I must have got out of bed without putting glasses on my nose. I must have had my shower without my glasses, I must have breakfasted without them, walked to the train station and caught the right train in the right direction without them — and found an empty seat on the train in rush hour. All of this without even thinking about glasses or being in the blur. Well, I was certainly aware of the blur now! I would have to go back and get them. Then I calmed down and remembered my intention to see naturally without glasses: I would continue on my day's journey without them. I spent the 40-minute train trip busily 'palming' and 'sunning', two of the vision activities I had just learned. But acute anxiety and fear kept surfacing. I felt naked and vulnerable without my glasses.

If you have ever taken a train over Sydney Harbour Bridge you will know that the train clatters as it crosses the bridge. That was my sign to hop out at the next station. I hurtled down the carriage, waiting in my blurriness for the door to open. Then I had to negotiate the steps on to the platform. I don't think I have ever walked down steps so consciously. Every step was a new experience. Leaving the station, I hugged the shop walls until I reached a flower shop, stopping there to get my bearings. I knew I had to conquer the next 30 metres to reach the pedestrian crossing; the studio was on the other side of a busy road. When I finally arrived at the crossing all I could see were dark moving shadows. I was acutely aware of danger and decided to wait and cross with someone else. I noticed someone standing beside me, then suddenly they were gone. I directed all my attention on the next person who came up beside me. This time I was ready and made it safely across the road. The usual five-minute walk to my studio had taken 20 — but I had made it.

Later in the day a colleague mentioned she had seen me at the pedestrian crossing and that I had seemed strange. What was I doing? I explained what had happened and my commitment to see without glasses. Only a few of my students commented on the absence of my glasses. Some people noticed how pale I was around the rims of my eyes.

During phone conversations that day I realised I was unable to hear clearly. I wondered how seeing and hearing could be associated.

By the end of the day I was totally exhausted, but very pleased too. The whole day had been filled with new experiences and different perspectives. My commitment not to wear glasses grew. It was pleasurable to rediscover mundane activities in a fresh way. It meant staying awake and being creative.

The process of letting go: transition glasses

It was 18 months before I no longer needed my glasses. I had gone back to the optometrist for 'transition glasses', as Dr Goodrich called them, rather than proceed with contact lenses. Transition glasses are reduced in dioptries, safe and legal to drive with, and support the vision improvement process by giving the retina and fovea centralis more freedom to function. The problem with contact lenses is that once they are in, that's it — they stay in all day, or even for a few days. Glasses have the advantage of at least being readily removable. I needed to 'sell' the idea of the transition glasses to the optometrist. When I left with a pair about 2.25 dioptries weaker than the ones I had gone in with, he said, "you are the first person I've had in my shop who hasn't wanted to see clearly!"

The glasses were indeed blurry to look through in the beginning. But by the end of the first week I was amazed at how clearly I could see with them. In just one week my eyes and vision had dramatically improved.

The next step was buying a chain from the pharmacy to hang my glasses around my neck. Removing them frequently allowed my eyes to rest, avoiding the constant staring through the centre point of the lenses and giving my natural vision a chance to be active. Gradually I came to a point where it was pleasant to be without glasses. When I wanted to see particularly clearly I treated myself and put them on. I had to remember to keep taking them off rather than leave them on out of habit. This process helped me to become aware of when I needed to wear glasses, when I didn't need them, and when I wished to wear them. It made me aware that I had a choice.

During the process of letting go of my prescription glasses I used pinhole glasses regularly as a tool for intrinsic eye exercise. Pinhole glasses have little holes stamped into black plastic 'lenses'. They allowed me to see clearly watching TV or movies, reading or writing, while at the same time exercising the inside of my eyes.

Walking down the road without glasses was interesting. If I thought I saw someone I knew I would try and work out who it was, then put on my glasses to confirm. After some weeks my guess rate was high, yet I still felt I had to put on those specs to make sure I was right. I realised how closely related trust and vision are. It was time to change the habit of doubting what I saw and leave my glasses off.

As the process of letting go of glasses continued both my physical and mental vision improved, assisted by two months of intensive professional training in Vision Improvement with Dr Goodrich in Germany. During this training I visited an optometrist for a lens reduction. The optometrist couldn't believe what she saw; the reading on her machine was different from what I could actually see on the reading chart, she said repeatedly. This couldn't be the case... By the time she came round to accepting the difference it was lunchtime. Traditionally every shop in rural Germany breaks for lunch from noon to 2.30 p.m., and I arranged to return after lunch to finish the tests. When I returned I felt sleepy and was a little slumped. The optometrist was annoyed that I could not read what I had been able to read in the morning.

In the end I left without a new prescription. I experienced how eyesight fluctuates and changes in response to many stimuli. I have learned to detect these fluctuations, notice changes and apply principles to improve where I am at any given moment. This is a step-by-step approach, bringing step-by-step success.

After my professional vision training I returned to New Zealand. Friends of mine had been building a remarkable centre for adult learning, the Mana Retreat Centre on the Coromandel Peninsula, and we regularly played volleyball there. At that time I was a liability because I could see only a metre without my glasses, which I didn't wear. Some of my friends would say, "Why don't you put glasses on?" or make other comments which certainly didn't support my vision-improving process. I had to avoid the trap of doing what other people thought I should do. Creating healthy boundaries was crucial, otherwise these passing comments could cause me to abandon my original intentions and lead to a feeling of 'I'm not good enough' or 'I can't do this'.

How easy it is to abandon a good intention and continue with an old habit. How easy for paralysing fear or anxiety to creep in. During my vision improvement process I had a sense of changing fear into fearlessness by remaining motivated and committed. And, day by day, step-by-step I

succeeded. My vision and volleyball playing improved rapidly and consistently and the comments ceased. I felt inspired.

The commitment to let go of glasses completely

A few months later I made the next big leap. I took the transition glasses off the chain around my neck, put them in a case and stored it in my pocket. Now the glasses weren't so readily available. It took at least five seconds to fiddle around and get them out of the case and onto my nose. Five seconds for a short-sighted person who likes things done instantly is a long time — about the same time it took to focus on and see an object without my glasses. The lesson was to stop and see, rather than have my glasses do the seeing for me. The process became easier and easier.

The day came when I was ready for the supermarket test. I wanted to buy groceries without using my glasses. This was quite a test because, as you know, supermarkets have row upon row of thousands of products, most of which you will never buy. I drove to the supermarket and left the glasses in their case in the car. I knew I had to be creative to get what I wanted. In my mind I started to visualize the butter, bread and milk. I used my vision actively, found the items easily, placed them in my trolley, walked to the cashier, paid for the items and left. From then on I was confident to go shopping without glasses.

As the process continued I recommitted to my intention daily, and sometimes several times a day. I didn't need glasses for any of the activities I enjoyed. And what are 18 months in relation to 27 years of being completely dependent on glasses every day?

In 1991 I let go of my glasses forever. At first my eyesight and vision fluctuated but they stabilized when I discovered and worked with the connections integrating eye, brain and body functions. For over a decade this journey of discovery has continued.