

# FELDENKRAIS AUSTRALIA

Journal of the Australian Feldenkrais Guild Inc.

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**LOVE, SEX AND  
FELDENKRAIS:  
CHRISTINE BARRAT  
MOSHE FELDENKRAIS  
LOUISE RUNYON  
DEBORAH BOWES  
LAVINIA PLONKA**

## ABOUT FELDENKRAIS AUSTRALIA

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Next issue is planned for 2019, contributions are invited.

Please address all correspondence to the editor,  
**Email:** [nationalnewsletter@feldenkrais.org.au](mailto:nationalnewsletter@feldenkrais.org.au)

*Cover: Cover photo is of the plant Psychotria Elata, also known as the Hot lips plant, which grows in Central and South America.*



## EDITORIAL

By Ralph A Hadden

Welcome to this issue of Feldenkrais Australia, my last as editor as I am now

relinquishing that role. This issue has been a long time in production, my apologies. The delay has been partly because of my almost superhuman powers of distraction and procrastination. But another, important reason, has been the theme, sexuality. It's a very challenging topic and there was, initially, a reluctance to discuss it. So, it has been a slow process. I persisted and gradually contributors came forward. Also, through the Facebook page *Feldenkrais Practitioners Around the World* I learnt of Christine Barrat's article in the French guild journal and that the German guild's 2016 journal had Sexuality as its theme. So I have, at last, assembled a splendid set of articles that you can now read here. I hope your reading is enjoyable.

Meantime, in other adventures, I have had a couple of trips to Japan. Initially I travelled there for a Melbourne client of mine, 10 year old Nathan. I gave him Feldenkrais support in the period following his gene therapy surgery in Tochigi. It was a fascinating and rewarding time working with the courageous youngster and his dedicated, loving parents.

While in Japan I also connected to lovely members of the local Feldenkrais community, had the opportunity

to offer an advanced training (many thanks to Yoko Kudo for wonderful organizing and translating) and sat in on Eilat Almagor's FPTP in Kawasaki.

And I enjoyed some travel and exploring in this marvelous country. There was a rich strangeness in the culture, language, food, rail systems and landscapes. I could almost feel the neuroplastic creaking and stretching of my brain coping with a torrent of new information. Fortunately I encountered many friendly Japanese people who were happy to help this confused gaijin traveler.

What I've been reading: *The Power of Habit* by Charles Duhigg. Duhigg examines how we form habits, how they become entrenched and how we can transcend them. As with Feldenkrais the key is to recognize the pattern and then insert a new behaviour option. Each habit strategy is illustrated by intriguing stories of individuals, organisation and cultures. Highly recommended.

For light entertainment: *Tell the Truth, Shame the Devil* by Melina Marchetti. Marchetti is well known for her delightful book for teenage readers, *Looking for Allibrandi*, but in this latest book she turns to crime fiction for a general audience. And she succeeds magnificently, an absorbing read.

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# FEATURE : LOVE, SEX AND FELDENKRAIS



## FELDENSUTRA

By Christine Barrat

*Christine (Rome 1992) originally trained as a physiotherapist (1987). She is a Trainer (2014) and Educational Director and has been working as a Feldenkrais practitioner in Avignon, France since 1990. She has taught advanced trainings about Confidence and Balance, Pelvic floor and sexuality, Baby movement for adults and its emotional effects. She enjoys dancing Argentine Tango and is currently working on lessons integrating Feldenkrais and tango for older adults.*

*This article was originally published in the journal of the French Feldenkrais guild, Corpus 8, Le Bulletin number 68, 2016. The article was translated from the French by Erica Horn (Liège 2004) with help from Feldenkrais practitioners Audrey Wilmott (Wellington, 2010), Nick Aboukhater (Melbourne 2008) and trainee Marie Claude-Tremblay.*

Is writing about sexuality taboo? Who dares to be the first to do so? This is a theme present in all of Moshé Feldenkrais' works, dealt with directly and precisely, evoking the learning process of sexuality, difficulties

resulting from incomplete maturation, problems of erection, premature ejaculation, frigidity, orgasm, auto-regulation, balance of the sympathetic/parasympathetic systems....

So to start, let me tell you a brief story.. As in ATMs, stories play a role in our learning process, certainly as much as the movement or the questioning does....

