In the dawning of this new era of instant communication, we move from one frenetic alert to another as the climate, the politics, the economy and the world we live in becomes more and more unpredictable. The thinking of Moshe Feldenkrais, offers a dramatically different paradigm from which to respond.

In this month's Spotlight, I spoke with Alan Questel, a trainer who has practiced full time since training directly with Moshe in 1983, taught in hospital and university environments, as well as in over 40 professional trainings internationally. In addition to numerous CD recordings, he recently released a 6 DVD set helping women find greater comfort and ease throughout their pregnancy and beyond.

**SenseAbility**: It's as if there is almost too much communication, too much stimulation in the world. Given what modern life is like, how can the *Feldenkrais Method* help?

**Questel**: [The] *Feldenkrais Method* can give people tools to bring them back to themselves, so that they don't feel as influenced by the outside world. Moshe once talked about how you can either change the world or you can change yourself. If you change yourself, there's a potential to change the world. Most people attempt to change the world around them and go at it externally instead of internally to see how that impacts the world.

[The] *Feldenkrais Method* isn't the only thing that provides internal change. Meditation, martial arts, and yoga do too. But I think we offer something quite unique that's explicit in what we do and that is we provide a more skeletal use of ourselves. It's implied in other modalities, so that it does become a bit more clear, but it's not explicit. With [the] *Feldenkrais Method*, when we find that sense of skeletal self-use our functioning is improved, our health is improved, our pain decreases. We gain a sense of being more grounded, more connected to the world and ourselves in a different way.

**SA**: Moshe Feldenkrais did not have

...
to deal with the rapid pace of communication we have now, but he did live in an extremely chaotic world. Did he ever talk about that?

**Q:** He used to talk to us about having a perspective of biological necessity. He would really look at what’s the bottom line of something. Moshe once asked us, “What part of you needs to be in a room for you to be in a room?” And people would answer, “My head, my feet.” And he would demonstrate by going to a door and sticking his head in asking, “Which room am I in?” It seemed obvious that most of him was in the other room. Or, he would put his feet in the room and ask again, “Which room am I in now?” Again, most of him was in the other room.

When I started teaching I would bring up the same question. I would get into arguments with people about it! They would say, ‘My mind,” or ‘My spirit.’ Finally, I started to think of it from the point of view of biological necessity.

**SA:** What do you mean by ‘biological necessity’?

**Q:** Survival. Biological necessity is that it’s necessary for our biology to survive.

**SA:** How does being in a room relate to biological necessity or survival?

**Q:** Well look, say I’m on a cliff. If only my head is over the top of the cliff and I’m hanging on by my hands, I don’t really feel like I am on the cliff. If my lower legs and feet are on the cliff and the rest of me is hanging off the cliff...I don’t feel like I am on the cliff. If my pelvis is on the cliff, and my legs are hanging off the edge or my head is hanging off the edge, I feel like I am on the cliff. It’s a more concrete way of looking at it. Looking at things from that point of view, we take it to a deeper foundation of where we want to act from in our lives, and in the things we want to do.

**SA:** So, clearly the part of me that needs to be in the room is more than just a body part, my head or feet. It needs to be a sense of my whole self, the biological self that has physical ability to move from one place to another for survival either in terms of safety or for food. How did Moshe come to this, do you think?

**Q:** Because of Moshe’s background of living through so many wars, of moving to Palestine and being a part of the development of Israel as a nation, he was always looking at what’s most essential to us. How do we stay alive? It may range from being able to fight, or to flee, or to feed ourselves. In our world we don’t have much of a sense of that. We go to the supermarket for food. Of course we have been affected by the attacks of terrorism in the last few years, but it’s still far away unless you’ve been a part of that. We’re not close to the sense of survival that brings us to a need to use ourselves differently in the world.

When Moshe lived in Europe, he was the first person on that continent to earn a black belt in Judo. I wouldn’t think that he would call that a disadvantage, do you? Hyper-vigilance is an awful thing if you can’t turn it off, but if you are walking down New Paradigm

**SA:** What about the veteran living with perpetual hyper-vigilance, who has recently come back from one of these wars with no front in Iraq or Afghanistan? Or, what about someone who grew up in an abusive home where being on edge is just normal? They have no sense of being on edge, always ready for the other shoe to drop, or the next catastrophe. For these people living in survival mode is so familiar that they don’t even know what it’s to like to feel secure.

**Q:** Their survival mode is initiated by a trauma that puts them into a state where they can’t find themselves anymore. For example, I have friends who experienced 9/11, who live in New York City. They live with hyper-vigilance that I don’t think ever really goes away, but it does quiet down after a while. Yet, there is still a part of them that is always looking over their shoulder.

