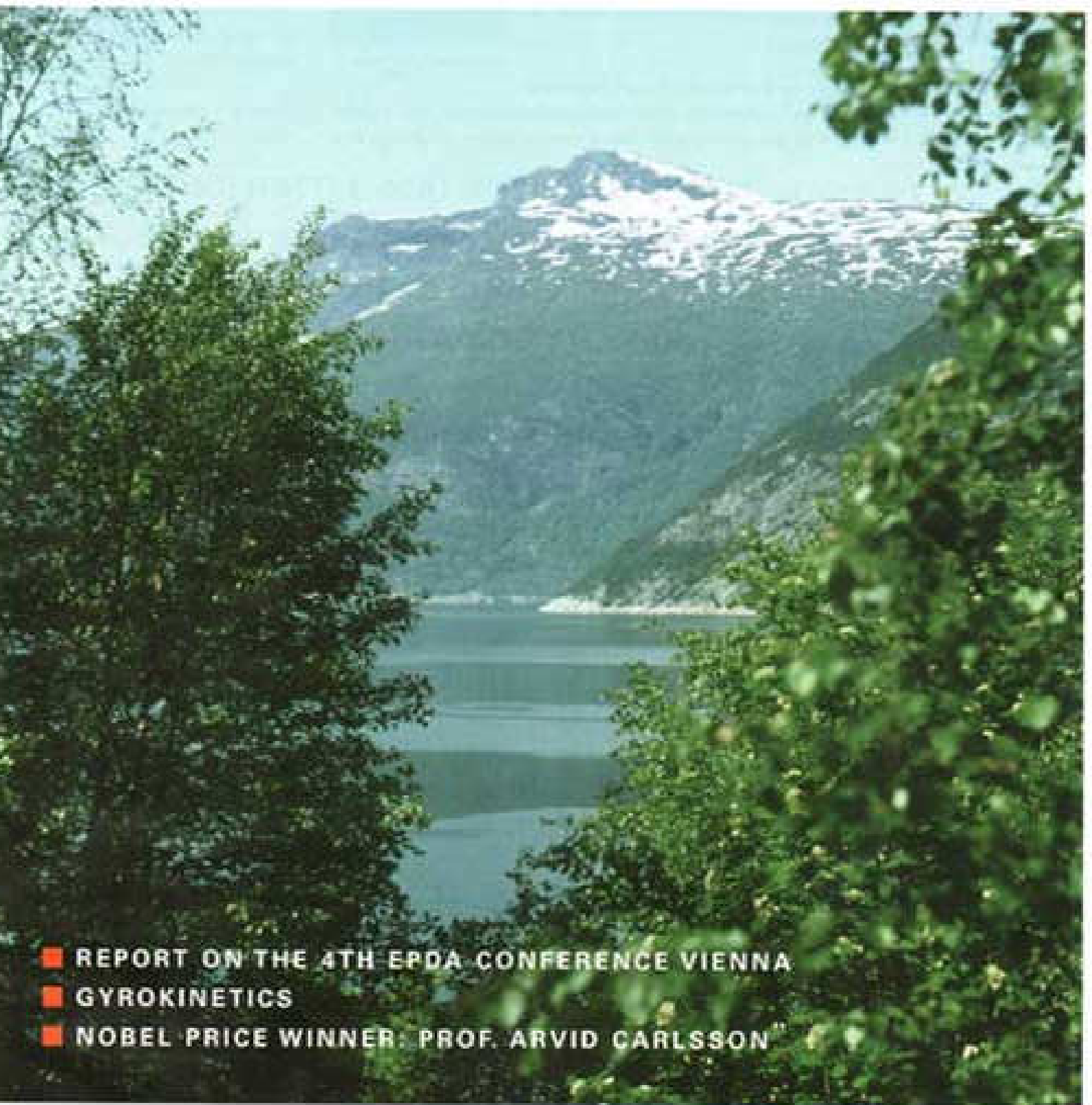


EPDA magazine



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GYROKINETICS: Re-Learning How to be Healthy

By Alex Kerten, Israel



Alex Kerten

I know that Parkinson patients can improve their condition.

