

NEW LIFE JOURNAL – March, 2005

***DESIGNED TO FUNCTION:
The FELDENKRAIS METHOD® Improves Movement – and Therefore, Life***

by Louise Runyon,
GUILD CERTIFIED FELDENKRAIS PRACTITIONER^{cm}

*"Movement is life. Without movement, life is unthinkable."
– Moshe Feldenkrais*

The complex, intricate process of evolution has produced a human species designed to function. Effortless posture, elegant movement, strong bones, functioning organs: these are our birthright.

So, what happens? Why must we struggle muscularly for alignment? How do we shift from the effortless movement we knew as children to difficulty and discomfort? How is it that our bones deteriorate, when people in other cultures work sturdily through to the ends of their lives? Why do digestion, breathing, vision and circulation become impaired, sometimes at an early age?

In life, as a result of the strictures of education ("Be quiet! Don't move!"), parental dictates, physical or emotional trauma, repetitive occupational stress, and/or the intervention of surgery, parts of ourselves stop moving and become unknown to us. The alertness and awareness we had as babies, when we were in a constant state of learning, become replaced by habit and often, lack of hope.

The brain needs options – at any age. When given options, it will choose the best path for the present moment. The FELDENKRAIS METHOD offers options to the brain *through movement*. Moshe Feldenkrais (1904 – 1984), an Israeli physicist and engineer, believed that learning – developing, growing, changing, adapting, thriving – happens most fundamentally through moving. When parts of ourselves stop moving, we become unaware of those parts, and vice versa. The movement explorations offered by the FELDENKRAIS METHOD wake up the brain, help fill in missing parts of the map, and things begin to fall into place: we begin to move – and to live – with more of our whole selves, and begin to function as we were meant to. This is embodied learning.

"After just a few moments of the FELDENKRAIS® exercises, people often find themselves, as if by magic, easily doing things with their bodies that they never thought possible."

–New Age Magazine

The FELDENKRAIS METHOD offers movement options to the brain in individual, hands-on sessions known as FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION®, and in group classes called AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT®. In both, ingeniously designed movement processes result in improved alignment,

mobility, balance, breath and self-image, and release of pain. FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION, custom-tailored to each person, utilizes touch and provides the most direct and personal information to an individual's nervous system. It is widely recognized for addressing both minor and serious muscular-skeletal and neurological problems, chronic tension and pain, and the motor development problems of children. AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT lessons are verbally-guided group classes where students begin by noticing how they contact the floor as they lie on their backs. Invariably, by the end of the lesson this has changed: they lie more comfortably, more of themselves is in contact with the floor, they can turn and bend and walk more easily, and pain and dysfunction are frequently gone.

Professional musicians, athletes and dancers have sought out the FELDENKRAIS METHOD to hone and improve their abilities, and to deal with potentially career-ending injuries and conditions. People with strokes, spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis and cerebral palsy have utilized the method extensively to improve their functioning. Individuals with pain and dysfunction through overuse, misuse and neglect have benefited, as well as people who simply want to move more easily, or age more gracefully. Others seek out the method because they have felt alienated from their bodies, or because they are in a process of personal growth and recognize movement as an important part of that process. The FELDENKRAIS METHOD has also been successfully applied to strengthening bones, improving vision, restoring pelvic floor functioning and improving sleep.

Moshe Feldenkrais developed his work in a successful attempt to heal his own injured knees. In the process, he discovered that learning through movement offered even more than the gift of being able to walk again. As he went on to work with other people, he became, more than anything else, interested in the question of human potential. Like Feldenkrais himself, most people come to the method because of physical pain or disability. Very often, they come away with more than just physical relief. They find that if they are not always compelled to orient themselves to the left, or to stand mostly on one foot, they can also act in non-habitual ways in the world. Some find that issues with which they have dealt in therapy for years become resolved when they are no longer carrying them in their movement patterns.

We are designed, through the evolution of the human brain, to function exquisitely throughout our lives. Very often we feel helpless when we do not function, when debilitating injuries result from something as minor as bending over to pick up a pencil. Learning through movement, the basic premise of the method, helps us access that which is possible in our lives, to get more in touch with "how we were meant to be."

"The FELDENKRAIS METHOD is the most sophisticated and effective method I have seen for the prevention and reversal of deterioration of function."

–Margaret Mead, Ph.D., Anthropologist

TRY THIS FOR EASIER TURNING!
A FELDENKRAIS Mini-Lesson

- Sit on the edge of your chair with your feet flat on the floor, feet and knees hip-width apart, hands resting lightly on thighs.
- Turn and look slowly to the right, without straining. How far can you comfortably turn?
- Several times, turn slowly to the right, but keep your eyes forward (you will be looking out of the left corners of your eyes).
- Again turn to the right, taking your eyes to the right also. Do you turn further without strain?
- Several times, turn as if to look over your right shoulder, but this time keep your whole face to the front, so that you turn below the neck.
- Turn right again, including your head and your eyes. How far can you easily turn now?
- Several times, keeping your feet flat on the floor, move your left knee forward. You will feel your pelvis shift on the chair.
- Move your left knee forward as you turn to look to the right several times. Do you see further now, without strain? Do you feel more of yourself involved in the act of turning?
- Repeat these steps on the left!

The terms FELDENKRAIS METHOD[®], FELDENKRAIS[®], FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION[®] and AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT[®] are registered service marks and GUILD CERTIFIED FELDENKRAIS PRACTITIONER[™] is a certification mark of the FELDENKRAIS GUILD[®] of North America.