Moshe Feldenkrais was a master of Judo; his contributions were recognized throughout the world. He opened the first European school in France in the 1930’s. His two books, *Judo* and *Higher Judo: Ground Work*, as well as numerous articles, are still highly praised by martial artists. He remained connected with judo training for the rest of his life. On his visits to Japan, many Judo teachers would attend his demonstrations with their students.

In the mid-fifties, the legendary G. Koizumi, a 6th Dan, and Chairman of the European Judo union, called 500 black belts together for an international congress on Judo. When it came time to teach about saika-tanden(or chi), he had Feldenkrais teach the day’s material. Koizumi wrote that Feldenkrais, “clarifies the interrelationship and the intermingled working of gravitation, body, bones, muscles, nerves, consciousness, subconscious and unconsciousness and opens the way for better understanding” of Judo.

Feldenkrais’ influence on the martial arts is felt even more strongly today: many *Feldenkrais* practitioners study martial arts. From Nin-jitsu to T’ai Chi, from Karate to Aikido, students and practitioners are finding the *Feldenkrais Method* and the martial arts complement and enhance their work on and off the mat.

The Art of Learning

By Chris Griffin

The martial arts could be described, as Webster does, "as any of the several arts of combat and self-defense that are widely practiced as a sport." Once you’re on the training floor, it becomes clear, through the depth and scope of the training, that the term “art” is truly warranted. Participants are constantly studying and experimenting with their movement. They develop, by necessity, a holistic approach to human movement - if that other hand or foot is forgotten, one’s technique is clearly less effective and you may receive an unpleasant reminder.

By developing an awareness and sensitivity to the subtleties of one’s own and one’s partner’s movement, the martial artist learns to move with greater efficiency and effectiveness. And as one’s form is honed, a graceful and maybe an awesome quality emerges.

This description of the learning process a martial artist engages in is probably familiar to the yoga student, and to someone who approaches any number of activities, from dance to horseback riding to basketball, as an art. It will also be familiar to a *Feldenkrais* practitioner.

It is as if Moshe Feldenkrais was able to distill the “stuff of learning” into an approach which he might have called *The Art of Learning*.

The *Feldenkrais Method* develops the student’s awareness and ability to sense oneself and one’s movement in a way that is so grounded it is a revelation. Pam Parker, a teacher of iaido, the Japanese sword form, recently began a series of *Functional Integration®*...
From Page 1...

lessons. She states, “I had the feeling that a light shone along each of my bones as it was touched… It’s amazing what a difference just being more clearly aware of yourself can make.”

Through guided experimentation with one’s movement habits, the Feldenkrais student learns to steer toward a smoother quality of movement. After another **Functional Integration** lesson, Pam got up from the table and said, “I get it, don’t do anything extra. I always tell my students not to do anything extra when practicing sword cuts, no extra movements, etc. But now I understand it in a new way - it’s also about not putting anything unnecessary into the technique.”

Meik Skoss, a teacher of several modern and classical martial arts, including Aikido and Jukendo, had many such moments of discovery over the course of a dozen FI lessons. He would leave the sessions excited about applying what he’d learned to his practice. Three months after finishing the series, he feels he is still reaping the benefits from these lessons.

During one session, Meik was almost speechless when he compared the ease and effortlessness of his sitting balance compared to the way he normally sat, and how invisible all the extra work had been to him. As he came to stand and began to step through some basic forms, he was struck by the clarity of his movement and his ability to move through each position as if he carried no “residue” from the prior organization.

In the martial arts, particularly those such as Aikido and Judo, where the partners are in contact for the duration of the technique, a smooth quality of movement is essential. When the movement is smooth, it feels natural and doesn’t stand out to your partner - so the technique can be executed without being countered.

**Chris Griffin is a Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner and an Aikido instructor at the Bond Street Dojo in New York City. Contact:**
cmgriffin@mindspring.com

---

**Aikido, Karate, and the Feldenkrais Method**

By Paul Linden, Ph.D.

