

**IMPROVING MOVEMENT: *THE FELDENKRAIS METHOD*®**

by Louise Runyon,  
*Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner<sup>cm</sup>*

***Draw On Your Innate Intelligence To Move –  
And Therefore To Live – To Your Greatest Potential***

Imagine a child skipping, the sense of joy in that UP, UP, UP, the child's heart lifting with every hop into the air. Hold in your mind's eye the effortless of children falling down and springing back up, rolling down hills, running across grass. How is it that children move with such ease, such economy? How is it that we seem to lose this as we get older? Is it a question of aging, or of ceasing to explore the endless possibilities with which infants and small children are so constantly engaged?

Through movement, babies are in constant exploration of themselves and their environment. Through repeated trial and error, they come to the miraculous abilities of lifting their heads, rolling over, sitting up, standing and walking. Through movement they discover their fists and feet, and learn to differentiate themselves from their mothers. They learn about toys and space and what makes noise, as they reach and crawl and turn.

As we go through life, we stop moving – and exploring – in many ways and for many reasons. We break an arm and it is immobilized. The arm heals, but parts of our ribcage, shoulder or chest remain immobile. We may experience abandonment or abuse, and parts of us respond by caving in, or freezing up. The trauma of surgery may cause ongoing rigidity in parts of our spine or our muscles. These experiences go away, but the resulting movement limitations often remain, and our process of movement exploration is stopped.

With the *Feldenkrais Method*, people learn again “how to learn.” Through gentle touch and small movements, this method of somatic education (somatic = the lived experience of mind and body together) helps people tap into their innate intelligence to move, and therefore to live, with greater ease, efficiency and elegance.

Moshe Feldenkrais (1904-1984) was a physicist and engineer who lived most of his life in Israel. He developed this work in the course of attempting to heal his own injured knees, discovering for himself the amazing self-organizing ability of the human nervous system. He found that when presented with different movement possibilities, the nervous system has a way of choosing the most optimal, efficient path, which over time becomes part of a person's new repertoire of movement. Feldenkrais became engaged in the process of helping others re-learn how to learn, drawing on the brain's unique ability for self-healing and self-realization.

In *Feldenkrais*® work, students are encouraged to work slowly and gently, with small movements. Quality is emphasized over quantity, and less is generally considered more. In this

way, people come to a heightened awareness of what they are doing and how they are doing it. This enables them to make different choices, both consciously and unconsciously. Because the parts of ourselves that are not moving are generally the parts of which we are unaware, by filling in these “uncharted areas” of our map we soon begin to move differently.

### ***Individual and Group Sessions***

The *Feldenkrais Method* is practiced in two ways: *Functional Integration*<sup>®</sup> refers to individual hands-on sessions, and *Awareness Through Movement*<sup>®</sup> lessons are verbally-guided group classes. Both offer different movement possibilities to the brain in an organized way, which result in improvements in a person’s coordination, posture, breath, self-image, and sense of well-being.

In *Awareness Through Movement* lessons, 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, their breathing is fuller, and pain and dysfunction are frequently gone. These ingenious movement sequences provide students with tools to become self-sufficient in maintaining greater ease of movement.

In *Functional Integration*, an individual is guided through small directed movements by the gentle touch of a skilled practitioner, while lying or sitting on a low padded table. Custom-tailored to each person, this process provides the most direct and personal feedback. *Functional Integration* can address areas that an individual may not be able to access through group classes, and is widely recognized for its ability to address both minor and serious muscular-skeletal and neurological problems, chronic tension and pain, and the motor development problems of children.

### ***Who Can Benefit?***

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.

### ***Our Human Potential***

Although Feldenkrais developed his work in an attempt to heal his own knees, he discovered that exploration through movement offered even more than the gift of being able to walk again. He became, more than anything else, interested in the question of human potential. Like Feldenkrais, most people come to the method because of some sort 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 suddenly 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 occur 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.”

**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!

“Through awareness we can learn to move with astonishing lightness and freedom  
–at almost any age – and thereby improve our living circumstances, not only physically...  
–but also emotionally, intellectually and spiritually.” – **Moshe Feldenkrais**