### A true story

One afternoon a woman in her 60s rang my doorbell. She said she wished to join in classes and asked me the schedule. Nothing extraordinary so far but then she added: "I'm warning you, I don't wish to speak about my sex life in the group." Surprised, I paused an instant, wondering what could have brought her to make this declaration straight up and in such a strong manner. She then pointed to Moshé Feldenkrais' book "Body and Mature Behaviour" which was on my bookshelves in the waiting room and said: "I read that book, that man's obsessed, he thinks of nothing else! So, I'm telling you, I'm happy to do the movement classes but no speaking out." For me the situation was comical and I had to stop myself from laughing. This woman seemed totally serious and was clearly expressing that which she didn't want. I assured her that I wasn't in the habit of having group discussions

either during nor after the classes and even less so any evocation of the participants' sexuality.

This interaction left me thinking, and various questions surfaced... How did this woman interpret what she had read? How could she have thought that we ask students about their sex lives? I meticulously went back through the book and came to the conclusion that either she read only the subtitle or that she started reading it from the end, backwards. Something I often do... don't you? (And you, reading this article?)

After having re-read *Body and Mature Behaviour*, there's one phrase that emerged which I could have used as a title: "...only individuals fully matured in all their functions, mental, emotional, physical and social could so adjust themselves to each other as to make the sexual act an emotional, physical and aesthetic pleasure, mutually produced and equally shared." (*Body and Mature Behaviour* (IUP 1981, p 134). Moshé Feldenkrais published this book in 1949; it was modern for its time when the idea was that sexual relationships often brought children into being, whether desired or not. The era of sexual liberation and the contraceptive pill hadn't yet arrived.

That this woman didn't wish to discuss it, I understand as it's not so simple. It's a subject that we don't even

broach during the training but throughout my 25 years of practice I've often had both men and women students who, on the contrary, have had enough confidence to ask very precise questions on the theme and/or to ask for help.

The role of the somatic educator is to ask him/herself: how can one integrate this part of oneself into the regulation of the whole? How to relate these questions to movement? How to situate the learning process in the senses, in what one feels, awaken the kinaesthetic senses at both a cellular and skeletal level? This is what we know how to do with the Feldenkrais Method and it is the most concrete approach.

#### **Who comes to see a Feldenkrais practitioner to speak about sexuality?**

Initially I mostly saw young mothers wishing to "find themselves" as a woman again after having given birth. They suffered from urinary incontinence, had little feeling in the pelvic floor and had no idea as to how all "this" worked.

Others were women who had undergone medical treatments, often for cancer, who "no longer felt as they did before". Their libido had declined. Listening to what they told me I couldn't see a directly

proportional link between the difficulties they felt and their surgeries, or their residual scars. The amount of difficulty doesn't depend on the magnitude of their surgery or treatment, it's their self-image that has been altered by the experience. It's possible, through movement, to act upon this representation of oneself. For example, a tiny scar on the side of one breast totally changed how one of my students saw herself. She no longer felt feminine, no longer wore a bathing suit, didn't allow herself sexual relationships, nor even to be touched or held in someone's arms....

Another female student, having undergone surgery of much greater magnitude, an organ ablation followed by chemotherapy, asked me to help her once again feel comfortable with her body. She asked questions that were more precise and technical concerning her pelvic floor, positions that would be more comfortable....

Then men students started to ask for help; they suffered from erectile dysfunction, either inefficiency or instability, suffered tensions and global stress that altered their sexual performance. Others had problems with urinary incontinence (following prostate surgery). These people had of course undergone a long series of treatments before coming to Feldenkrais. They'd often received local, very specific re-education. Now

their demands were orientated towards a more global approach or a clarification of their body image.

And to end on a more pleasant note, someone in the 60s who came for FI. She said that she had recently met a new love and wanted to be able to again feel the sensations in her back, pelvis and hips so as to really feel at ease in this relationship. "So", she said to me, "that all the little aches and pains of age don't interfere too much with the pleasure!"

### **Necessary harmony of the whole**

Sexuality is an integral part of our life and it's our entire life that creates the space for a flourishing sexuality. Do we have a clear image of how we breathe, how we look at one another, how we touch each other, how we know each other, how we love each other? Perhaps it's not easy to speak about, and I asked myself where to start and how to select themes so as not to write an entire book...

*In the sexual act, as in any act, there is a sensory, a motor and emotive component. In some acts, one of the components may be for practical reasons ignored. Not so in the sexual act.* (op cit p 132)

All components being of equal importance, I've chosen to present motor function, starting distally, i.e. at distance from the perineum and genital organs, in order to integrate them in the whole. We'll seek fluid mobility in every direction, of the spine, the pelvis, hips and ribcage.

