



SENSEABILITY

A Quarterly Newsletter of Applications of the FELDENKRAIS METHOD®

The FELDENKRAIS METHOD is an educational system that develops a functional awareness of the self in the environment.

Moshe Feldenkrais D.S.c (1904-1984), physicist, engineer, martial artist and educator, developed the FELDENKRAIS METHOD by studying the direct relationship between bodily movement and the ways we think, feel, learn and act in the world.

AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT® is the group lesson form in which students explore movement sequences according to the verbal directions of the teacher.

FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION® is the private lesson form combining instructive touch and movement with verbal cues.

These lessons help students become aware of old habits and provide choices for more efficient action.

GUILD CERTIFIED FELDENKRAIS PRACTITIONERS™ must complete 800 - 1000 hours of in-depth training over a three to four year period in a Professional Training Program regulated by **The FELDENKRAIS GUILD®**.

The FELDENKRAIS GUILD is an international organization of practitioners which maintains the professional standards of practitioners and provides a range of informative materials for the public.

For more information, please contact your **GUILD CERTIFIED FELDENKRAIS PRACTITIONER** or **The FELDENKRAIS GUILD** at (800) 775-2118.

Please Note: The FELDENKRAIS METHOD is an educational system. It is not a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Consult your physician if you have pain or difficulty with movement.

Issue #5: Enriching Daily Living

Think of elegant, efficient movement. Most people see the breathtaking leaps of a dancer, or the speed of a pro basketball player dribbling across the court. Perhaps the Olympics, or martial arts come to mind. But the truth is, elegant movement can be everywhere - from reaching for a box of cereal, to running up the stairs. Your everyday movement can be as fluid as a ballet, as efficient as an athlete.

Moshe Feldenkrais once said, "*The aim is a body that is organized to move with minimum effort and maximum efficiency, not through muscular strength, but increased consciousness of how it works.*" If ordinary, everyday activities have become difficult for you, the FELDENKRAIS METHOD is one way to recover the grace and ease you need. Each person deserves to function at their fullest potential. This issue offers a few stories of how the FELDENKRAIS METHOD can be applied to enrich daily living.

Active Sitting

Mary Newell, a practitioner in Westchester, NY, (<NEWELLWW@aol.com>) has the following thoughts on the familiar activity of sitting.

"When you're busy at your computer, reading, or watching TV, you may forget that you're also sitting - until you get up, and feel pain or stiffness. As with all our activities, how we sit makes a big difference in how we will feel. FELDENKRAIS® lessons help you become aware of how you habitually sit, and what changes would contribute to greater comfort.

"Think of your habitual posture as frozen movement - something you did so often that you got stuck there. Are your shoulders raised or forward, as if you were still holding the phone or bag? Do you tend to lean to one side more than

another - for instance, when you pick up the phone, or by leaning on your elbow or reaching for the mouse? Over time, this could shorten that side and create an imbalance.

"Comfort depends on finding a dynamic balance. In sitting, your weight is supported by the spine and pelvis. When these are well aligned with gravity, your weight balances on the ischial tuberosities, or 'sitting bones' at the base of the pelvis, and your muscles do not need to work as hard just to keep you upright. If the top of the pelvis is tipped too far forward, your lower back arches a lot; if it falls backward, the lower back rounds beyond the neutral range; either can produce strain over time.

"Balancing the spine involves allowing the natural curves, and distributing effort proportionally, so no part overworks while others are stiff or weak. For instance, leaning

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back in a chair may be fine for resting. But leaning back and looking forward, for example at your computer, can result in neck or shoulder strain because your back or neck will have to make a sudden detour from the direction the rest of the back is taking.

"Sensory cues will help you recognize your comfort zone. When your muscles are working overtime, you will eventually feel tight, tense, heavy, or tired. Being more aligned is often accompanied with feelings of lightness, ease, length, flexibility and fuller breathing - and it's easier to move from there, to turn your head, lift your arm, etc. Don't confuse comfort with familiarity. If you slip back into your old habit, it will feel familiar; but if you stay long enough, or even exaggerate - for instance, slump even more, while attending to sensory cues, you will feel its effects on the whole of yourself. You can find alternatives dynamically - not by imposing ideas about how you should sit, but by

***"Don't confuse comfort
with familiarity..."***

exploring with awareness.

