

Movement First

—by Prisca Winslow Bradley, GCFP

SenseAbility is produced by the *Feldenkrais*[®] Educational Foundation of North America (FEFNA) and distributed by *Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioners*[™] Content Editor: Lavinia Plonka, GCFP Please e-mail all correspondence to: news@feldenkraigsguild.com or call 866.333.6248.

Back issues and “[Find a Practitioner](#)” are on our website: www.feldenkrais.com Check the website or call for the free [Catalog of Educational Materials](#).

Feldenkrais[®], *Feldenkrais Method*[®], *Functional Integration*[®], and *Awareness Through Movement*[®] are registered service marks of the FELDENKRAIS GUILD[®] of North America. *Guild Certified Feldenkrais Teacher*[®] and *Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner*[™] are certification marks of the FELDENKRAIS GUILD[®] of North America. *Friends of Feldenkrais*[™] is a service mark of *Feldenkrais*[®] Educational Foundation of North America.

Contact us at:
FEFNA
5436 N. Albina Ave.
Portland, OR 97217 USA

1.866.333.6248
(1.866.FEFNA4U)

“Find a comfortable position to rest in.” A dance teacher quietly goes from leaning on knees and elbows to sitting back on her heels, her forehead resting on the ground. Her lower back moves freely, broadening with each inhale. I watch, barely able to contain my excitement, curious when she might realize her knees are fully bent for the first time in years! Four days earlier she arrived at a six day *Feldenkrais*[®] *Awareness Through Movement*[®] workshop for dancers in Taos, NM. She had given up grande pliés (deep knee bends in turnout) and squatting a number of years earlier due to pain in her knees. Throughout the workshop we focused on regaining movement in the torso and spine, discovering where a lack of movement and awareness had kept groups of vertebrae from moving relative to one another. On this day we explored lessons relating to arabesque, bringing a leg high behind us. Like many *Awareness Through Movement* lessons, spatial orientation, weight shift, balance and improving flexibility were all included. As the teacher sensed the full length of her legs and spine in movement, her knee joints had ample space to easily fold. She had not yet noticed her choice to bend them fully for “a comfortable position to rest in.”

Newfound flexibility often comes as a surprise during or some time after an *Awareness Through Movement* or *Functional Integration*[®] lesson. Instant freedom can boggle the minds and beliefs of many people, including dancers who have stretched daily for years. Acknowledging that a change did occur without making an effort is the beginning of a new relationship to yourself and movement – a recognition that a wisdom far more powerful than force

exists in ourselves. We can access this wisdom through listening and intention.

People who have dedicated years to perfecting movement in a given technique or sport may find this new approach takes time to resonate. Another teacher at the summer workshop received an individual *Functional Integration* lesson. Quite tired, she went to her hotel room to rest. She was repeatedly awakened by her own movement. Each time she began to move one of her arms it would hit her in the head



Learning to balance a board on the foot while rolling improves coordination while standing up!

or chest! Her usual amount of force was no longer needed and she had not yet adjusted to the proper amount of muscular work for a simple movement. As you can imagine, it made quite an impression on her. She was then able to notice the overwork in her daily activities and dance. Using more effort than a movement requires drains us of precious energy and takes a toll on all the systems of our body. When we shift to using only the amount of work necessary, there is less strain on our muscles and joints and our stamina increases dramatically.

(continued on page 2)

...Movement First

(continued from page 1)

So how do we go about changing habits of overwork and tension? Mabel Elsworth Todd, in her book, *The Hidden You*, states it simply, "Remember, when we move, we move bones, we do not consciously move muscles. It is movement that resides in the thinking, not muscle action." Placing attention on the use of the muscles is a detour that delays spontaneous action. When we know precisely what we would like to accomplish, muscles automatically respond with minimal effort.