*By eliminating contraction and rigidity in the pelvic region, an obstacle interfering with reflex discharge of motor impulses, essential to normal orgasmic release of tension in the sexual act, is removed.* (op cit p 156)

### **The top 10 ATM, ad hoc:**

Pelvic Clock

The Cat (on all fours, flex, extend spine)

Spine like a Chain (1/2 bridge lying on the back)

From all fours to sitting on the heels

Bending the legs like a frog (AY48, And from here to the frog stand)

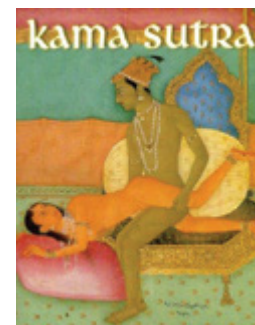
Buttocks (AY13)

The Sphinx

Some lessons that are more clearly orientated to the breath, allowing you to differentiate the abdomen, ribcage and diaphragm

The Oral Cavity, mouth, teeth and tongue (AY23, Palate, mouth and teeth)

Bell Hand



*Kama Sutra*

All of these lessons allow one to build confidence, to clarify self-image, to learn to differentiate the various sensations, mobility and intention of movement. We could list the lessons and thus create the "Felden-Sutra" referring to the work whose name is known but perhaps not explored enough by most people even though it also includes positions for those less acrobatic.

The Kama Sutra, the Indian treatise on the art of loving written by Vatsyayana in the year 500 and based upon works from the 4th century BC, shows the importance of sexual satisfaction, considered to be a divine pleasure. The art of sexuality has been developed, according to places and times, as being social, aesthetic and .... even at times, therapeutic!

Many books and articles deal with the history of sexuality. For as long as the mechanisms of procreation remained a mystery, women's sexual fulfilment was encouraged and reputed to give beautiful children. It was imagined that the woman expelled the egg inside herself just as the man ejaculated and they

combined to produce the child. Later, under pressure of monotheistic religions, the association of sexuality and pleasure was considered shameful, to be hidden, which didn't help a large number of individuals mature in this area of their personality and further condemning this aspect of pleasure only for the benefit of reproduction.

*Re-education of the kinaesthetic sense, and resetting it to the normal course of self-adjusting improvement of all muscular activity - the essence of life - is fundamental. By the principle of correlation, it has the advantage of directly improving breathing, digestion and the sympathetic and parasympathetic balance, so important in the sexual function, all linked together with emotional experience and is a worth-while enterprise in its own right at any time (op cit pp 155-156)*

### Discovering the pelvic floor

With the periphery differentiated and clarified, it's possible to consider the sensations of the pelvic floor. But who knows their pelvic floor?

This question is superbly dealt with in Eve Ensler's play "The Vagina Monologues", where one after another, women describe their vagina, how they imagine it, what they know about it, their experiences concerning it....



What image do you have of your pelvic floor? Could you draw it? The rounded boney form of the pelvis frames the base which is soft but firm at the same time, in the shape of a diamond.

Its function is to retain the weight of the internal organs and viscera and sustain the pressure resulting from the contraction of the trunk muscles (it's therefore reasonably tonic), and to the contrary, allow enough space for the baby to pass during childbirth (which also requires a large amount of suppleness). Well-illustrated anatomical charts make it possible to visualize the tissue layers, ligaments and orientation of the tissue fibres. The 4 cardinal points, pubis, coccyx and the 2 ischia form the insertion points of this diamond that is reinforced in the centre by the pubococcygeus muscle in the form of an 8 (see page 8 - The muscle of happiness).

### Differentiating the quarters of the diamond

This will allow us to create a mental image and then play with more specific ATMs to learn to sense and

differentiate the different "quarters" of the perineum and their relationships with the breath, voice, movement and one's stability when upright.

The perineum is an anatomical zone little understood and often little differentiated. However, it's the quality, finesse, and the progression of the contraction and relaxation of it that will make a difference in daily life and during the sexual act. Imagine a person who, when they wish to withhold going to the toilet contracts their pelvic floor, abdominal, gluteal and perhaps back muscles in an undifferentiated manner... Not only is it impossible to maintain this effort over a long period of time, but it is also inefficient. During sexual intercourse, very intense contractions aren't more efficient and an extremely high tone impairs the quality of the sensations. Following the same principal as with all other movements: less effort = more sensation.