"FELDENKRAIS explorations or movements can also be used to vary your position from time to time, so you don't become stiff. Some ideas are in the short lesson at right.

"Additional lessons could focus on using the hip joints when leaning forward to reach for something, instead of rounding the upper back; and on head and arms. Letting the head balance on top of the spine, instead of pulling forward, will prevent a common cause of neck and shoulder strain. At best, the arms hang effortlessly from a shoulder girdle resting gently on the upper ribs. The arms will be free to swing. Often, however, there is a lot of unnecessary work holding up the shoulders or arms all day, resulting in soreness and stiffness. After a lesson about how arm movements relate to the

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\$75 • Basic Benefits, plus ATM Audiotape by Moshe Feldenkrais, and *Friends of Feldenkrais*® polo T-Shirt

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trunk, you may find your shoulders dropping into a more relaxed position.

"Learning to undo unnecessary habits will have a more lasting effect than trying to correct your posture from outside, using additional muscular effort, such as pushing your shoulders back into a military pose. As soon as you forget to monitor such a movement, it will be dropped. But if you learn to sense your range of comfort, you will find yourself staying within that range more often."

AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT®

A short sitting lesson

FELDENKRAIS sitting lessons can help you find alignment by exploring around it, as if honing in on a target.

1. Shift your weight from one sitting bone to the other. How does this affect the rest of you - your shoulders, your head? Is one direction more familiar?
2. Tilt your head right and at the same time raise the right hip a little, shifting your weight towards the left sitting bone

Your spine takes the shape of a "C".

Do all parts of your spine contribute equally to the movement?

Is a lot of work being done in one area, and less in others?

3. Does this change if you put your right hand over your head towards the left ear, and take the right elbow down toward the lifting right hip?

4. Change hands and direction. Is going to the other side easier, smoother, or less so?

When are you really in the middle? Where do you feel taller, lighter? Where is breathing easier?

After such an exploration, you may find it easier to balance your weight equally on the two sitting bones.



What I am after is to restore each person to their human dignity" - Moshe Feldenkrais

Many people with chronic pain find that simple daily activities are arduous if not impossible. Carrying in the groceries, tying a shoe lace, reaching for an object on a shelf are actions that they cannot take for granted as something they can do.

The FELDENKRAIS METHOD addresses basic biological movement patterns which are the underpinnings for all the movements we need to act in the environment. When our efficiency in movement is increased pain diminishes and disappears. At this point a certain quality of living emerges. As Dr. Feldenkrais said in an article on health :

"...Learning is the gift of life. A special kind of learning: that of knowing oneself. [People] learn to know "how" they are acting and thus are able to do "what " they want - the intense living of their unavowed, and sometimes declared, dreams."

Waking on the Right Side of the Bed

Although a new baby brings great joy, there is also a lot of stress. Tuija Cohen began experiencing severe back pain shortly after her son Daniel was born. A friend suggested an AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT class to help with stress reduction. Tuija was skeptical, but willing to try anything to relax.

Part of the class series included several lessons on getting up from a lying position. Tuija had been getting up several times a night to attend to her son. Each time he cried, she would jerk herself up to a sitting position and leap out of bed. In the AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT lessons, Tuija discovered the ease of rolling to her side and using the skeleton's natural organization to effortlessly get out of bed. She decided to try that when Daniel cried in the middle of the night. To her surprise and delight, the back pain went away.

"Not only did the FELDENKRAIS METHOD help me cope with a stressful situation, but I have learned to wake up without violence. I never thought that could be the cause of my back pain! Now when I wake up, I know if I remember to roll instead of jerking, my whole day will be better."

Just Imagine

Debra G." uses FELDENKRAIS principles every day. Because she has Parkinsons' Disease, Debra has experienced severe movement limitations at times. Feldenkrais taught that the human being learns movement through the use of imagination as well as the action.

Many classes teach a movement on one side, and then the class imagines doing the movement on the other side. Although this is now a popular technique used by athletes and dancers, it is not often applied to daily life. After coming to a series of AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT lessons, Debra decided to apply the idea of imagining movement to her daily activities whenever they got difficult.