Developing a sense of how to balance our skeletal structure with its numerous bones and joints occurs throughout the first two years of our lives. During that time strength and stability are learned through movement and intention. If we continue to develop our awareness and balancing skills through learning an art or sport, we stay strong and flexible. If we are sedentary, we gradually become less able. Unfortunately in some physical training, and all too often in classical dance, there is an early and strong focus on how to use the muscles rather than clarifying the movement. The balance skills diminish leading to overwork, strain and eventual injury. Rediscovering balance as a constant activity brings fluidity back



Intelligent Injury-Free Dance workshop in Taos, NM

into the technique to make even the most complex movement appear and feel effortless.

Born with unusually flexible hips, I began ballet at an early age. Encouraged to stretch along with everyone else, by age 16 I felt incredibly weak and was referred to as "a noodle". I was advised to do strengthening exercises. After diligently doing exercises daily, increasing them when they did not produce results, I became more tense, less coordinated, and injured. It was not until age 22 that I finally happened onto the *Feldenkrais Method*. The shift was immediate! Although initially I did not know what had happened, I was out

of pain and once again improving as a dancer. Learning to feel and balance my bones, my flexible joints were free to move while easily accessing the strength I had from years of training.

It is much more enjoyable to train through balance than to try to recover free expression after one has accomplished technique with extreme tension. In Ballet, the simplest way to begin, although controversial, is to teach barre work in center floor. With a hand on a barre there is the suggestion that one needs it to stand on one leg. This could not be further from the truth since any healthy child can stand and hop on one leg. As a ballet teacher, I found if you wait to introduce the barre, beginning students of all ages find their balance quickly and are not nearly as tempted to force turnout. The barre can then be introduced as a tool rather than a support. The practice of basic exercises such as pliés and tendues (pointing the feet) lays the foundation for automatic control of turnout, pointed feet and the ability to land a jump or turn in plié. From there, learning movement without extra detailed thinking is more fun and reduces tension.

The *Feldenkrais Method* starts with what one knows and builds to new and more complex movement. This approach can be applied to any type of learning. When teaching grande jetés (big leaps), both children and adults enjoy leaping or running with the longest strides possible before adding turn out, pointed feet, straight legs and specific arm movements. Want to improve port de bra (carriage of the arms)? Stand easily without turnout and tell a story with your arm gestures. Need to get ready to coordinate complex movements of arms with the legs? Continue the story while walking. In this way technique will begin to slip in on its own and can be added with confidence. When trained with clear movement intention and skeletal balance in mind, the musculature develops so artists and athletes performing their chosen physical activity continue to move well as they age. Developing awareness of how to balance our bones is a gift the *Feldenkrais Method* has to offer for everyone. For performing artists and athletes, it is THE gift that makes a difference!

Prisca Winslow Bradley, GCFP, holds a particular interest in highlighting functional movement in dance training so dancers are empowered to take care of themselves throughout a lasting career. Prisca has a private Functional Integration® practice in Taos, NM, assists in Feldenkrais® Professional Training Programs and also teaches Feldenkrais and Dance workshops around the country.

Phone: 575-758-2840

Web: www.moveintobalance.com

Stress, Learning and the *Feldenkrais Method*®

—by Chris Elms, GCFP

Life is a bowl of cherries, if you are a bowl filled with cherries. Otherwise there are elements of learning that at first might seem “stressful,” and yet, once learned, are a sweet and ongoing part of life. For example, we come out of the womb, and the air thing: new. Stress. Lungs don’t know how to breathe air. If we don’t breathe air we die. New situation. Luckily we don’t have cell phones to call up another baby and complain how stressed out we are. Instead, we handle it, learn to breathe, and another life begins, the life in air.

So what is “stress” anyway? Well, we all know that it’s “bad,” because when people say, “I’m so stressed,” they imply that they are in a tense and worried and poorly functioning place. And yet, if the stress of breathing in air had not presented itself and been solved, we’d all need to keep the umbilical cord with us. Not a pleasant way to live.

