

# THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

## INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE - WELLNESS - SELF HEALTH CARE

Persons taking Alexander Technique (A-T) lessons report experiencing an increased level of well being, sense of presence, physical comfort and relief from pain. Managing stress or anxiety, improved coordination, and self control in conducting daily activities are also reported.

The A-T is an experiential learning psycho-physical (mind-body) method aiming at the improvement of one's cognitive awareness in movement. In the lessons one learns and gains knowledge how to:

1. Be aware of his/her automatic movement habits which interfere with daily activities;
2. Consciously intercept these undesirable habits;
3. Improve her/his monitoring and control over the undesirable habits.

A-T lessons could benefit a wide range of people. For example, persons burdened by pain, discomfort or movement difficulty, overstressed health care providers or caregivers, performing artists, athletes, teachers, public speakers, trainers, etc. The A-T is an educational method, not a therapy. Lessons do not replace or substitute for consultation with or therapy by physicians or other health care professionals. Rather, the A-T addresses one's self-behavior in movement that is associated with difficulty, limitation and discomfort. As an experiential mind-bio-physical education, lessons can be beneficial as an integrative-facilitative method in conjunction with the care and therapy provided by relevant medical and other health professionals.

Listed below is an example of limiting conditions where A-T lessons may be beneficial:

- \* Arthritis, lower back and other joint pain, tendonitis/bursitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, tennis elbow, rehabilitation following accidents or surgery, movement limitations in daily activities (e.g., osteoporosis or during pregnancy), or other kinesthetic limitations.
- \* Anxiety and inability to rest, headaches and migraines, depression, anger, insomnia and discomfort during sleep, drug abuse, communication difficulties (including in business and general social interactions), agoraphobia, or other limiting fears.
- \* Post traumatic syndrome and other trauma-related dysfunction, stress-related conditions (chronic and acute), chronic fatigue-related conditions, fibromyalgia, Lyme disease, or infectious mononucleosis.
- \* ADD/ADHD, autism, sensory integration deficiencies, or Parkinson's disease.
- \* Asthma and other breathing difficulties.
- \* Recurrent laryngitis, TMJ and vocal/swallowing dysfunction.
- \* Hypertension.
- \* Seniors' discomfort at daily functioning.
- \* Discomfort associated with cancer therapy or other medical/surgical intervention.
- \* Poor self esteem, stage fright, etc.

For example, A-T lessons could benefit persons living with fibromyalgia by learning experientially how to improve their ability to sit/walk/stand gracefully, reduce restrictions related

to myofascial rigidity-tightening, improper control of muscle tension, musculoskeletal degenerative/inflammatory problems, low mental and physical security, lack of proper sensory feedback, dizziness, loss of balance, paradoxical breathing, poor quality of life, etc.

A-T lessons are private or in small groups. They usually include common daily activities such as standing, sitting onto/getting up from a chair, walking, talking, laying on/getting up from a table, work at the computer, breathing, resting, and performance of daily activities that one chooses. A considerable portion of the learning is through touch and verbal guidance. These are delicate and highly respectful, and adjusted to the needs of each person.

### **Background on the Alexander Technique and its founder F M Alexander**

The A-T was formulated and developed by F M Alexander (1869-1955), a highly successful Shakespearian orator/actor who repeatedly lost his voice, and conventional medical practices were of no help. He decided to self-experiment/investigate his ailment, and was able to improve his speaking performance when he became aware of (sensed) his “wrong” somatic habits, applied a conscious “interception” onto the habitual process, and allowed an optimal (non-habitual, “not familiar”) functioning to occur. He realized that a proper dynamic relationship of the head with the neck, and of both with the body, is essential to organizing his whole body organization and coordination in movement (his proprioceptive-kinesthetic behavior), in an improved, more comfortable and self-controlled manner. Further, and importantly, he realized that he can teach others to acquire this “new” beneficial, more comfortable mindful-bio-physical manner of “Self in use”. He trained teachers and after his death and his 1<sup>st</sup> generation teachers continued in training teachers. Today, there are many teachers’ training schools and thousands of qualified teachers, worldwide. Qualified teachers train for at least 3 years. There are two professional A-T organizations in the US: *A-T International* (ATI) and *The American Society for the A-T* (AmSAT). Sites such as [www.alexandertech.com](http://www.alexandertech.com), [www.ati-net.com](http://www.ati-net.com), [www.mouritz.co.uk](http://www.mouritz.co.uk) or *The Alexander Technique* by Wikipedia, provide background information on the A-T, training schools, and where to find qualified teachers. Ron Brown’s book *Authorised Summaries of F. M. Alexander’s Four Books* (STAT Books, London, 1992), which was approved by F M Alexander, is an excellent reference among numerous books in English and many other languages, written by F M Alexander and other A-T teachers.