**SA:** When Moshe lived in Europe, he was the first person on that continent to earn a black belt in Judo. I wouldn’t think that he would call that a disadvantage, do you? Hyper-vigilance is an awful thing if you can’t turn it off, but if you are walking down

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a dark alley in New York City, I would think it’s an advantage.

Q: Here’s the thing: is it hyper-vigilance we want or is it vigilance? Vigilance has a high degree of awareness to it, and hyper-vigilance has a high degree of compulsivity to it. When we get stuck in a response, we can’t act in any other way. There’s no choice in it. [The] Feldenkrais [Method] offers the possibility of more choices in what we do. Once there is the possibility of more choices, that compulsive hyper-vigilance can start to diminish. And what we are talking about here are fairly extreme circumstances. The idea of creating more choices is foundational to the Feldenkrais Method, as is being more skeletal. We all benefit from having more choices...especially in our everyday lives....this is where the work can have a huge impact.

SA: You’re currently involved in a project, a DVD set for pregnant women entitled, ‘Pregnant Pauses-Movement for Moms.’ In the description of that series, you talk about a pregnant woman using herself in a more efficient, more intelligent way, what do you mean by that?

Q: For some women, pregnancy is easy, it’s a wonderful experience and they just fly right through. But for many women, it’s not like that. They wake up one morning and wonder, “Who am I?” They don’t recognize themselves. Over the years, I have given lessons to many pregnant women and it would happen, sometimes, that they would come in a week later, and even I didn’t recognize them because they seemed so different. The changes can be quite dramatic. The question is, how can we make it appreciable to pregnant women that although change keeps happening, there is some part of themselves that remains constant? It’s a sense that it feels right, that I am able to connect my intention to an action, that I can connect to the sense of support offered by my skeleton that makes it easier and more comfortable to get around. Pregnant women are highly motivated to be more comfortable, and that’s definitely a main aspect of what [the] Feldenkrais [Method] has to offer.

In Awareness Through Movement®, you get to move in a way that you like how it feels, you get to feel better from the inside. And a woman who is more aware of how her body responds, or of having choices in how to respond is going to have a much easier time adapting to the changes throughout her pregnancy. So, while Pregnant Pauses is about moving through pregnancy with greater ease, it has unmistakable fringe benefits that go way beyond just those nine months.

Alan Questel’s videos are available at: http://uncommonsensing.com http://pregnantpauses.us
Contact Alan at: alan@uncommonsensing.com

Gabrielle Pullen is a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner™ in California. Contact Gabrielle at: Gabrielle.pullen@gmail.com

Watch an ATM Class at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=004wr-Yn-2w
Movement is Life: this is a big picture.

A curse and blessing of being a Feldenkrais® practitioner is finding over and over the vast web of connections and implications of this work to almost all of human life. I started thinking about how these three elements core to being alive—feeding, sex, and fighting and the Feldenkrais world view could be a jolly dance of exploration. Our work is nothing, if not about exploration. And of course, this is just the beginning.

Food / Feeding
Food is obviously essential to our life on this planet, right? Because if we don’t eat, we’ll die, and so a system that is about increasing happiness and well being and vitality in life has to keep us alive, and to stay alive we need to eat. And let’s have some fun: what is the most important movement to a human being who has been weaned.

Answer: bringing at least one hand to our mouth. This is a movement that has a FUNCTION. If you come to a practitioner for a private lesson, they are called Functional Integration® lessons, and if you were to lie on your back on that pleasantly firm Feldenkrais table, and the practitioner were to begin to bring one of your hands in the direction of above your head, she or he would first bring your hand toward your mouth, and then in front of your face, and then, bit by bit, probably, above your head. This function, hand to mouth is a big deal to our brains. The brain loves and knows this movement: apple to mouth, fork of yum food to mouth, celery stick to mouth, glass of water to our mouth. So if a practitioner were to just “make better” this movement of hand toward your mouth, in sitting, and lying on your back, and lying on your side, that “better” would spill out into all sorts of ease and clarity in movement in back, neck, ribs, shoulder, pelvis, breathing, hands, fingers, and probably even more.

So the big picture of feeding ourselves, and the genius of the Feldenkrais Method® in capturing the brain’s deep interest in useful and real function, could combine to help a client play the violin better, or comb the back on their head with a brush, or walk with more freedom and ease, or dance with more joy and delight. All for 4 million years of bringing nourishment to our mouths!