To learn to recognise the sensations of the pelvic floor, we can use better known but comparable analogies in the body such as fingers, hands, mouth. Their image is better represented; the awakening of sensations in the mouth, the tongue and lips that are rich in sensory receptors contributes in the global sensorial and sensual awakening.

### Sensorial and functional integration

During ATM classes, reintegration of sensations in the pelvic floor is found via the sensations in movements that are more global, such as pelvic clock, the cat.... Varying the positions in space play a role in the sensation of gravity; the alternating roles of the agonists/antagonists of the flexors and extensors also bring a wider variety of sensations, just as changes in position create differing organ stimulation and diverse sensations due to the sensory-motor receptors in the ligaments, muscles and sphincters. Certain positions will favour movements of flexion whereas others, extension, thus modifying the global effect on the posture as a whole, on breathing, muscular tension and self-image in space.

At this stage it's interesting to review the schema of the pelvic organs using a plastic model of a pelvis or a large poster with a life-size representation where we can see in cross sections the respective positions of the vagina, ovaries, bladder... and the same for the male pelvis.

### Le Clitoris, cet inconnu

The film *Le Clitoris, cet inconnu* (The Clitoris, this stranger) by Odile Buisson (that you can see on the internet, <https://vimeo.com/32783601>, only in French), adeptly describes the recent research on

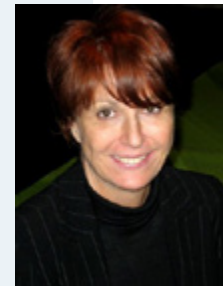
the functioning of this organ, it's anatomical position, it's span over the pelvic floor and extensions to the labia.

It turns out that the clitoris isn't just a "little button". This allows us to understand that although it was long considered that the clitoris and vagina were separate pleasure zones, their interconnection is more complex. Effectively, even though their innervation is different, their functioning is complementary. Changes in position allow the woman to perceive differently the effects of gravitational weight on these tissues and it's the work of the peripheral muscles that allows learning to differentiate the contractions and relaxation so that pleasure can emerge.

The position of "inverting the roles" which symbolises that "women who wish to do as men do" allows a great amount of clitoral stimulation. Rolling to one side while enlaced allows the couple to change roles easily. (5)

### Erasing the conscious control, liberating reflexes

The deepening of the awareness of self-image, differentiation of movement, of tone and this phase of individual learning are prerequisites for being able to discover another person. The practice of awareness



*Odile Buisson*

balances the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems and allows the liberation of autonomous functions, in particular diminishing the activity of the sympathetic system (by reducing tone). When tensions linked to habitual patterns that have been built through life experiences are liberated each partner finds him/herself in a neutral and receptive state, conducive to the building of a satisfying sexual relationship.

*The release of tension in the culmination of the sexual act is essentially a vegetative phenomenon. It is a state that follows a reflex discharge starting when the excitation during coitus reaches a certain level. Reflexes do not manifest themselves properly when voluntary skeletal muscles are involved unless the conscious control is smoothly and completely withdrawn. Our education is such that most people feel it impossible, indecent, shameful or animal-like to relinquish this control, even when sexually excited. Properly matured people learn readily to do so after some experience. The majority, however, do not. Some try to bring about the reflex action by a conscious effort, just as some try to produce erection consciously. With apprenticeship, some sort of result can be obtained. Even then, the reflex is emptied of its essential property of being purely reflective....the conscious wish to perform a reflex*



*action is sometimes sufficient to stop it or interrupt it*  
(op cit pp 130-131)

Moshé Feldenkrais' book, taken as reference, was written in a different century however it was modern for its time. In it Feldenkrais only discusses sexual relationships between men and women whereas in our epoch society has evolved towards accepting more varied forms of sexuality. So continuing on, we can therefore refer to "partners" because no matter what the form of sexuality, the orgasmic process is identical.