### **The Alexander Technique, bio-medical sciences, education and humanistic philosophy**

Physiology or Medicine Nobel Laureates Sir Charles Sherrington and Nikolas Tinbergen endorsed the A-T. The Nobel lecture of the latter (who with his family took A-T lessons) was about the A-T (Tinbergen N. *Science* **185**: 20-23, 1974). Among other notables who took A-T lessons and endorsed the A-T were the education philosopher John Dewey, the neuroanatomist George Coghill, George Bernard Shaw and Aldous Huxley (Dewey and Coghill wrote introductions to Alexander’s books). Increasingly, integrative and complementary medicine departments are providing A-T lessons among their services. The NIH supports research on the potential benefit of the A-T in lower back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome and Parkinson’s disease. The Department of Health in Israel recognizes the A-T among methods in integrative medicine. Recent clinical research has been published: on benefits for back pain (Little P *et al.*, *BMJ* **337**: a844, 2008), and for endurance of surgeons conducting operations (Reddy T P *et al.*, *J Urol* **186**: 1658-1662, 2011). In addition, the A-T draws support from *Tensegrity* (Buckminster Fuller’s dynamic mechanostability model) and advances in cellular mechanotransduction, fascia biology, neuroplasticity and behavioral psychology. The A-T is widely taught in performing arts departments of academic and other institutions, worldwide.

## **Biography (resume with further information available upon request)**

Zadok Ruben, DVM, PhD is a certified A-T teacher (ATI and ISTAT). He trained with Martha Hansen-Fertman, Ed D, at the Philadelphia School for the A-T, and additionally studied in Israel, NYC, New Jersey, Cambridge (MA) and Sweet Briar (VA), and prior to training with Goddard Binkley and others. Founded *Alexander Technique in Living* (Westfield, NJ 2008), a general practice that has included teaching at a V.A. Hospital (Integrative Medicine, East Orange, NJ), the Philadelphia School for the A-T (Philadelphia, PA), the A-T at Cambridge (MA), the Netanya A-T Teachers Training Course (Netanya, Israel), the Music School-New Jersey Workshops for the Arts (Westfield, NJ), the New Jersey Institute of Technology string and jazz ensembles (Newark, NJ). In addition, have developed and presented a conceptual view of functional anatomy “*Integrative-Relational Body Construct and Cognitive Awareness in Movement*”, is a research team member (fascia and muscle tone) at Rutgers University School of Rehabilitation and Movement Sciences (Newark, NJ), and anatomy consultant for a book on the A-T and voice (in preparation by Kathryn Armour, M A)

A certified veterinary anatomical pathologist (ACVP) and general toxicologist (ABT), Zadok is an R&D consultant in pharmaceutical and other medicines for human diseases ([www.patoximed.com](http://www.patoximed.com)). He has significantly recovered from lower back injuries without surgical intervention, and is interested in the nature of integrative-mindful awareness in movement in man and animals.

## **Publications (A-T related)**

Ruben, Z. 2012. A view on a conceptual understanding of anatomy for facilitating a constructive kinesthetic behavior (use of the self). *The Congress Papers: 9<sup>th</sup> International Congress of the F.M. Alexander Technique*, 327-347; STAT Books, London.

Ruben, Z. 2016. Toward the development of a conceptual view of the body construct as aliveness in movement. *The Congress Papers: 10<sup>th</sup> International Congress of the F.M. Alexander Technique*, 194-205; Rachel Gering-Hasthorpe, ed. STAT Books, London.

Numerous abstracts for workshops/seminars given worldwide (details available upon request).

## **Available**

- \* Private and group lessons
- \* Presentations and workshops
- \* Collaboration with medical professionals and other health care therapists
- \* Collaboration with educators, scientists, business and organizational consultants
- \* Collaboration with teachers/directors of stage performing arts, mind-body methods and sports

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