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INTRODUCTION

The Feldenkrais Method involves movement and facilitates improvements in our ability to function. However it is notoriously difficult to define. It is not that the mechanics of movement lessons themselves cannot be described. It is just that describing the method as movement education or as a modality for improving coordination or flexibility or for reducing stress only tells part of the story. Vague mystical descriptions of the method's more indescribable aspects are equally unsatisfying. The following represents my personal opinion of what learning in the method involves and how it can contribute to personal growth.

Moshe Feldenkrais would probably not have described himself as any particular sort of practitioner. Whilst he considered and absorbed the work of others around him and those who went before him, he was not a follower of somebody else's method. To describe his work as imitating someone else's would have been an anathema to him. He was being himself, just doing his own thing in his own way. The method for him was self-expression. If the method was to go on, I am certain he would have wanted it to be a means of self-expression for those who practised it. I doubt that he would have wanted to produce a generation of clones who simply imitated his work. I also doubt if he would have accepted any authority restricting his own explorations. His dictum was that the only rule is that there are no rules. Nevertheless, because the work was effective in restoring well-being to so many people and because those doing the work felt it was so "right", there has been since his death, an attempt to formalise and promote it. Professional bodies were created to oversee the training of Feldenkrais Practitioners and to represent them as well as to define a code of practice. Registered trademarks were created to identify the work. The method has to have a tangible identity in order to make it commercially viable while professionalism requires consistency in practice. Understandably practitioners' guilds have created guidelines in how the teaching is delivered and by whom. Where there were no rules there now are rules. And whereas Feldenkrais may have not felt compelled to define his work, the training programs and the services provided by graduate practitioners now require a definition of the method. But here we enter into

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uncertainty. Practitioners themselves often struggle to arrive at a satisfactory definition of what it is that they are doing. Some people focus on the value of the method as movement education and that is what it becomes for them. Others focus on the therapeutic aspects of the method until it seems that it is considered as another therapeutic modality. While I suppose it can be anything one wants it to be, something is missing from such piecemeal characterisations. It is more than a tool to be used or a drug to be administered.

It almost does feel like one is trying to describe the indescribable when an effort is made to verbalise what happens during a hands on Functional Integration lesson or how one improves as the result of doing verbally guided Awareness Through Movement lessons. As I became more involved in the method, I felt that the issue of articulating what the method is about needed addressing, if only to clarify to myself what was going on. All the more so because it appeared to me more and more, that everything I did was part of the method. The method has to do with the ability to act and we are in life continually acting. It was becoming difficult to distinguish the method from life itself.

Other disciplines have faced the same dilemma. They need to be defined without losing their essence. The principles underlying their practice may have been elucidated early on. Yet with the passage of time the disciplines often become popularly understood to be something else. The practice of yoga for example, was described in Patanjali's ancient yoga sutras. It is obvious in reading these sutras that to Patanjali, yoga was much more than a series of poses to be done before breakfast. Many branches of yoga sprang up in time, for example Bhakti yoga, Raja yoga, Karma yoga etc as well as Hatha yoga, which represented the path of the physical. Each of these involved different practices and each was supposed to be a path to enable one to realise the aims of yoga. Today when people generally refer to yoga they are unfortunately mostly thinking of Hatha yoga reduced to a system of stretching, not Patanjali's yoga. Patanjali defined yoga at the beginning of his exposition. Various translations of that sutra from the Sanskrit exist, such as "Yoga is the annihilation /control / inhibition of ideas /thought / modifications of the mind." My personal understanding in reading this sutra is that Patanjali

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meant, "Yoga is the inhibition of perception". And this to me is equivalent to saying "Yoga is the attaining of awareness". (I will go into my understanding of the word awareness, later in the book.) How far away is this sutra from recommending the mechanical performance of stretches? And how close is this interpretation to the aim of Feldenkrais' verbally guided movement lessons termed "Awareness Through Movement"?

If you are prepared to let it be, the Feldenkrais Method can also be more than a system of improving mechanical performance. It is one of a class of endeavours that allows us to explore and discover our self. The issues addressed may therefore be of interest to a larger audience than the community who are already actively involved with the method. These are really everyday issues that concern everyone. I have therefore also attempted to write about them, as much as possible, in terms that can be familiar to everyone in the event that this work reaches a larger audience.

The method has largely influenced my outlook and approach to exploration. When I talk about movement exploration or movement lessons, they are very much considered in the spirit in which Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement lessons are done. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to give a full description of the method or of specific movement lessons, nor is it my intention to do so. The reader, if he or she has had no experience of the method will no doubt be interested in finding out more about it. Several excellent books that do provide an introduction to the method and movement lessons already exist. I have therefore included the names of some books that give more details of the method in the appendix. Better still, I recommend the reader take lessons with a qualified practitioner. Whilst I cannot provide a full description of the method as it has evolved, it is important that the reader understand its spirit. For this reason it is appropriate to include a few words about its development and application from my viewpoint.

Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais developed his method of functional movement exploration through his lifetime last century. He started by exploring movement in a bid to improve the ability to use his knee, which had been injured through sport. Not only did his method help him deal with his knee, he found in it a much wider significance. He came to study movement and concluded that movement was very closely connected to life. There was no

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life without movement. Still, movement and movement improvement were not his only or ultimately even his real interests. It was life itself that interested him. He was interested in how we come to act and how well the action matched our intention. He was not interested in freedom of movement per se. He was interested in freedom of action. He was not interested in movement divorced from intent.

Movement is a component of action. Action is movement performed with a purpose. Freedom of movement, it is found, is a consequence of freedom of action as much as it is a determinant of it. Action requires a clear intent. And a clear intent requires a clear sense of self. Feldenkrais' movement explorations consisted in sensing the self as it moves to act and seeing how it can produce action that matches its intent. Action and intent were, he found, aborted by an unclear sense of self. A clear sense of self is the missing link between the two. In exploring the self in motion and in sensing our relationships, we discover a clear intent and an ability to act. We know what we want and we know what we are doing. We have a sense of what we are capable of doing and in this knowing we can also do what we want. The successful are not always the most gifted. They are those who, facing their reality, know what they want to do and are able to do it. They are those who can give full expression to the self and its relationships.

Conventional physical therapy generally looks at providing freedom of movement through intervention and correction. A tight muscle may be coaxed to relax or stretched. A weak muscle may be strengthened. A joint may be mobilised. Surgery may be advised. There are notions of good movement and bad movement. We learn to lift with our knees not with our backs. Conventional therapy does not address the issue of what our intentions are, how we sense our self in action or even how we produce action. It does not address itself to how we function or if it does, it reduces function to prescriptions for movement. Through therapy we come to act armed with prescriptions, definitions of right and wrong movement. But the prescriptions reduce our options in action. We may truly lift with our knees, but not with our heart or even our head. Had we a sense of self and intent, we may have approached the task differently. We may have slid the object from point A to point B instead of lifting it or we may have enlisted outside

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assistance or decided not to move the object at all. And what if the weight was located on our chest? How would we have lifted it then? Lifting with the back would have been a useful option.

Through movement exploration, we come to an awareness of self. Movement in action is a display and an expression of self. And the self, we find, is not an isolated thing. It is not limited to what resides within the boundaries of our skin. There is no self outside relationship. Awareness of self therefore involves an awareness of our relationships, in short, our reality. Feldenkrais wrote a book, one of several, called Awareness Through Movement. And what it is we become aware of in particular through movement is the self in action and in relationship. The verbally guided lessons he taught are now known as Awareness Through Movement lessons. In the hands on Functional Integration lessons the practitioner moves the student who remains passive. The practitioner's intent replaces that of the student. Perhaps it more accurately is superimposed on the student's intent or merges with it. Further, the practitioner's hands provide sensory feedback to the student about where the body is and what it is doing. Such information is crucial in providing the student the opportunity to change. In examining the possibilities for movement free of his own constraints or under conditions of an imposed constraint, the student has an opportunity to expand the possibilities for action. These may equally have been called Self-discovery Through Action lessons. Since Moshe Feldenkrais died in 1984 his method, which includes Awareness Through Movement lessons as well as the one on one Functional Integration lessons, has been taught by a growing number of practitioners around the globe. The lessons are therapeutic, not though because of outside intervention and correction, but because of internal reorganisation and reorientation. They have been used both in therapy and in promoting ease of movement. As a result of the work people are able to reduce their level of pain and discomfort due to a host of disabling and nuisance conditions. They are able to move more easily, more efficiently, with greater coordination and recover function lost through time or through illness. But these are all consequences of movement exploration and an awareness of self. When we do the explorations for their consequences alone without an appreciation of the process, we lose our sense of the value and the