A month or so after I had started working with the [Feldenkrais Method](https://www.feldenkrais.com), I had an experience which brought home to me how valuable [Feldenkrais](https://www.feldenkrais.com) could be for my martial arts training. I had gone out on the lawn to practice my karate kata. I started to do a punch. I remember it quite clearly. I started the movement of a punch, but I couldn't tell where to end the movement. I suddenly realized that I had normally put a lot of needless tension into every movement I made. It didn't accomplish anything useful. It just wasted energy, but I judged how far I had moved by how much effort I had expended. All of a sudden it took so little effort to execute the punch that all my habitual movement cues were irrelevant, and so my punch just kept going. I had to watch my fist to see when it had gone far enough. Over the course of the next few months, my body recalibrated itself so that moving with much less effort became normal.

Later on with more Feldenkrais work, my sense of movement sequencing in my body began to improve as well. In the slow, introspective movements of the Feldenkrais lessons, I learned more clearly how to start movements in one part of my body and transmit the motion in smooth, sequential spirals from joint to joint to joint through the rest of my body. Many of the movements in Aikido and Karate depend on just this kind of action. Rather than moving the body in rigid chunks, power is built up and delivered through sequencing, the way a whip generates and magnifies power.

This same movement sequencing is the foundation for Aikido joint locks as well. For example, when I do the Aikido elbow/shoulder control technique (ikkyo), I have to be able to control the attacker's pelvis and legs by sending movement from the wrist and elbow to the shoulder, through the spinal column and to the pelvis.

Moshe Feldenkrais was himself an accomplished Judo practitioner, and the martial way of moving has been preserved in his body awareness lessons. The [Feldenkrais Method](https://www.feldenkrais.com) offers martial artists a new and more specific way of studying a crucial element in movement coordination that is part of all martial art traditions.

Paul Linden holds a fourth degree black belt in Aikido and a first degree black belt in Karate. Contact: (<PaulLinden@aol.com>)

---

**The Way**

We spend our life's allotted span pursuing idle wealth, although our best possession is enjoyment of good health.

Along the way are obstacles we must face, large and small - the challenge: Overcoming them -- that is life, after all.

Are there no lessons we can learn to ease our daily path, a school that will teach us good health like history and math?

We are in luck, there is a way to open our eyes:

**Awareness Through Movement** as taught by MOSHE FELDENKRAIS.

by Joseph P. Weber

Mr. Weber, is a Friend of Feldenkrais, and has been taking [Feldenkrais](https://www.feldenkrais.com) classes weekly for three years. He writes that his posture and general well-being have steadily improved. Now, at age 77, he says, "I feel excellent."
T’ai Chi and The FELDENKRAIS METHOD

--Different windows on a common vision

by Ralph Strauch

T’ai Chi and the FELDENKRAIS METHOD both see natural human movement as involving the entire person in a smooth and flowing way, balanced without effort in the field of gravity, under a special kind of effortless control. Moshe Feldenkrais calls such movement “elegant,” while the Chinese speak of a body “so light that a feather will be felt and so pliable that a fly cannot alight on it without setting it in motion.”

Feldenkrais describes that effortless control as “reversible movement” — meaning that the mover is never committed to continue on a trajectory, but can stop, start, or change direction at any time. A man sitting down in a reversible way, for example, would not fall if the chair were pulled from under him. A woman hurrying along a hallway could stop if someone suddenly stepped in her path. The T’ai Chi master in combat cannot be bluffed or feinted into a compromising position. He has, in the words of the Chinese classic, Tao Te Ching, “no spots where death may enter.” We don’t encounter this kind of reversible movement much in our everyday lives. It’s far more common, it seems, to fall if a chair is pulled out from under you, or to collide with someone who steps in your path without warning. People normally violate this ideal in other ways, as well. Movement is often fragmented and choppy, with the body stiffly held in gravity and moving as a set of disconnected pieces rather than a smooth and flowing whole. For many people, “effort” is almost synonymous with “movement.”

Why is the normal movement we encounter in our everyday lives so at variance with the natural movement that both T’ai Chi and the FELDENKRAIS METHOD seek? Here again, both offer the same basic answer. We move so poorly they say, at least in comparison to the potential that exists within us, because we lack self-awareness. Un-aware of what we do and how we do it, we cannot choose well, so we function less efficiently than we might. Moshe Feldenkrais summed this up in one of his favorite sayings — “If you don’t know what you’re doing, you can’t do what you want.” Improvement depends on learning — learning more efficient possibilities for action, and incorporating them into your life.