For the past 25 years that I've been working with patients, with a special focus on movement disorders, I have seen many Parkinson patients improve and regain their optimistic view of life as their symptoms become milder and milder. There is no magic to the process—I haven't invented any magic pill that alleviates the symptoms associated with Parkinson. Through hard work and commitment patients can learn how to regain lost functionality and reverse some if not most of the deterioration caused by Parkinson.

During a recent annual gathering of the Israeli Parkinson association I had the privilege of giving a lecture in which I shared my insights from years of using the Gyrokinetic method in working with Parkinson patients.

In this article I will try to share with you the essence of that lecture. I will begin by outlining the process in which a healthy person, with no symptoms of Parkinson, becomes what I call 'a Professional Parkinsonian'.

I will then describe the way we use Gyrokinetics to help the person move from being a 'professional Parkinsonian' to being a 'Healthy person with Parkinson'.

Building a habit, or 'how to become a Professional Parkinsonian'

The first time a Parkinson patient becomes aware that something is not as usual is when a symptom first appears. The symptom, be it an involuntary movement in the leg, a tremble in the fingers or a spasmodic contraction of muscles in the foot is often mild and is ignored by the patient who hopes that it will 'go away', but it doesn't. As the days go by, the symptom starts to cause difficulty in performing daily work. It might be harder to hold the pen steady when writing, to hold the spoon when eating soup or to type on the computer keyboard at work. These symptoms affect not only work but a lot of other activities, including sports and hobbies, which become harder and less enjoyable to do.

The symptoms aren't an isolated physical phenomena; from the very beginning they are accompanied by emotional and mental stress. At the very heart of it is the terrible feeling of lack of control over one's own body. The body, MY body, which I took for granted, which always carried my commands, suddenly acts as if it has a mind and rules of its own. Suddenly my body becomes something different than 'me'. And 'it' seems to have the upper hand, forcing me to adjust myself to its caprices.

What is going on? How worse can it get? Will I have to quit my work? What will I do then? How will I keep my standard of living? What will others say when they start to notice-what will I tell them?

These questions create worry and anxiety that consume energy which could be better used in an effort to regain a healthy state rather than collaborate with the syndromes of an illness.

The combination of the mild but nagging physical symptoms and the emotional and mental stress, anxiety and uncertainty transform the patient's perception of himself. He no longer perceives himself as a healthy, balanced person, but as an ill person, a Parkinson patient.

In Gyro-kinetics we say that at this stage the person becomes 'an Amateur Parkinsonian'.

But it doesn't stop here. The increasing inconvenience of performing various movements, coupled with fear of what others will say when they notice, naturally lead the patient to limit the set of movements he uses. Instead of talking animatedly, with a variety of gestures, the trembling hand is kept in the pocket or the two hands are held together in front of the chest. Activities that require highly coordinated movement are abandoned because they become a source of frustration rather than a source of joy. By limiting the repertoire of movements used, the patient can manage to hide it from others. Some patients learn how to hide their symptoms so well that even their friends and people who are in daily contact with them are unaware that something is wrong. As the limited movement repertoire becomes a habit many options for movement are forgotten. At the same time, anger towards the body and its 'betrayal' further increases, often leading to a feeling of being 'separated' from the body by decreased body awareness and increased concentration on mental processes and an 'analytic' attitude.

Those reactions further exacerbate the symptoms to the point where they start to affect body systems other than the ones in which the symptoms were originally manifested. The imbalanced functioning

of the muscles may lead to changes in respiration like a shallow, 'dog-like' breathing; problems in the digestive system, such as constipation or diarrhea may appear; emotions become more stormy, with frequent mood swings, increased aggressiveness or apathy, even in people who used to be very calm and quite. The person loses his ability to fully relax. When the syndrome affects multiple body systems and the emotional balance of the patient, Gyro-Kinetics practitioners say that the patient is now 'a Practicing Parkinsonian'.