As part of this life out of the womb, we swim in three oceans: gravity, air, and light. The gravity ocean takes us longest to figure out: how the heck can we move around on two little feet and this long tall cylindrical body, with a big heavy head thing at the top? This is a stressful situation, having a human body in an ocean of gravity. Most of us handle this, often stopping our learning when we’ve gotten the mere basics of walking from chair to bed to automobile, but we know how to move in gravity. Sort of.

And if we step off a curb and aren’t paying attention, or suffer a stroke, or are born with some neurological limitation, the gravity thing can be more than we can handle. So we start life in stress, handle it, and have the stress of a long, tall, top-heavy body in gravity, and sort of handle it, and then life keeps throwing challenges our way. Is this stress or opportunity? Well, having to learn a second language in ten minutes might be stressful. Have three months in a new country in which to immerse ourselves and learn, an opportunity.

What to wear to the party you don’t want to go to: stress or opportunity? How to build up a new business? How to learn to ski when you are over sixty? How to live with the loss of a loved one, either through death or divorce?

When the Oakland fire of 1989 roared through the hills and destroyed thousands of homes, there were two reactions. One was what you’d expect, “Lost everything. Devastating. All the family photos. Years of work and memories,” and so on. Another reaction was, “Wow, I was dreading cleaning that back room and the garage, and now I don’t have to do it. This is a great chance to start over!”

So, stress seems at least partly in the eye of the beholder.

If seen right, small doses of stress are exactly what we need as human beings to expand and grow and thrive in our lives. Interestingly enough, and not surprising for a system

developed by a physicist deeply interested in judo and the biology of living systems, the *Feldenkrais Method* could be called the intelligent application of small and useful stress to break old habits and discover new ways of moving, being and thinking.

So, for example, we could turn our heads to the left and see how far we turned, and with what ease. This is a useful skill when driving a car, the ability to look behind ourselves to the left. If we then turned our head halfway to the left, picked something to look at there, and then began to move our nose to the right of that point and our eyes to the left, and then brought nose and eyes back to this reference point, and then took our eyes to the right and nose to the left of this point, and so on, back and forth, this movement, if we haven’t done it before might seem “stressful.”

If we slowed down our efforts, took rests, and allowed ourselves to do this in little smaller bits, we might find ourselves learning something we didn’t know we could do. And then as this head and nose in opposition thing became easier, the stress feeling might completely dissolve and a feeling of ease and expansion might appear.

If we once again look to the left, and allow our eyes to go in synch with our nose, we might discover that turning to the left has become easier. Stress sets us up to learn. In the *Feldenkrais Method*, there are hundreds of lessons designed to create situations of small and surmountable stress, that result in our nervous system learning new possibilities of action.

These lessons, called *Awareness Through Movement*® lessons, give us over and over an opportunity to experience the healing “frustration,” of encountering something new, or slightly difficult, or perhaps even very difficult, and then take our time solving these riddles, with the way out always involving an expansion of awareness.

We are designed to learn, but often avoid the opportunity. If we are smart and/or lucky we will set up challenges to stress/expand our lives. This might be brushing our teeth with the non-accustomed hand. It might be smiling and saying nothing when our partner throws a zinger our way. But, one way we can count on to practice and delight in taking a bit of stress into our life and learning how to “handle” this stress (notice the very physical implications of hand-le) is through an ongoing involvement in *Feldenkrais*® lessons. Each time we engage with the opportunity to learn, we can, instead of getting “stressed” by the stress, be recalibrating ourselves to experience “stress” as a learning opportunity.

Chris Elms, M.A., teaches awareness (to himself and others), offers Feldenkrais® lessons for adults and children, rides a bike, writes daily (www.slowsonoma.com and more), and ponders the saving of the human race from self-extinction in Sonoma, California.