T’ai Chi and the FELDENKRAIS METHOD focus most obviously on improving things like balance, flexibility, and ease of movement. Yet both have the potential to go far beyond that — to improve functioning in all aspects of life. The T’ai Chi master draws his effectiveness in combat from his ability to comprehend his environment and control his reactions to it, and those abilities are useful anywhere. Feldenkrais often spoke of the need to develop “flexible minds” as the objective of his work, and of the development of flexible bodies as a tool to that end.

Flexibility of mind and body are inseparable; you can’t have one without the other. Movement is a metaphor for life, and the lessons T’ai Chi and the FELDENKRAIS METHOD teach about movement have direct analogs in other areas. The converse of Feldenkrais’s dictum that “if you don’t know what you’re doing you can’t do what you want” is also true. If you really do know what you’re doing, you can do almost anything you want!

Ralph Strauch, Ph.D., Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner, has studied T’ai Chi for over 25 years. The longer article from which this is drawn can be obtained from Ralph’s website at www.somatic.com.

"Martial Arts IS Integrated Movement"  

By Eric James

Jack Hoban is an executive in the health industry, holds a 10º Dan in Ninpo Taijutsu, and teaches this ancient Japanese martial art at the YMCA in Red Bank, New Jersey.

Jack was first introduced to the FELDENKRAIS METHOD by Doron Navon (of Israel), a practitioner of the FELDENKRAIS METHOD and fellow instructor of Ninpo Taijutsu. Jack says, “It took less than five minutes for me to realize that this method would be a real help to martial artists.”

Jack has continued improving his martial arts abilities by doing periodic AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT® lessons with me and also by using a tape series by Moshe Feldenkrais. He says, “I feel that I have better body integration, that my spine and hips are freer, that I throw, kick and punch better. But mostly, I can ‘watch’ my movement better, I can feel what my entire body is doing. I am more aware of how everything is moving and how to make my movement more efficient. Also how to move in unexpected ways... ways that the opponent can’t anticipate.”

Jack even finds that his work with the FELDENKRAIS METHOD helps him teach his martial arts students more effectively. He also occasionally brings in a FELDENKRAIS practitioner to teach an AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT lesson at one of his Ninpo Taijutsu seminars or regular classes. For example, he recently taught a seminar with Moti Nativ (from Israel) who ended the seminar with an ATM lesson.

On the relation of the integrated movement that one learns in the FELDENKRAIS METHOD with the martial arts, Jack finishes by saying “Martial arts IS integrated movement.”

The FELDENKRAIS METHOD represents a revolutionary way of improving martial

continued...
Martial artists tend to reflect the general population in terms of when they seek out someone like a Feldenkrais practitioner. It is generally either those experiencing a setback in their functioning (e.g. due to an injury or perhaps a training flaw that has progressed to a strain interfering with their practice) or those at a high level of performance looking for a key to the refinement of their art.

Those in the middle range often go along until they find themselves at one or the other end of the spectrum. In reality, this middle group gets great benefit from periodic participation in a series of Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement® classes or Functional Integration® lessons. Developing greater sensitivity and self awareness, becoming more skilled in experimenting with one’s movement patterns, experiencing the accessibility of a more supportive organization and a smoother quality of movement not only informs the student’s practice, but also helps one detect and attend to training flaws before they lead to strain and injury. The simple truth is, we don’t always have to learn the hard way.

As Jack and many other martial artists have found out, the results are the ability to improve power, speed, and ability continuously, without the very narrow limits of muscular strength. Also, one is able to continue improving ability throughout life, while a focus on muscular strength is destined to diminishing returns as one ages.

Eric James, Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner, has a first degree black belt in Ninpo Taijutsu.

---

### Resources

Resources available through the Feldenkrais Guild of North America. (800)-775-2118 - or as noted.

#### BOOKS by Moshe Feldenkrais

- Practical Unarmed Combat
- Higher Judo

#### TAPES