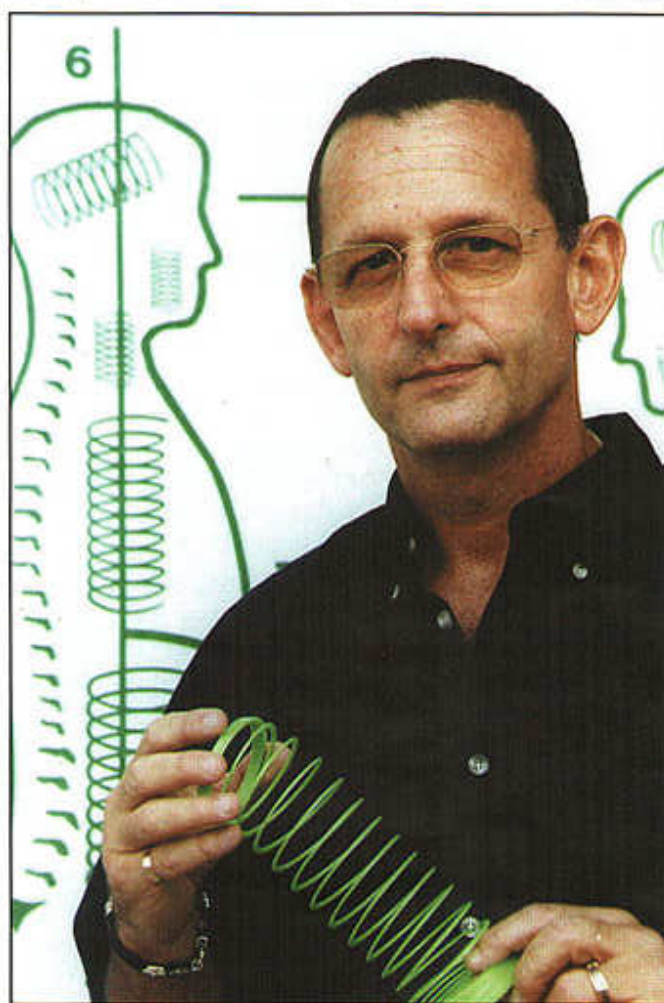
The initial mild symptom, that has put the system out of balance, started a vicious cycle where physical symptoms exacerbate as a result of emotional reactions and physical adjustments made by the individual, and vice versa. As the physical condition continues to deteriorate, the patient gets closer and closer to becoming a 'Professional Parkinsonian'. As a professional in any other trade, being a professional Parkinsonian requires the patient to be one with Parkinson: He loses his identity as a healthy person and his memory of himself as a healthy person. The symptoms feel as if they were there forever—they become an integral part of him. It becomes hard to even imagine oneself without the symptoms, as if they were there forever. In fact, the patient can only imagine the symptoms getting worse—as they did in the past—never better. His awareness of his body becomes limited, the person becoming less sensitive especially in the parts that are most afflicted. His self-esteem is low; he feels defeated, pessimistic and in the hands of forces bigger than him. He feels out of control of his own body. He feels there is nothing he can do, therefore he forfeits his responsibility to his health, often putting it in the hands

of the doctor. He thinks, 'if there is nothing I can do, and the course of the disease is not in my hands, how can I be held responsible for my health?'

Breaking the cycle, the Gyro-kinetic way

In Gyrokinetics we try to break this self-feeding cycle of habit building. We do so by countering many of the habits learned through the process of becoming a professional Parkinsonian.

To do so we work on several levels:



in the mental level, we help the person understand what's going on in his body and adopt a curious attitude towards his condition, essentially investigating his own lifestyle and habits to find out whether something he is doing is contributing to his illness. In the physical level, we help the patient re-tune and re-balance the different body systems, bringing them back closer to their homeostatic state, and

increase his movement repertoire as much as possible. Working on all levels simultaneously helps the patient make the Gyro-Kinetic techniques part of his daily life and not stay as isolated 'exercises'.

The therapeutic process is comprised of a series of sessions of the following types:

• 'Active' sessions

These sessions help the patient increase his movement repertoire. The patient is taught several pre-arranged sets of movements, adopted from the martial arts, which are repeatedly practiced to the sound of Jazz and rhythmic music. These sequences of movements, while simple and easy to perform, provide a complete workout to the musculo-skeletal system, helping patients to increase their kinesthetic awareness and create new neural pathways in the brain.

• 'Passive' sessions

These 45-minute sessions help the patient relax and re-balance the different body systems. The patient lies on the table, and is instructed to listen to the music in the background and relax. The Gyro-Kinetics practitioner uses a special physical therapeutic massage that includes various forms of touch to create vibrations that propagate through the patient's body, stimulating the vascular, nervous and respiratory systems. These stimuli help the systems get closer to their healthy, balanced homeostatic functioning and also restores the harmonic cooperation between the different systems.