The Gift of *Feldenkrais*® Training

–by Jodi Freedman, GCFP*

Growing up, I never really enjoyed being physical. I was the kid who was always picked last for team sports and faked having my period as much as possible so I didn't have to participate in P.E. People seemed to have so much fun running and jumping and dancing. I just didn't get it. When I had to engage in physical activities, not only did it not feel good, it felt bad. By about ten years old, I figured out that sports were not my thing. Don't get me wrong, there were many things that I enjoyed, but physical activity was not on the list.

In college it got worse, as the pressure to do aerobics or go for a hike was all around me. We had to take a P.E. course in college and I chose one that I thought had the least amount of movement – archery. I kept getting bulls' eyes, in the target next to mine! I simply had no idea how to use my body. My self-image was, "this is Jodi, and this is her body, but never shall they actually meet." I never felt truly connected to my physical body. I had a successful life, job, friends and passions. I was fine.

About ten years ago, I thought maybe I'd give the exercise thing another try. After all, it was supposed to be good for me. I perused the community college catalogue for something slow and gentle; to ease me into movement. And there it was, a once a week class, on mats, that purported to be slow, gentle, easy and was designed to facilitate ease of movement: *Feldenkrais*. It was open to seniors too, so I figured if they could do it, certainly a thirty-something could handle it. "Dress comfortably and bring a mat," the catalogue said.

I can't even remember what we actually did in that first class, but I remember the feeling in my body when I stood up. I felt lighter, taller, less tense and kind-a-sort-a happy to be in my body. I remember that I had a goofy grin on my face as I walked – no floated – back to my car.

For the next six years, I took group *Feldenkrais*® classes, called *Awareness Through Movement*® lessons, and one-on-one lessons, called *Functional Integration*®. In *Awareness Through Movement* classes, a practitioner verbally guides us through a series of slow, gentle movements, that are designed to offer options and choices and also encourages us to decide the quality, rate, and range of movement according to our needs. A private *Feldenkrais*® lesson, called *Functional Integration*, involves hands-on work, usually with the student lying on a table or sitting in a chair, as the practitioner takes the student through various, function-related movements. And slowly, I came to know my body, and even enjoy my movement.

I am now in my last month of a four-year, 800 hour *Feldenkrais*® practitioner training program. When I tell people that I am doing this, they are curious to know what exactly is the *Feldenkrais Method*, what happens in a class, and who is it designed for? I wish there were short, easy answers to their queries.

In the past four years, through my *Feldenkrais*® training, I have learned how to stand on my head, do judo rolls, balance books on my hands and feet while rolling on the floor, stand and sit more comfortably, and even on occasion, enjoy walking. But more importantly, I am learning how to think and feel differently not only about my body, but about my life.

Moshe wrote in his book, *Awareness Through Movement* :

Each one of us speaks, moves, thinks, and feels in a different way, each according to the image of himself/herself that he/she has built upon over the years. In order to change our mode of action we must change the image of ourselves that we carry within us. Such a change involves not only a change in our self-image, but a change in the nature of our motivations, and the mobilization of all the parts of the body concerned.

And that's exactly what I feel I have gained: a new way to see myself. As I have become aware of my body and learned that I can move in many different ways, I have simultaneously become aware that I can move my life in many ways too. I don't have to be trapped by my habitual thinking and movements. And through my training, I am learning to help others move, think and feel in new ways.

Feldenkrais also said about physical movement, "...make the impossible possible, the possible easy, and the easy elegant." I thought it was impossible for me to be a physical person and enjoy it. I still don't consider myself an athlete, but there have been times when my movements feel easy, free and even elegant. Where my training will move me, I do not know, but I am excited to move forward. Who knows, maybe I'll even join a dance class. Wow, there's something I never thought would happen! Things can change, and my *Feldenkrais*® work has shown me that and much more.