And then there is another “Big picture” of feeding as in where does the food come from? And can the Feldenkrais Method help that? Sure.

Let’s say you want to raise some healthy food, save some money, get fresh air, sunshine, exercise, slow down your life a bit, reconnect with the Earth. Where am I leading us? To a garden, of course, and all that leaning, kneeling, pulling, shoveling, swinging a pick around, up and down, all this is a great chance to limber up and keep young and flexible. And what of the various “aches and pains” that keep some of us from gardening?

The Feldenkrais Method to the rescue. Group classes, private lessons, following various blogs that include lessons can keep you gardening with pleasure. And then that feeding necessity of going to the store and paying good old fashioned money, can the Feldenkrais Method help us stand on our own two feet and earn our living?

Yes.

It’s a long story, but let’s just say, that part of the “side effects” of lessons seems to be a sense that we can start out on a path with an intention, and by awareness and flexibility, keep pursuing that intention much more easily and enjoyably than if we hadn’t been doing lessons.

Okay, feeding and the Feldenkrais Method. One helps the other.

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Sex in the Human Species
Do we need sex?

As a species, yes, though a pastor friend of mine once joked that the only of God’s proclamations truly followed was, “Go forth and multiply.” Be that as it may, you are reading this because a whole string of your ancestors had s-e-x.

Beyond the big picture, we all have our brief flash of time on this planet and in that time sex seems to be good for the spirits, good for our need to bond intimately with another, good for balancing the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous system, good for the breathing, the sleeping, the practicing of paying attention to someone else besides the usual “me, me, me.” It’s vital exercise for the pelvis and spine, an opportunity to move a central part of our moving organism. What is this pelvis that links our two legs that walk and run and stands us and our spine, that holds up head to see and hands to grab, hug, put apples in the mouth, shoot arrows at moving future meat, what is this pelvis about?

A lot.

And my Feldenkrais trainer once said, perhaps even on the first day of training, that “the punch line to every Feldenkrais joke is the pelvis.” Whether working with children, high powered musicians or athletes, the goal is the same: get the pelvis and lower back to hold up the head, via a spine that knows its part of a “big picture,” so that spine is easy and holding our ribs is easy, with our shoulders floating freely on our ribs, so that shoulders and head and arms are free, and you have a happier, more easily moving person.

Fighting
Let’s think historically, as in why you and I are still here. Somewhere back there we probably had ancestors that fought off the cold, or bad guys, or wild animals, or forest fires/ floods and so on.

Moshe Feldenkrais as a real historical person had to engage in hand to hand combat and judo for survival reasons in the early days of Palestine before Israel became a state. Built into the core of the Feldenkrais methodology, in my mind, is an understanding that good judo makes for good living. Not “tough guy” judo, but the central aspects of what makes good judo good, what makes powerful and easy judo powerful and easy. And what are these aspects?

One, once more our deep moving friend the pelvis. And one more necessity: freedom of our necks.

Many a martial artist has or could improve their tai chi, karate, judo, aikido, boxing, with two hints that Moshe stressed as central to martial arts: 1. having the power connected to the pelvis region and that region always clear and connected to gravity and 2. having a flexible and mobile neck and eyes, so we can always look around to find the enemy. Or friend.
Sit comfortably in a chair, with both feet on the floor and your back away from the back of the chair.

Feel yourself more or less upright, and feel what that is like. Perhaps closing your eyes can help you get a more clear Sensing feel of yourself.

Now, slowly, begin to bring your right hand to your mouth, and then place it back down in your lap. You’ve done this a zillion times, so go slower than slow and see if you can notice anything new about this life necessary movement.

Rest.

Now bring the back of your right hand just to the left of your mouth, and bring your hand back down, and as you repeat this movement, move toward bringing the middle of your right forearm to your mouth. After it’s there, go back and forth from lap to middle of right forearm at your mouth.

Rest.

Now please come to this last position of middle of your right forearm on your mouth and begin to round and arch your spine. What does that mean?

To round your spine: bring your belly in and back, rock back a bit on your pelvis, let your sternum sink and your nose lower as if you are going to look between your legs.

All the while your arm and mouth are united, and this gives your elbow a downward trajectory as you round your back.

Then when you arch your back, your elbow will lift, your eyes and nose will look up, your sternum will rise, your belly will come forward a bit and you will rock a bit forward on your pelvis.

Go slowly and with pleasure and awareness in the arching and rounding, paying attention to all your parts: spine, ribs, sternum, elbow, nose, belly and pelvis.