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importance of that process. When the focus and emphasis is on the recovery we look for through exploration and not on the exploration itself, we lose sight of what the method is about. The effectiveness of the method as a tool in therapy is also diminished as a result. I wanted to remind people of the significance of the process of self-discovery and its outcomes. The benefits of this learning are real. They have the capacity to ease our suffering and to enhance and enrich our lives. When somebody suffers however, they are concerned first and foremost with a rapid alleviation of their suffering. It is natural and often enough necessary, that correctional therapy or treatment is sought rather than waiting for a change through self-discovery. A process of healing through self-discovery cannot promise any predetermined quick fixes. The "fixes" resulting from self-discovery may themselves not turn out to be what the individual envisages. Entering the process requires a degree of responsibility to be taken by the individual for his or her own welfare and it requires a preparedness to accept the self and the outcomes whatever they are. People often lack the confidence that they can take care of themselves or the patience to do so. People are generally not as self-reliant as they could be in our society. We lack faith and even find the meaning of the word obscure. This is not anything new. The proclamation "Ye of little faith" is as familiar as it is old. When we have a problem, no matter whether it is large or small, our tendency may be to consult a specialist who can solve our problem for us without any effort on our part. There is a tendency to treat this service as a commodity. With self-discovery, we still ask for assistance when we need it but we need it less often. The relationship in the receiving of help can be also more of a communication than a commercial transaction.

A degree of suffering or discontent and the search for ways of eliminating it may be prerequisites for embarking on a process of change and self-discovery. We do not look for a change unless we see and feel a need for it. Discontent should therefore be appreciated as being a healthy thing. It provides us with the urge to discover and deserves respect. It leads us to self-discovery and ultimately to self-reliance. It is only when there is a degree of recovery in that process of change and self-discovery that the individual may acquire more self-confidence in the ability to look after him or her-self. More may be seen then in the Feldenkrais Method or

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in the process of selfdiscovery than just a system of correction. While the process is therapeutic, to see it as just another set of techniques or modality for therapy is short changing it. I quote from an article by Feldenkrais translated from the French by Thomas Hanna.¹ In discussing the correction of defects by the method, Feldenkrais says

“...the correction of these defects should not be experienced as the “treatment of an illness”, but, rather, as the rekindling of growth and development of one’s self.”

Despite this, the method has come to be seen by many as merely some sort of therapy or adjunct to therapy or some sort of physical exercise program for enhancing ease of movement. Proponents of such views could say that it does not matter why we do the explorations. They will have their effects anyway. But the reason you do the explorations does affect the way you do them. To my mind you will get more or less out of the process depending on the intentions you start out with. We cannot explore having predetermined our outcome. That is not exploration. That is action. In exploration we search without knowing what we will find. We search because we do not know what we will find. It is a trek into the unknown to discover the self. You must start with the premise and be aware that you just do not consciously know. You must be prepared to allow the knowledge gained to remain unconscious.

Once you have embarked on a journey of exploration and discovery, and as you begin to recover, there comes a greater degree of self-reliance and selfconfidence. You have a sense that you can look after yourself better and knowing you can better deal with, you are not so frightened of, your condition or of life in general. And as you become interested in exploring how you organise yourself to act and your capacity to act, you find in the explorations something of significance. There is something very rewarding in discovering the self. You may not find words though, when starting to explore movement, to express what you see in it. You may simply want to continue because you enjoy doing it without being able to define what it is that you enjoy. Or you may have some indefinable sense that it is the “right” thing to do.

¹ “Bodily Expression” by Moshe Feldenkrais, *Somatics*, Volume 7, No.1, 1988-1999

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Life is a process of learning and self-development. It is a process of continual self-definition and action. Growth should continue throughout life. Exploration and self-discovery should continue because we are continually changing. Learning may stop prematurely and we are stunted for that. The method offers us an avenue to continue that process of learning to self-define. Feldenkrais thought that functional movement exploration was the most direct way to learn and also to learn how to learn. By exploring how we move to act, we remain in touch with our world and ourselves. The sense of well-being and greater ease with which we can live are a direct outcome of our ability to connect with and respond to our world in a greater variety of ways. They come from an ability to choose our path in life and to do what we truly want. If the method is seen simply as one of pain reduction or one of imparting greater ease of movement, we are in danger of overlooking the fact that its practice allows us the opportunity to continue evolving and to better choose our outcomes. If we see the method as a tool to alleviate our condition of pain or discomfort so that we can blindly chase in the same way the same outcomes that were giving us our problems in the first place, we have learnt very little from it.

We find that in movement exploration we are functioning in a different state to acting in everyday life. However we find that being able to explore affects the way we function generally and not only because we move better. We learn, through movement exploration, a different way of sensing than we may have been used to. This way of sensing spills over into action. We learn to be aware. Having periods of awareness is something we may find essential for a more satisfying existence. Sometimes we will lose this sense in action only to come back to it later. Perhaps trouble along the way will be the impetus which compels us to re-examine what we are doing. Perhaps we will simply miss the joy of learning. You may find that there need to be periods of exploration at this different level that I spoke of. These periods of exploration can bring balance and perspective into your life as well as improved mechanical functioning. And you may change what you are doing without being aware that you have changed anything. If you do change it will be in ways and directions that are unimaginable to me. There is no point in me trying to direct that change in you.