Jodi is a middle school teacher and wannabe dancer. She recently graduated from the Sonoma Feldenkrais Professional Training Program with Russell Delman. e-mail: jodifreed@gmail.com

**This article was previously published at www.divinecaroline.com*

Featured Region: The Eastern United States

—by *Chrish Kresge, GCFP*

The **Eastern Region of the *Feldenkrais Guild*[®] of North America** comprises Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey. Currently, there is one ongoing *Feldenkrais*[®] professional training program in this region: David Bersin's Baltimore-Washington III training, with 50 students enrolled. Trainees are in the middle of their second year and will graduate in the summer of 2010.

There are 150 *Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioners*[™] in the Eastern Region. We wanted to highlight just a few of the many talented and creative practitioners of the *Feldenkrais Method*[®] in our region.

Several practitioners work with horses or equestrians.

Keith Johnson, GCFP, writes from Charlottesville, VA.

"Currently I find myself offering a combination of services I had not imagined when I started the *Feldenkrais* training. An intensive series of lessons with injured equestrian athletes morphed into doing mounted *Feldenkrais* lessons for the riders, and then morphed again into doing *Feldenkrais* lessons for the horses themselves. Unlike some colleagues, I came to the work not as a horse work expert (although I was a horse-husband for a number of years). Now I find myself offering a peculiar combination specialty that coordinates the rider's movement development with hands-on and in-motion lessons for the horses. My depth of expertise is with the *Feldenkrais Method* and human learning, but I have enough experience to be a valuable contributor to the rider's training of their horses seen from the *Feldenkrais* perspective."

Paris Kern, GCFP, who lives and practices the *Feldenkrais Method* in Baltimore, MD, calls herself "a *Feldenkrais* fundamentalist, working with everyone from children to the elderly." However, she also specializes with working with equestrians and teaching riders "to Ride with the Whole Self". Being a horseback rider herself, she has worked with many riders who experience frustration in executing their intentions or have a lot of pain. Once they have done a clinic or had a series of lessons, they often report that not only has their effectiveness with the horse increased, and their pain decreased, but they are also riding better. Many times the horses' pain has also gone away! "I just see what it is that is getting in their way", reports Paris.

Steve Shafarman, GCFP, lives and practices in Washington, D.C. "In the Amherst professional *Feldenkrais* training and while I was traveling with him, Moshe Feldenkrais often talked about the harms of exercise. He didn't like yoga, jogging, stretching, or exercise machines. I've thought about that a lot, especially when people come to see me after hurting themselves while exercising. Watching people do sit-ups, push-ups, and such, it's easy to see the habits

of straining, stiffening, and holding the breath. Treadmills and stationary bikes, it seems to me, condition people to be mindless, robotic and machine-like, particularly when people exercise while watching television or listening to headphones. With yoga and Pilates, people tend to be very concerned about doing it right, and the focus on achieving a specific goal can sometimes impair learning. "

After Steve wrote *Awareness Heals*, he began to explore ways to exercise that were compatible with the *Feldenkrais Method*. He devised some vigorous and demanding exercises that teach people to be more aware, to breathe more fully, and to move more comfortably and efficiently. "Students who exercise with awareness" he says, "gain much greater benefits from *Feldenkrais* lessons, and they are more likely to retain the benefits."

He believes that combining the *Feldenkrais Method* and exercise will be a powerful vehicle for introducing people to the Method. "I want us to be teaching in gyms, health clubs, and everywhere that people do any type of exercise. "

Jaclyn Boone, GCFP, from Princeton, New Jersey, has learned to teach another form of movement in addition to teaching the *Feldenkrais Method*. Several years ago, the program director of one of the local fitness and wellness centers where she teaches *Awareness Through Movement*[®] (ATM) classes persuaded her to take a Tai Chi instructor certification course offered by the National Arthritis Foundation.

