

Healthy Times Product Review

The Alexander Technique with Christie Johnson

By Mike Bundrant

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I've heard about The Alexander Technique many times over the years. It is a method that can help you perform all your usual activities without unnecessary tension. It can be applied to sitting, standing, walking, running, lifting, speaking - to whatever you do during your day. I've often wondered how it works.

Not long ago I was talking to my friend Laurie Reynolds, a massage therapist in Wildomar, and the name Christie Johnson came up. Laurie commented that Christie seems like a very "centered" person. "So centered it's scary," I replied. I'd noticed that Christie carries herself with a certain ease and grace that is hard to explain, but impressive nonetheless. In that moment I decided it was time to find out what the Alexander Technique is all about.

"I'm not here to do anything to you, necessarily," said Christie during my first Alexander session. "I'm here more to help you get out of your own way." We have all developed patterns of tension in how we hold ourselves, "brace" ourselves and react to the various stressors in life. I've noticed how often I tend to tense and clench my way through the day, as if I am actually fighting something. According to Christie, it is possible to gain a different kind of self-awareness that allows us to adapt to the challenges of life without all the tension.

I learned, for example, that how I typically hold my head sets off a series of unfortunate physiological events. I tend to hold my head tilted slightly back – not how my head wants to rest naturally on my Atlas. This tilting causes my neck and shoulder muscles to compensate and strain. It also restricts my airway, making it more difficult to breathe. As a result I end up breathing in a more rapid, labored and shallow manner. Breathing in this manner makes me prone to higher levels of anxiety throughout the day.

Christie taught me to how to optimize the relationship between my head and spine in order to end this stress inducing cycle. Now, whenever I notice my head titling habit, I can easily allow my head to balance with the rest of my body. When I do this I naturally take in a deep breath of air, as if my body is grateful for the relief. I am beginning to understand what she meant when she offered to help me get out of my own way.

I left Christie's office having addressed not only how I hold my head, but also my shoulders, which I tend to want to protect due to old injuries. I'd never noticed how I chronically tense my shoulder muscles, which restricts the swing of my arms as I walk and makes the simple act of walking much more effortful than it needs to be.

I left Christie's office knowing that I wanted to bring my daughters, Courtney and Jennifer, to see her. The earlier we can teach our children these things, the better chance they have to live well adjusted lives, in my opinion. So, I signed them each up

for five sessions. During the first session I watched Jen demonstrate what she believed was “good” posture and also realize that holding herself straight like a board requires a lot of effort. The spine is naturally curved. Straightening it out like a 2x4 is a lot of work. In a matter of minutes Court and Jen learned that good posture is actually relaxing, restful and easy to maintain once you understand how the body works. After the second session when Courtney commented that she’d never felt so relaxed in her life, I knew we were on the right track.

No longer straining, but allowing the body to support us naturally, we are free to go about our day in a state of “active rest” as Christie likes to call it. This is a state in which I feel balanced and aligned with my personal environment. No matter what activity we are involved in, if it requires participation from our body, The Alexander Technique can help us perform it with less effort, more poise and even a sense of wholeness.

Christie refers to the Alexander Technique as the resource for human fuel efficiency. “If you look for fuel efficiency in your car and home, why not have it in the way you move your body too?” she suggests.

Christie will be teaching a new Alexander workshop series starting in February, at Mt. San Jacinto College in Menifee. Each workshop will offer practical, portable options to expand choices in movement, support, flexibility and coordination in daily activities. Participants will learn to identify and let go of restrictive movement patterns via functional, fun anatomy that allows for optimum fuel efficiency. For workshop information and lessons call 951-312-2188 or visit www.christiejohnson.net