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## Using Yanai: Making Alexander Yanai Lessons Easier to Teach (and do!)

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When the Alexander Yanai books first started coming out, I was very excited — new lessons to teach! But my excitement turned to frustration pretty quickly. I found most of the lessons just too hard to do, and certainly too hard to teach. My students, carefully weaned away from their lifetime habits of over-efforting, would be cheerfully straining and holding their breath again by the second step of most of these lessons. So I ended up just putting the Yanai books away. In fact, I put them away for several years.

The change came when I started assisting on trainings. A trainer threw me AY such-and-such, and said “Can you teach this the day after tomorrow?” I couldn’t exactly answer “Sorry, I don’t do Yanai.” Necessity pushed, and something in me yielded. I came back home feeling suddenly able to teach from those fearful books. I was so elated that I made it my special challenge to start working my way through the AY lessons in my public classes. At the same time, though, I had a nagging question. Necessity had pushed, but what had changed? What was I doing differently from before?

Sometimes it was a matter of simple confidence, or of knowing where I was going (or at least thinking that I did!). But sometimes I was making actual changes to the lessons themselves. I should emphasise that the primary reason for doing this is always to improve the quality with which the students move through the lesson.

### **Adding Steps**

My first clue was a comment of Larry Goldfarb’s. Speaking of Trainer X, he said “If you look at the way X teaches, the steps are really different. She’ll take a lot of little tiny steps, and then suddenly take a few giant steps.” However true this may have been of Trainer X, it set me to thinking about how I taught and, more importantly, how I might teach. How big were the steps in the lessons I liked to do, or to teach? In the lessons that I found difficult, or couldn’t get a handle on? How could I make the steps smaller?

Surely we’ve all had the opposite experience, of asking a class to do something so difficult or complex that they lose the quality, or even the sense of what they’re doing. Then we have to go back, build up the pieces again, put a couple of movements together this way or that way, until the students are secure enough in what they’re doing that we can try the step that had been too difficult before. Isn’t this process one of the hallmarks of our Method? So, in dealing with the Yanai lessons, I find that I often interpolate one or more steps between each of the steps that is set out in the lesson.

### **Indirectness in the Body**

When I compare Yanai lessons to ATM’s from later sources, I find a real difference in the directness. In fact, it seems to me that there are two different aspects of this. We could call the first one bodily directness: if Moshe wants us to include the chest as we move our shoulder, he will say “And include the chest.” What could be simpler? But in later lessons, he is often much more

roundabout in his instructions. A sequence of instructions that I find works for this situation goes like this. If you want people to include their chest, for instance:

And is your chest moving?  
Forbid your chest to move.  
Now allow your chest to do what it wants, but don't make it move.  
Is there a difference? (There usually is!)  
Compare these again.  
If the chest moves, where does it go? And how?  
Which way seems easier now, forbid or allow?

### **Indirectness in Space**

The Yanai lessons seem very direct in their directions in space as well: if Moshe wants us to go forward, he'll say "Go forward." Later lessons are often much more indirect, and Moshe will introduce the direction forward by asking us to go backward a few times. Now, you can sometimes change this very easily, but it can also get very confusing to make many changes of this sort. The ultimate aim can just get lost. So I think of this as being like a strong seasoning — use sparingly.

### **Softening the Steps**

Sometimes you can soften a step by using a part to give the sense of intention of the whole. This is most true, perhaps, of the eyes. I could turn my head to the right, or I could just move my eyes to the right, with the eyes open or even closed. The movement of the eyes will tend to start into motion the whole train of events that would move the head, the neck, and the rest of the spine. This can also work for a hand in relation to the whole arm and for a foot in relation to whole leg. By substituting a movement of the part for a movement of the whole, the step can retain the original sense of intention, but with much less effort.

### **Adding Detail**

One of the most basic strategies of ATM is adding detail. In the same way that we get a fuller sense of a sculpture by looking at it from a variety of angles, we get a fuller sense of our self in movement by asking questions like:

When I (for example) look downwards, where does my nose go?  
Where does my right eye go?  
My left eye?  
The back of my head?  
And so on.

Many of the steps of Yanai lessons can be made richer, more oriented toward sensation, by adding this kind of request for detail.

These are a few ways of modifying lessons that have worked for me, helping to make the lessons easier and softer. Of course we always run the risk of making an elegant lesson into something bloated and unlovely, or worse yet, of distorting the intention of the lesson completely. So any such modification should be weighed in the balance of experience, our own physical experience as we wrestle with the lesson, and also that of our students. We've all heard the familiar story of Moshe taping lessons, playing them back to another class in order to judge the usefulness of the steps, then modifying the lesson accordingly. In the long run, we can do our students the favour of using this same experimental attitude. It may spur our creativity as well as our discrimination.