"Many who attend my ATM classes suffer from arthritis and have received benefits from regular practice, and so I imagined that teaching a separate Tai Chi class could complement their *Feldenkrais* experiences. When I attended the Tai Chi workshop, one of the first things that I noticed was the way the instructor's style of teaching was similar to how we teach an ATM class – gentle, thoughtful, slow speed. I told him this, and he said that he had learned a lot about *Feldenkrais* when recovering from a martial arts injury. I found the ease and effortlessness associated with the practice of the Sun style of Tai Chi can be as enjoyable as practicing a *Feldenkrais* lesson. It was also easy to incorporate a new perspective in movement practice into my own teaching style – as if my handwriting became more refined.

When teaching, I keep in mind that there is visual, audible, and kinesthetic learning. In the learning process there usually is an anchor point, or starting place for the student, and a process of exploring and working forward to learn a movement. The ability to have a quiet mind and listen to our nervous system is a skill that improves with practice. And I think that just about everyone can get the benefits of *Feldenkrais* lessons, whether they learn Tai Chi

...Featured Region: The Eastern United States

(continued from page 5)

or not: reduced pain and stiffness, increased sense of tranquility, improved flexibility, and probably most importantly – continuing enjoyment of practice.”

Anne McDonald, OT, GCFP, is a *Feldenkrais* practitioner living and working in Washington, D.C. She says, “As a former pediatric occupational therapist and dancer, I continue to see teenagers with learning disabilities as well as performing artists. Each year I teach a *Feldenkrais* workshop at The University of Maryland to graduate opera students. Both populations appear to benefit from ATM’s and FI, not only in their improved awareness and use of themselves, but also in their increased stamina for paying attention. Being distracted by that internal “over-excitement or fear” that comes right before performing or being a very excitable kid in a classroom of friends, is considerably reduced by learning the *Feldenkrais Method*. It’s really exciting to see!”

Tammy Spitzer, PT, GCFP, owns a health and wellness center in Hagerstown, MD, where she offers the *Feldenkrais Method* as her specialty along with physical therapy.

Prior to her *Feldenkrais* career, Tammy was a physical therapist, with several specialties in neurology, rehab, pain management and wound care. She now uses the *Feldenkrais Method* to address many issues for her clients, from incontinence solutions for women to improved movement for runners and walkers. Tammy suggests that by doing *Feldenkrais* lessons, her clients

no longer consider exercising a chore, but will think of running and walking just as easy and effortless as when they were children. She takes her students through some simple *Awareness Through Movement* lessons that help them find easier connections of their whole body and make running or walking simple and fun.

Tammy further reports that she worked with a young lady who suffered a brain injury from a gunshot wound. “Over several months, we did many *Functional Integration*® lessons. Her balance systems were poor, but over time she was able to briefly balance on one leg, and then even jump. She started using a walker and advanced to no assistive device, returned to full work capacity and resumed a beautifully full life. She credits most of her gains through our work together using the *Feldenkrais Method*, and always recommends others to try the Method.

There are so many wonderful stories to share about how the *Feldenkrais Method* can change the lives of people. I still practice as a physical therapist, but my passion is getting the opportunity to work with my clients using the *Feldenkrais Method*.”

Her wellness center offers ongoing weekly classes in the *Feldenkrais Method*.

Jane Johnston, GCFP (fitoverforty@jesed.com) and *Chris Kresge*, GCFP (chrish@chrishkresge.com) are the Co-reps for the Eastern Region

Interested in Upcoming Events in Your Region?

Visit the Online Version of *SenseAbility* and Click on “Upcoming Events in North America”
www.feldenkrais.com/resources/senseability/

Join Friends of FeldenkraisSM

Your contribution can help to:

- build the *Feldenkrais Method*® virtual library
- sponsor research projects
- develop educational materials
- promote public awareness

www.feldenkrais.com/senseability

support the vision



Please send me info on:

- becoming a *Friend* —Leave A Legacy™ planned gift
- becoming a practitioner —Annual Conference program
- FREE educational materials catalog

Call: 1.866.FEFNA4U (toll free)