

Black belt giving disease the chop

BY ROBYN ROSEN
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► A GROUP of Parkinson's disease patients have pooled their resources to bring an Israeli martial arts expert to London for some off-beat treatment.

Alex Kerten, who holds black belts in several fighting styles, was flown to Britain after Laurie Phillips, 67, had taken his wife to see him in Israel.

The result was a series of workshops which left the wife of one sufferer in tears after she saw her husband, who has been in a wheelchair for 16 months, stand up and dance.

Sandra Schaverien attended a London workshop with her husband, Stanley, who was diagnosed with the neurological condition 19 years ago.

Mr Schaverien, 73, lives in Lady Sarah Cohen House, in North Finchley, and is in the advanced stages of Parkinson's. He cannot talk, has difficulty walking unaided and dementia. "I was sceptical at first," Mrs Schaverien said. "But Alex was direct and down to earth. He promised no cures or miracles and

didn't tell us any lies. He was showing patients simple methods to control the disease, to keep breathing as you move and to relax.

"At the end of the workshop, people were holding hands and dancing — and Stanley walked right into the circle and started dancing.

"I had tears in my eyes. My husband hasn't danced or walked alone in a strange place in years."

Mr Phillips said he had spent years trying to find help for his wife Estelle, 65,

who was diagnosed with Parkinson's six years ago.

"I would scan the internet looking for anything I could find and we'd try all sorts of things," he said.

In 2008, a friend in Israel told him about Mr Kerten, a martial arts enthusiast and musician who has developed a method he calls gyro-kinetics, which combines dance, touch and music to improve balance.

His sessions have been recommended to patients by doctors at the Chaim Sheba Medical Centre's Movement Disorder and Parkinson's Clinic in Tel Hashomer for more than two years.

"I found someone who knows more about Parkinson's than anyone else and have received more help from him than from any medical source," said Mr Phillips, a member of Maidenhead Synagogue.

Mr Kerten, 64, said: "I use music and meditation to teach patients to connect to their inner rhythm. They learn to speak rhythmically. They listen to music and translate it to movement, building new neuro-networks in their brains.

"It's all about the re-programming of the brain. The patient has learned to think and act like a Parkinson's patient. To behave differently, his brain needs reconditioning."

With a grant from the Cecil Rosen Foundation, the patients were able to hold the three-day seminar in Watford earlier this month with 20 participants and a long waiting list.



It's all in the movement: Alex Kerten, right, takes a patient through her paces

"It had a significant effect on my wife and she's hardly increased her medication since she saw him," Mr Phillips said. "It's pretty remarkable."