

The Pelvis

please refer to the accompanying colour plate

The pelvis forms the foundation for the spine. Good erect use of the spine is dependent upon a balanced transmission of weight from the spine through the pelvis onto the hip joints and/or the sitting bones. As you can see from the illustration, sitting on the sitting bones does not place any weight on the tail-bone (*coccyx*) and the hip joints and thigh bones (*femurs*) are suspended above the seat of the chair. Your teacher may sometimes encourage you to notice this suspended articulation of the leg by moving your leg for you whilst you are sitting.

Many Alexander students quickly grow to dislike upsetting the balance of the pelvis by, for example, sitting with their knees crossed or standing with their weight slumped onto one hip. However, good use of the pelvis is far more subtle than these purely mechanical considerations.

Eastern systems of self development, such as the classical Martial Arts, place primary importance on the balance of the pelvis, encouraging a specific awareness of “centring” your energy in the pelvic region, at or near the body’s normal centre of gravity. This has given rise to some confusion, as a contradiction appears to exist between the Alexander idea of “going up” and the Eastern idea of centring.

I would like to suggest that there are, in fact, no contradictions, only complementary ways of describing the same thing.

For example, the startle pattern (normally thought of in the Alexander Technique as pulling down) is described in the Martial Arts as “pulling the centre up” (most people will be familiar with the “stomach in the mouth” feeling of an extreme startle).

As I have observed before, a well coordinated human is (among other things) a counterbalanced suspension structure which depends upon opposition or antagonistic pulls between different parts to facilitate balance and movement. In the light of this information it would perhaps be better to describe poor use as involving a loss of antagonism (or two-way stretch) between the head and the pelvis rather than (simplistically) “pulling down” or “pulling up”.

In practical terms there are, perhaps, two main principles to consider in the use of the pelvis:

- Various parts of the pelvic region¹ can be used as references away from which to direct the head, setting up an antagonistic pull which maintains the lengthening of the back.
- If the pelvis is to be used as a stable foundation for the spine it must remain “underneath you”.

This idea is complicated by the fact that the back need not be vertical in order to maintain the desired relationship between the skull, spine and pelvis. Pulling the pelvis away from underneath you (examples of how one might do this are shown in the illustration) is a little like having a rug pulled away from under your feet – it devastates your balance and leaves little option but to respond by stiffening the neck, disturbing the balance of the head and shortening and narrowing the back.

As with any other situation which may evoke a startle-like response, the way to deal with an imbalance of the pelvis is through the primary control, utilising inhibition and the primary directions.

1 For example: sitting bones, pubic bone, coccyx, the muscles of the pelvic floor, the body’s normal centre of gravity, and specific Eastern variations on the “point of centre”. Your teacher will, no doubt, suggest which of these (or others) might be appropriate.

2 In practice, this seems to be the essence of the Eastern concept of “moving from the centre”.