*Coitus is a pleasurable act. At first sight such a statement may seem superfluous. But a surprisingly large number of people confuse excitement with pleasure in this context. Close examination of considerable numbers of people shows that, paradoxically, many do not experience any pleasurable feeling. Rather, there is a passionate excitement, or simply excitement and expectation of sublime satisfaction which later, however, does not materialise. With the approach of the climax, the excitation begins to peter out instead of building up, and the climax itself is not particularly memorable or pleasant. Such people come to believe that the excitement they experience is all that there is to it. In others, however, the sexual act produces a keen sensation of well-being. Mental and*

*physical tension are released in a fashion that cannot be obtained in any other way.* (op cit p 130)

The games between partners, mutual exploration and awakening of sensations leads the partners to come closer together, then to unite. What we used to call "foreplay" is in fact the most conscious part of the sexual act, and under voluntary control. It's during this time of play and exploration that they can put into practice the different positions where a dialogue in movement is established, one after the other, or together, with pauses.... The ATMs Pelvic Clock, The Frog, The Cat, The Half Bridge and Bear Walk, previously mentioned, find here a new functional meaning.

### **Vaginal geography, from point A to point G**

For women, position, orientation, caresses and penetration stimulate different parts of the vagina wall due to pressure and friction. The vagina is closely linked to the internal extensions of the clitoris; its walls, surrounded by the muscles of the perineum, harbor multiple receptors. There's the famous G-spot, discovered by Dr Grafenberg, the one that everyone talks about and is looking for, but who really knows where to find it? A small area the size of a coin in the front wall of the vagina, which swells, thickens and starts to become apparent when the clitoris is

stimulated, it reacts to firm pressure, distributing pleasure throughout the pelvis. The clitoris and the G-spot have different innervations, the vulvar nerve and pelvic nerve (which innervates the prostate in men); the two work together to increase pleasure. Certain positions such as *the lioness* or *the rider*, allow for a more intense contact between the partners on this point. The word "point" isn't exactly correct as it's actually zones of small surface area. The different zones may be stimulated by caressing, as well as by coitus.

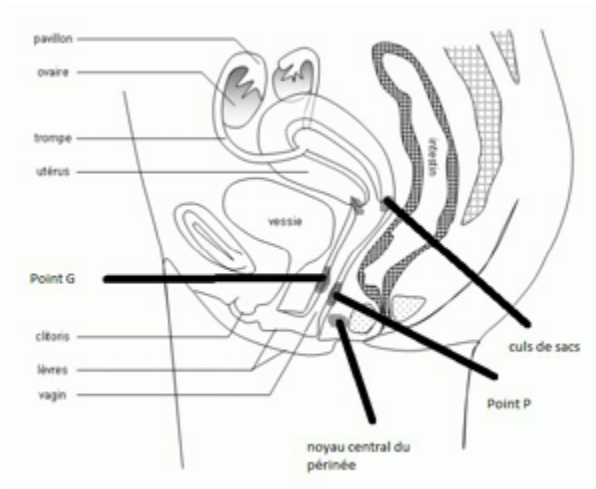
If there was only just the G-spot, it'd be easy but in fact this part of the anatomy has been so forgotten that very few researchers have shown it any interest. It's the personal research of each woman that will allow them to discover the sensitivity and the possibility of resonance of the area, which Dr Leleu calls "the voluptuous vaginal constellation". This means:

Point A which is situated above the G-spot in the anterior wall of the vagina, reacts to the same stimulation.

Point P in the posterior wall, close to point N (situated opposite the central nucleus of the perineum).

Point C, as in Culs de sac of the Cervix, is a highly innervated area triggering visceral sensations and

emotions. The culs de sac unfold and swell like hot air balloons; they're sensitive to deep penetration or when the woman is in a position folded at the hips. For example, *the missionary*, with legs on the shoulders of her partner (also called the "monkey fight") or *the rider*, kneeling or squatting version where the woman straddles the man while leaning on her hands either behind or in front (also called "*the butterfly somersaults in the air*"), or *the lioness*, on all fours with lower back arched and leaning on forearms (also called "*the white tiger jumps*").



### Penile geography, more sensitive than a simple piston!

Symbol of virility and fertility, the penis has been celebrated in many civilizations. In the ancient Greek, Roman, Indian or Mesopotamian arts there are many sculptures of the male organ, in its erectile form and often of disproportionate size, showing the importance of its sacred representation. It is an attribute of the deities Osiris, Bacchus, Dionysos and Priapus. And for Eros, as the god of aesthetic and subtle love, the penis is a symbol of self-fulfillment. The phallic symbol, often present at the entrance of Greek or Roman homes so as to protect them from evil spirits, was also worn as a pendant to protect children.