"Sometimes when I am reaching for things," Debra says, "If I just take a moment and imagine that I am doing it, it becomes more possible than it was a moment ago. Or when I'm having trouble walking, I picture how the rest of my body can participate, and then it makes the walking easier."

Shopping, Walking and Sitting

Jackie Berger, an office administrator, sought out the FELDENKRAIS work because of back pain so severe she couldn't lift a half gallon of milk.

Her first breakthrough came after a two day workshop with **Aliza Stewart** (<ALStew119@aol.com>). She felt that she finally found something that would bring her relief. Private sessions and classes did just that.

She is functioning normally again - shopping walking and sitting at a desk. The Method *"...has enabled me to participate in daily activities again. I am sincerely thankful for learning how to be in charge of my well being."*

"A little smile..."

Arthur Nierenberg contracted polio when he was 2 1/2 years old. Now in his sixties, his muscles were growing weaker and his functioning began to deteriorate as a result. He was diagnosed with arthritis in the neck and was told that "this is what happens when you get old, and the weakness is post-polio syndrome.." During his first **FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION** lesson, **GUILD CERTIFIED FELDENKRAIS PRACTITIONER** Paris Kern (<ParisKern@aol.com >)noticed that he was using only his neck and shoulders to get in and out of the wheelchair and many other daily activities.

Arthur wasn't using any back or pelvic muscles to do anything at all! This was a habit he had developed over many years of sitting in a wheelchair. Paris drew his attention to the relationship of the head, neck, shoulders, ribs, back and pelvis, then to the fact that there were perfectly usable muscles in these areas. Arthur "woke up" to the strength and movement he didn't know he had. In his words:

"I've learned to move from my bed to my wheelchair with ease and grace and do all the other things I have to do in my life more comfortably. That is very empowering and at times it enables me to deal with things with a little smile, a little joke and a little more comfort. Paris' inventiveness and creativity are the keys to her success with me. You can't be dull and be a Feldenkrais Practitioner!"

Feeling Comfortable with My Life

The FELDENKRAIS METHOD has made such a dramatic effect on Elizabeth Bright's life that she changed her daily life completely. She started taking AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT (ATM) classes with **Suzy Albert** (<Salbzoo@aol.com>) at Northwestern University. She enjoyed the class although she found it unsettling at first. *"It was the first class I had taken in twenty years where no one told me what I was supposed to learn."*

Many people who have taken AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT classes share Elizabeth's experience. Although the lessons can look like "exercise" they have a very different intention. The FELDENKRAIS METHOD is an exploratory, non-judgmental, non-goal-oriented process of learning that helps the nervous system mature so the student can reach her fullest potential. This organic approach to learning asks the student to listen to herself - to move within a range of comfort, to move without unnecessary effort. Instead of copying others, the student learns to slow down and listen to herself.

In this way, we become aware of what we are doing, rather than what we think we are doing, and we are able to do what we want to do. As educator John Holt said, *"Learning is becoming aware that something is possible."*

As Elizabeth continued with the classes, she began to feel supported in thinking for herself. She found that she could make decisions based upon what she wanted rather than on what "society" wanted. She decided to leave school. She moved to New York City where she took a job in cable television. *"I am much more comfortable with my life now,"* she says.



RESOURCES: The following resources are available from The FELDENKRAIS GUILD (800) 775-2118.

TAPES

The Embodied Life by Russell Delman. *Twelve somatic journeys which guide the participant to take their ATM experiences directly into everyday life situations.*

BOOKS

The Potent Self- A Guide to Spontaneity by Moshe Feldenkrais.

Mindful Spontaneity - Moving in Tune with Nature by Ruthy Alon. *Ruthy studied for many years with Moshe Feldenkrais. Ruthy's gift is of poetic empathy. This delightful book has many short lessons and insights into spontaneity.*

Awareness Heals by Steven Shafarman. *This new book on the FELDENKRAIS METHOD has interesting stories about Moshe Feldenkrais and six well-illustrated, easy-to-follow AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT lessons.*