

Psychotherapy Guidebook

**BATES METHOD
OF
VISION TRAINING**

Janet M. Goodrich

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Bates Method of Vision Training

Janet M. Goodrich

DEFINITION

The Bates Method of Vision Training utilizes relaxation, movement, light, and visualization to gain clear eyesight without the use of glasses or artificial lenses.

HISTORY

In the preface to his revolutionary book, *Perfect Sight Without Glasses*, Dr. William H. Bates expressed regret that ophthalmic science had at that point already become so rigid that creative searching for preventive and truly curative measures had ground to a halt. Faulty vision, we are still told, is annoying, but nothing can be done for it beyond the prescribing of refractive lenses or, in more severe cases, treatment by drugs and surgery. Unconvinced, Bates performed many experiments with nearsighted, farsighted, and astigmatic people, both adults and children. He discovered that visual distortions are directly linked to states of tension and emotional stress. Upon this basis, Bates devised educational techniques for relieving eyestrain and staring brought on by the effort to perform visually and by

mental-emotional imbalances.

The effectiveness of the Bates method was evidenced by innumerable case histories. Students of both Bates and Margaret D. Corbett, who trained teachers at her School of Eye Education in Los Angeles during the middle of this century, learned to direct their own seeing-healing process, and dispensed with eyeglasses. Because this therapy was never accepted by the orthodox professionals, objective research of this method is rarely found. More recently, a handful of optometrists have expressed interest as the trend toward holistic measures moves into professional circles. The Bates practice is currently enjoying a great resurgence of activity among the many people who are seeking alternatives in all areas of their life.

TECHNIQUE

A teacher of the Bates method sits with the students for one to one and a half hours patiently leading their bodies, minds, and eyes into a state of relaxed functioning. A typical lesson may begin with “sunning” the closed eyes: while absorbing the light, warmth, and energy of the sun, a slow, easy movement of the head is employed to stimulate the retinal cells and to induce deep relaxation of facial and eye muscles. Following sunning, swinging of the head or the whole body may be taught. This slow, rhythmic motion, which can be done to music, reverses the rigid staring process and helps restore the

natural mobility of the eye. The students can sit in chairs easily and turn their heads from side to side, sometimes imagining a fluffy feather or paintbrush extending from the ends of their noses. This gives a feeling of smoothness that creates many fine movements of the eyes. The standing body swing is done by standing easily, turning from side to side in a half circle by swinging the heels outwardly one at a time.

The students are advised not to look outward from themselves at objects, to peer, or fix their gaze. The suggestion is given that they allow all the wonderful colors and details of the world to come into their minds softly, realizing that all vision, whether eyes are open or closed, is in the imagination.

Cupped hands are then placed gently over the eye, shutting out all light, and the visualization of pleasant scenes is described by the teacher and sometimes by the students as their powers of imagery grow. Emphasis is placed upon images that are conducive to general body and sensory enjoyment, such as vacationing on a tropical isle or scanning a panoramic mountain view. When students open their eyes once more, they are encouraged to blink easily and retain the sensation of ease and well-being as they swing their attention gently about the room. The idea of centralizing may be introduced as the students “edge” or outline one object at a time, using a make-believe pencil on the ends of their noses.

Massage of the shoulders, neck, head, and face may be brought in to relieve accumulated tension in these related areas. All through the process, expansiveness of breathing is encouraged and much yawning ensues.

APPLICATIONS

The foregoing procedures have application to people of all ages and types of visual problems. In general, the students who seek out the method are those interested in activating their own native capacity for vision. Motivation, persistence, and understanding are the deciding factors in the outcome of any individual's practice of the Bates Method. Its relationship to all other psychosomatic therapy procedures is being revealed in the light of present-day holistic endeavors. For example, the teachers of Reichian-oriented or Bioenergetic therapies often refer to the relationship between refractive problems and emotional repressions. The near-sighted person may carry subsurface feelings of apprehension, anxiety, and fear. The farsighted person may be expressing a blockage of anger. This person stares intensely at the world and can suffer from fierce eye pain and headaches. Corbett-trained vision teachers often spoke of cross-eyed children throwing temper tantrums as they released the pent-up energy held in their eyes and heads.

Emotional flexibility, release of body tension, and visual functioning are closely tied together. Students of the Bates Method react with pleasure when

experiencing a “flash” or natural clearing of vision. When asked how they felt when first taking off their glasses, typical replies were: “insecure,” “unbalanced,” “my jaw was tight all the time,” “mistrustful of what I see.” When asked later how they felt upon their first experience of a “flash,” these replies came through: “I enjoyed letting the world into me,” “It was exciting and expansive,” “I felt lightheaded and transparent,” “I was relaxed, thrilled, and balanced.”