Take rests if you get fatigued, or lose concentration, but do come back to this until you can feel an unity of sorts between your pelvis rocking forward and back, and your elbow raising and lowering.

Have thoughts, if you wish, about how this motion in the pelvis region could have something to do with s-e-x.

Rest.

Now, play with this a bit. Put yourself in the same position of the middle of your right forearm touching your mouth as you sit forward on your chair, and arch up so your elbow is more toward the sky/ceiling and your pelvis is rocked forward more, and from here bring your pelvis into a kind of hula hoop circle on your chair, and allow your elbow to make a corresponding circle that you discover.

Enjoy this a bit, and then reverse the circle. Go slowly enough to get a nice realization of your pelvis and spine and head as a grand team.

Rest.

Now for a bit of the fighting part:
Sit with your left hand on your left knee, and bring your right hand down and outside of your left knee, going down and twisting slowly and easily. Then rise up from this with an arching of your back as earlier, but this time raising your right hand forward and up and to the right, as if slapping someone with the back of your right hand, or slashing a sword up and to the right, and any other image you’d like (hitting a backhand tennis shot way to high, flinging a Frisbee to the right and upward), whatever the image, feel your whole self participating in this curling down and twisting (as if to load your strike, throw, fling, slap) and then uncurling and letting your back and pelvis participate in a powerful move of your right arm and hand.

Rest.

This is all one sided. Please feel free to read the instructions and then imagine this all on the left side, and then perhaps do it just once on twice to see how clear your imagining was and what you would need to remember if you were to imagine it again.
The Art of Slowing Down:  
A Sense-able Approach to Running Faster

So many people run because they think they “ought to”: to burn calories, to be thin, to get enough cardio exercise. Moshe Feldenkrais said in The Potent Self, “…ought to means don’t want to…” And many people give up running because it hurts, it’s not rewarding, they don’t improve and countless other reasons.

The idea of taking up running can even seem in contradiction with Feldenkrais® principles like, slow down, pay attention to what’s taking place, only do what’s comfortable. So it seems even more counterintuitive to slow down in order to run faster. And yet that’s exactly what Edward Yu has set out to do in his new book, The Art of Slowing Down: A Sense-able Approach to Running Faster.

Yu, a Feldenkrais teacher and practitioner of Tai-Chi and Bagua (Chinese martial arts), has written a book that is about much more than running. He generously shares anecdotes from his own struggle not only to slow down, but to listen, as well as his personal trials with learning to love running. He writes in a down to earth engaging style that is easy to understand. The body of the book explores everything from gravity to biomechanics, with a healthy dose of philosophy. Peppered throughout are inspiring quotes that relate to the chapters. The book offers a program of “training” based on Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement® lessons. These lessons are illustrated with clear photos that can amplify understanding of the lessons. And again, these lessons can be enjoyed for so much more than running.

If you run, or know someone who does, this is an excellent and very “sense-able” gift that will guarantee to improve your running, even as you slow down!

A Guide to  
Awareness Through Movement®:  
18 Lessons based on the Feldenkrais Method®, Second Edition
by Chava Shelhav, Ph.D. & Dalia Golomb

The detailed instructions and abundant photos accompanying the 18 lessons in this new collection sets it apart from many other guides intended for both Feldenkrais® teachers and their students. Lessons on standing, sitting, lying on the back, side and stomach, as well as lessons for breathing and the voice are included.

Chava Shelhav is a graduate of Moshe Feldenkrais' first Israeli training and Dalia Golomb is an experienced practitioner.
The domain of core self seems to be where psychology crosses paths with brains and bodies.”
-Roger Russell, 2004

The concept of unifying mind and body to foster healing dates back 2500 years as a cornerstone of Buddhist practice. By the 1970’s, Moshe Feldenkrais had envisioned and created a method designed to facilitate healing, self-regulation, and the emergence of self by inducing neurological change and reintegrating the central nervous system through sensory input to brain, body and the embodied mind, achieved through movement with attention. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, neuropsychological research and brain imaging technologies had provided conclusive evidence that integrative brain development occurs throughout our lives, the result of integrative and mindful cognitive, behavioral, and sensory connections made within, and between brain and body, and through integrative connections sustained between brains in human relationship.

Eating disorders are disorders of Self & sensing
Eating disorders and co-occurring body image distortions represent the loss of integrity of the core self and with that, the inability to sense the self accurately, to regulate the self effectively, and to functionally adapt to change. Disconnection from self can be observed in the anorexic’s inaccurate sensing of the body-

Self-image and mind-body unity
According to Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, “We act according to the image that we create of ourselves.” He used the terms “self image” and “body image” interchangeably, asserting that there is no valid distinction to be made between the mind and body. He explains that one’s self image changes from action to action, and that “The improvement of self-image [through attention to self-sensing] increases the number and range of possible actions.”

