

The following article by one of our long time CKE teachers of Moving On Aerobics and CKE Dances! describes a somatic approach to well-being through somatic education and yoga. It focuses on her yoga practice that is somatic in nature; one that gives each person authority to adapt movement and postures to meet their individual needs. She reports how this approach to yoga combined with one of the first of the systems of somatic education - the Alexander Technique – has been found can be helpful to anyone including skilled dancers and athletes or people recovering from illness or injury. It reduces the physical limitations of aging as well.

The Alexander Technique and Yoga© - Elena Lopez Sans April, 1998

IN THE LATE EIGHTIES, I had the wonderful opportunity, for the first time, to have an Alexander Technique private session, and it was just before attending my daily dance class. Many dancers had commented on how excellent the Alexander Technique was and of course I was very enthusiastic to have the chance to try it. And yes! When an hour later I was dancing, I felt that I was almost flying in space. My body had a sense of natural readiness for movement. All seemed to fall into place at once: alignment, flow, and presence. That experience provided a seed leading to future personal and professional growth. Soon after, I began Alexander Technique teacher training. Joel Kendall, a former dancer with tremendous creativity and teaching skills, was my teacher, and I felt really fortunate to work with him.

As soon as I started the Alexander training, I noticed many connections to yoga, which I had started to teach more than a decade earlier. In particular, the line of Yoga of Krishnamacharya, (which I trained in previously for four years), and the Alexander technique have many points in common. Though of different roots, both practices seem to be in communion like two good friends subtly nourishing each other. The yoga approach of Krishnamacharya is a subtle practice, which not only focuses on the postures or asanas, but also really emphasizes all aspects of yoga. It could be described as a meditative and healing form of yoga where positive change in all aspects of life is a possibility regardless of one's physical abilities or spiritual practice.

In the early 90's after my certification as an Alexander Technique teacher, I started to build my private practice. One day a lovely woman in her seventies came to take private sessions. She mentioned that she loved to practice yoga, but that unfortunately due to her age and physical limitations she could not do so. It's a comment I have heard for so long and from so many people, but still it saddened me. Everybody can practice yoga if they choose to do so. Unfortunately, we often receive the impression nowadays that yoga is only for the young and fit, a concept that is sometimes based on the experience of attending competitive yoga classes or seeing images in yoga books where people with muscular bodies perform challenging postures. So I always make sure to emphasize that is not necessary to have any particular body type to practice yoga; rather, yoga can be a means of obtaining a healthier, stronger more flexible body and mind. So the woman in her seventies decided to give this way of viewing yoga a try. Without delay, I started to practice with her the principles of the Alexander Technique while I led her in a yoga class. As if by magic, many postures she had not been able to do before were now

accessible to her and giving her enjoyment. Soon she started to invite her family and friends to my class as well. This is how my "Alexander Technique and Yoga" class was born.

Shortly after that, I started to offer the class in other places and have been doing so uninterrupted since 1993. I have taught three different levels and at different locations including yoga centers, dance studios and my own private practice. The more I practice and teach the "Alexander Technique and Yoga" the more connections I find. Each time I discover more ways that each practice enhances the other. The simplicity of the Alexander Technique and Yoga is a starting point for a wide spectrum of possibilities in health, art, and creativity, awareness of our thoughts and emotions, and improvement of our day-to-day life. Likewise, we can bring these qualities into our movement practice.

After having taught hundreds of students mostly in New York, but also in other cities and countries, I often feel the great satisfaction of seeing people who had previously thought yoga was "not for them" now practicing it joyfully. I watch their bodies getting healthier and having a greater range of movement, and since the practice is preventive they also have less need to visit doctors and chiropractors to get rid of discomfort and pain. I notice often a greater sense of peace and contentment as well. Limitations really start to evaporate since there are many different ways that yoga postures and movement can be done gracefully in harmonious balance.

As the yoga of Krishnamacharya emphasizes, we adapt yoga to the individual, and not the individual to yoga. When we are present in our practice as well as in our daily life and allow the flow of energy dance inside our bodies, we tap into our natural grace and balance. Like us, the trees, plants, and flowers have their natural grace and balance as well. Though some are curved and asymmetrical, still they express their inherent beauty. The same happens with humans when the energy flows and we are living in the moment. Our bodies become graceful and elegant as in nature.

I feel fortunate to share this work that has the potential to embrace everybody. "Alexander Technique and Yoga" is suitable for all levels and physical conditions. It can be enjoyed by those who prefer an introspective and meditative approach, and its principles could be applied as well as by those who seek a more vigorous physical challenge.

The wisdom of these two profound practices, the Alexander Technique and Yoga, is accessible to everyone.