Movement Mindfulness: Introduction to the Alexander Technique

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Course Overview:  
The Alexander Technique, a system of movement education, is a practical tool for postural awareness and mind-body connection. In studying the Alexander Technique, a person learns to observe and experience one’s self as a moving body. In this class, the teacher will lead students in performing simple, everyday movements and activities. The Alexander teacher will use her hands to provide feedback for the student to become conscious of their unique physical patterns. The teacher will guide the student in releasing sources of tension and organizing themselves for better alignment and balance.

By bringing awareness to the body, the student improves their mindfulness and overall coordination. They will understand how various moods and situations affect the use of your body. They can to apply the Technique to everyday movements such as sitting, standing, and walking, and to more complex activities like public speaking or playing a musical instrument.

The Alexander Technique allows for an increase your body’s physical capabilities, but it is neither physical therapy nor exercise. It’s a gentle method suitable for all ages and levels of physical fitness and ability. Many students come to the Technique to help them recover from illness or injury that limits their mobility. It’s especially useful for back pain, neck tension, and pregnancy-related discomfort.

Other students come to the Technique because they are performing at a high level of physical activity and wish to expand possibilities for performance and avoid injuries. Top music, dance, and acting programs include Alexander Technique as a key part of their course work. However, it can be useful for anyone who wants to learn about themselves and how to move more easily.

By learning to apply the principles of the Alexander Technique, students help themselves by learning to apply tools for self-care to remain poised in stressful situations. Many students describe the feeling of Alexander work as giving them a sensation of lightness and freedom in the body, the sensation of being taller, and a sense of readiness to speak or respond to any given situation with ease.

Course Objective: Students will learn the basic concepts of mind-body awareness of the Alexander Technique. Students will gain an understanding of their own habits and physical reactions to stress, and receive practical tools and self-care skills to help deal with these situations.

Course Length: 6 weeks

Notes: As in many movement classes, the instructor will use hands-on guidance in helping perform the movements. It is the student’s choice to receive hands-on contact or not, in any given exercise. Please wear clothes that are comfortable for movement – if you are wearing a skirt, please wear leggings.
Week 1: Introductory Principles
• Discussion and activity: how does mind affect the body?
• “Going Up”: introducing awareness of body language and trying on different styles of body posture.
• Introduction of anatomical relationship between head and spine and how this affects our overall movement pattern
• Introduction of Constructive Rest activity, using it to expand kinesthetic awareness, using mind-body connection to reduce stress.

Week 2: Habit and Awareness
• Review head-spine relationships and discuss reflections from the students on first week’s concepts.
• Activities for students to notice habits: getting in and out of a chair, writing, walking, using phone. Applying AT principles for more ease of movement.
• Constructive Rest to reinforce Alexander concept of Direction.

Week 3: Sitting and Bending
• Using understanding the structure of the hip joints and sit bones can help students find more comfort in sitting.
• Introducing Alexander way of bending (Monkey) to avoid strain on the back and move more efficiently. Common problems in sitting and bending and how to use our AT way of thinking to help us avoid them.

Week 4: Breathing Easily
• How does breathing work? Using ribs and diaphragm for three-dimensional breathing.
• How does mood and concentration affect breathing? How can we observe our own breathing patterns?
• AT perspective on breathing: emphasizing the exhale. Learning AT procedures: “whispered ah” and “silent la-la-la” for allowing full exhale and easy inhale and relaxation of jaw.

Week 5: Taking Our Bodies into Action – Moving and Speaking
• How does our focus on getting something done affect our whole body in relation to the activity? “Going up” to pick up objects and accomplish household chores.
• How can understanding shoulder anatomy help us add ease to the arms and shoulders? It’s more than just “shoulders back and down!”
• Problem-solving: our shoulders at work. Understanding the pattern that sends our stress to our shoulders.
• We will apply the concepts learned so far with breathing and awareness of the shoulders and torso to be more confident in speaking.

Weeks 6: Reacting to Our Environment
• Topics determined based on student interest. Opportunity for students to review concepts and ask questions.
• Each student will bring an activity they want help with and receive individual coaching. Activities might include: working at a desk, getting in and out of a car, giving a presentation, or playing a musical instrument. Students will have the opportunity to observe application of AT principles in a variety of contexts.