Self development is grounded in attention to kinesthetic experience
According to Feldenkrais, the functional, kinesthetic nature of his method stimulates change with poignant immediacy only where there is concentration on each part of the action itself, on what was felt during the action, on the total body-image and the effect of the action on the body image. The neuropsychologist Daniel Siegel describes such a focus of attention as the “specificity scalpel into the brain to re-carve neuro-circuits,” capable of changing the architecture of the brain through growing its integrative and regulatory fibers and modifying synaptic connections.

Feldenkrais Method & Psychotherapy
Eating disorders strip their victims of the internal resources and resiliency required to accomplish the tasks of recovery.

Eating disorders strip their victims of the internal resources and resiliency required to accomplish the tasks of recovery.”

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tools and ego strengths they need to access and use themselves optimally in achieving these goals. Through Feldenkrais’ individual and group learning venues, respectively titled Functional Integration® and Awareness through Movement®, students of the method engage in the act of “learning how to learn” by directing attention to sensing patterns in movement, thereby facilitating self-discovery and inviting curiosity, exploration, and options for differentiating and assembling new, remediated patterns. Anat Baniel, a leading authority on implementing ways to access the brain to overcome pain and limitation, describes the brain as “a self-regulating mechanism that needs to learn how to self-regulate.”

The process of psychotherapy and the Feldenkrais Method similarly evoke and integrate neuronal connections through mindful thought and behavior, each reinforcing the other’s function in re-creating a healthy sense of self. Movement with attention stimulates autonomous shifting out of old habits and into useful new ones, not only by creating and re-creating an image of self and achievement, but through learning a tolerance for uncertainty, and affirming that human beings can change from dysfunctional to functional patterns, becoming more aligned with their intention.

In conjunction with the multi-disciplinary eating disorder treatment team, somatic educational input provides invaluable grist for learning within the treatment process “from the inside out.” Eating disorder clinicians reinforce sensory learning and promote neurological change by facilitating the student’s self-questioning: “What was it like for you to explore inside of yourself? to experience the sensation of transitioning into the unknown? to stay with that feeling, and to sustain that contact with your self? When and where might you have experienced similar feelings or sensations before? Is there a place in your body where you can go to feel safe? What’s it like to have newly discovered so many options in initiating change?”

Scientific and anecdotal research with eating disordered individuals
A controlled study of bulimic in-patients in Germany evidenced positive treatment outcomes for bulimics who engaged in Awareness through Movement classes. These included “an overall reduction of anxiety, increased contentment with problematic zones of their body, more spontaneous, open and self-confident behaviors, a felt sense of self, decreasing feelings of helplessness, and a general process of maturation of the whole personality. Some patients reported a reduction or cessation of purging behaviors.” (Visit: www.empoweredparents.com/1treatment/treatment_02.htm for the full article.)

As a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner and certified Anat Baniel practitioner, as well as a psychotherapist specializing in the treatment of eating disorders for the past four decades, I have pioneered professionally in combining the work of the Feldenkrais Method and Baniel® with relationship-based cognitive-behavioral psychotherapeutic practice, facilitating timely and sustained recovery outcomes. Eating disordered patients engaged in adjunct somatic treatment report a new-found emerging sense of self-awareness, self-control, self-determination, and self-regulation. Some report feeling “more comfortable in their own skin” and more able “to feel themselves as a whole being” rather than as an assemblage of disparate and shameful body parts. One bulimic patient who had been a long-term recovering addict and who lived a life dictated by compulsions observed, “If I can create changes in mood and body sensations so readily through this work, there is no reason to believe I can’t make changes in other areas of my life, as well.”

Feldenkrais spoke of emotional maturity as “emotional flexibility” or “emotional integration,” qualities that are antithetical to the existence of an eating disorder and clearly synonymous with eating disorder recovery.


Abigail was interviewed by ABC. Watch it at: abclocal.go.com/wls/story?section=news/health&id=7993876

Photo of apple by Nutdanai. Image of person running in gear by Rejith Krishnan. Photo of baby eating by Federico Stevanin. Photo of Moshe and his training courtesy of the IFF Archive. Photo of man eating by Andy Newsom. Image of punch by Salvatore Vuono. Photo of ATM: copyright 2007, Rosalie O’Connor. All rights reserved.