

Buoyancy and Direction

- Swimming and The Alexander Technique –

by Satoko Kajita

Swimming is my daily activity and I consider that it includes so many elements of the Alexander Technique and can give me the great opportunity to experience and think them deeply. This time I would like to show one of my experiments in floating in terms of buoyancy and direction. In contrast with swimming in the specific styles such as a freestyle or breaststroke, just floating in the water brings me so many sensations of being free physically and mentally, and profound thoughts about the direction in the Alexander Technique and the inseparable relation between buoyancy and gravity.

First of all, I experimented in the following way: I just started to float, then did not try to keep floating, and gradually tried to lose my whole strength and weight while continuing to exhale. Then as a result of gravity I started to slowly sink to the bottom of the pool. It seemed similar to falling down on the ground on purpose without any strength to support the body. At that moment I felt that I was pulled down by gravity and there was no opposite power against it. However, unless I were to have an oxygen mask, I could not stay at the bottom of the pool being pulled by gravity for such a long time. I would need to inhale. In this moment I discovered that buoyancy and my direction helped me go up and out of the water to inhale. When I felt the need for oxygen I just used my direction upwards and the direction gave me a natural buoyancy, without any strong tension or power from my body. I could go up and take a breath. There was no struggle to go up and I felt as if I just had been led by buoyancy.

This experiment impressed me strongly, so secondly I tried to keep floating, paying attention to use my direction and experience the buoyancy. I started to float by stretching my arms forward without any kicks, and then I used my direction forward and up, thinking that my head and the top of the spine were leading my whole torso and legs. The direction and my thought that I just wanted to float with no strength created the buoyancy, and I could float for a long time in the condition of lengthening my whole spine and without any struggle. Vertical buoyancy from the water under my body supported my whole body. In the same way, while lying down on the table during the Alexander Technique lesson, my own buoyancy lets my body be upward to the ceiling, and my direction to go forward and up keeps my body horizontal. That is to say, buoyancy and the direction supported and crossed each other vertically and horizontally, and they brought me the most powerful, pure and soft buoyancy in the water. On the contrary, if I lose my direction and have some tension in my body, I cannot achieve buoyancy such as I experienced this time, and soon would be standing while being pulled by gravity. I can point out that it depends on the quality of my direction to make the best of buoyancy.

Thirdly, after I experienced good direction and attained enough buoyancy as mentioned above, I tried to swim using the breaststroke. As a result, without any tension in my body and any strength to move my arms and kick, I could swim so much faster than usual and did not even feel any fatigue after a long period of swimming. I did not feel any trouble with breathing and I just enjoyed buoyancy so well, as if I had melted to the water.

As I look into the meaning of “buoyancy” in *the Longman Advanced American Dictionary*, the third meaning says “a feeling of happiness and a belief that you can deal with problems easily.” This is so interesting and remarkable because what it means is the same feeling as I get when I experience literal buoyancy which means “the ability of an object to float” and “the power of a liquid to make an object float.” As a trainee of the Alexander Technique, I believe that I am so fortunate to get the opportunity to feel the qualities of buoyancy included in each of the meanings above, and would like to put this experience to good account in the Alexander Technique and my life on the earth.