• 'Theory' sessions

In these sessions the patient is taught about the processes that take place in his body while he learns the habit of being a Parkinson master. He learns to see how the different systems in the body are interrelated and mutually affect each other;

he learns how the habit is built in his memory. The goal of these sessions is to encourage the patient to take the responsibility to his own health, and change from a helpless, sick person asking an authority figure to 'perform his magic' and heal him to a person whose actively committed and responsible to becoming a 'healthy person with Parkinson'.

The entire Gyro-kinetic treatment is gentle and non-intrusive: all the sessions are done in full clothing, and even though it has roots in the martial arts, the touch is gentle and non-aggressive and can be used with any person.

The goal of Gyro-Kinetics is to bring the patient to the point where he assumes responsibility for his own health. While all exercises used in Gyro-Kinetics are straightforward, re-learning to be healthy is a long, hard process that requires commitment on part of the patient. Being responsible means that when we become ill we need to carry out a serious, comprehensive investigation of our lifestyles and habits and find out whether something we are doing is contributing to our illness. It means recognizing that our actions-or lack of them-lead to our malfunction. I believe that this realization is a great personal gift because it empowers us to act differently and therefore affect the course of the disease. However, my experience show that most people find it hard to make this commitment; when there are so many good excuses, why bother? 'I'm too old-it's too late' (said by 50-year-old people); 'I don't have any time to practice' (sure, after watching TV and talking on the phone for hours); 'my condition doesn't seem to improve' (a patient frustrated that he couldn't unlearn in a few weeks those habits he learned and practiced for more than 10 years); and it's ironical but common twin brother 'my condition improved, therefore I don't need to practice anymore'. Not all patients agree to be responsible for their health, but those who do invariably see their condition improve.

It is important to understand that practicing the Gyro-Kinetic technique doesn't prohibit the person from using any other sort of treatment, including the conventional medical treatment; the opposite is true: we encourage our patients to be responsible for their health, and this responsibility entails a commitment to finding and using whatever makes them feel and function better. More than that, I believe that in many ways practicing Gyro-kinetics can increase the effectiveness of the medical treatment.

Summary

The years of experience I have working with Parkinson patients using the Gyro-Kinetic method taught me that there is no reason to accept the deterioration that is common in Parkinson patients. I **know** that Parkinson patients can improve their condition-I've seen it happen. It takes commitment, responsibility and hard work on part of the patient, but it is very much possible.

Many people are led to believe that the deterioration of the Parkinson symptoms is an inevitable process that is out of their control. I took the time to discuss the process of building the habit of Parkinson in such length so you can appreciate its complexity, the many factors that influence it: the initial symptoms, emotional reactions, reduced movement repertoire and others. Using Gyro-Kinetics we can slow and reverse this process.

In many ways you choose whether to participate and 'follow the rules' of Parkinson or to break them. Not choosing, whether from unawareness, laziness or lack of commitment, is also a choice to 'follow the rules' of Parkinson. Either way, it is your life and your choice, not your wife's, not your husband's, not your doctor's.

What is your choice?

For more information about the Gyro-Kinetics method you can visit our web site at www.gyrokineitics.com.

You can also write us at:
gyrokineitics@hotmail.com.

Alex Kerten, 55, combines extensive knowledge of martial arts (5 Dans), functional structuring movement and music to treat patients with various conditions including movement disorders such as Parkinson and Dystonia. He is the head of the Gyro-Kinetics method, and currently works, in the center for Gyro-Kinetics in Israel.

POEM

THE APPOINTMENT

I have an appointment with life
I must travel down the sky-walled road
Leave the centre
Ride towards the light
And rest in some green place
And then to die upon a kiss?
No, not this

I have an appointment with a woman
This man who is no other than himself
Who stretches out a tender hand
To bring on sleep
Do I compare thee to another
And then to die upon a kiss?
No, not this.

I have an appointment with love
No more to dream of marble
rain and seeds
Which, dropping from
the hanging feet of weeds
Now disappear in some black hole
And lace, discarded
Which was plundered from the dead
Of some long-forgotten war
No, not this, not this.

I must leave this world of bones
And raise my head from
the warmth of stones
This hunger starved of calm ambition
Devours the ambiguous breast and rests
Kiss life not death
And leave the dead desired and imagined
Yes, this
Yes, this

Paul King (Portugal)