*"The penis is more sensitive than we think; I fear that we take it just for a simple piston."* Dr Leleu

The fetus already discovers this external appendage and some ultrasounds show the baby holding, touching and discovering it. The sensations are double, those of the hand that holds it and the perception of its changes - the swelling of the erectile bodies of the penis that make it erect. This visible and palpable modification is felt internally as tension and a beating or palpating sensation. As in women, the erogenous zones detailed below, when stimulated by caresses or from contact of the vagina receive multiple sensations causing a

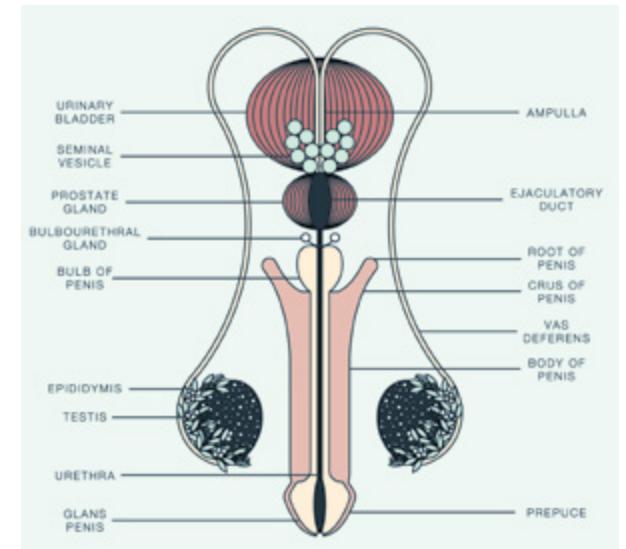


Image by Duvet Days

reaction which reinforces the erection, mobilizing and firming the member:

A back and forth movement along the penis from top to bottom and bottom upwards, imitating the movement in the vagina, allows the man to feel pleasure all along its length, with a peak in sensation as he passes over the head of the gland. Pressure, lighter or stronger as desired, or compression of the lower part of the shaft (in relation to the erectile bodies) causes different, deeper sensations.

The frenulum of the prepuce brings exquisite pleasure over a very small area; this is undoubtedly the most sensitive zone and the pleasure felt is equivalent to that given by the clitoris in women.

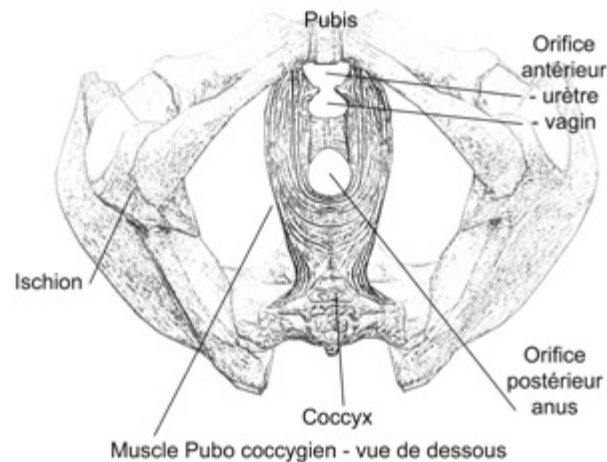
The rim of the gland, composed of highly innervated tissue, including Krause's corpuscles, is stimulated by circular caresses or light pressure from a finger or the tongue, which increases the tension in the penis and intensifies its erection. This tension is a source of intense pleasure. This zone is also highly stimulated during very shallow penetration where the head of the penis "touches the entrance" or when "the happiness muscle" (see below) reduces the opening of the vagina.

Men also have their A point: close to the base of the penis, apparent when it's held like someone playing a flute who touches it note by note, descending centimetre by centimetre and discovering a reactive point at the extremity which gives great pleasure.

Below the pelvis floor, at the base of the penis in the centre, is point B which triggers an enormous sense of well-being.

Of course, other erogenous zones also bring pleasure and erections. This is the case in particular, of caressing of the nipples (by analogy and by the presence of erectile tissues).

These zones are stimulated without discrimination by manual caresses, by the mouth or during penetration. The man, whose head of the penis is extremely



sensitive, feels the variations in the contractions, the texture and suppleness of the opening; the more slowly he penetrates, the more intense are these sensations. Taking his time and taking pauses allows him to discover and to learn just where his point of no return is, where orgasm takes place in an irreversible manner. Prior to this point, reversibility is possible and allows the man to profit from more intense and more varied pleasure, and to wait for his partner whose pleasure is often slower to emerge.

### The muscle of happiness

Among the most important muscles to be awakened is the *Muscle of Happiness*. Its anatomical name is the pubococcygeus muscle. Shaped in the form of an 8 it extends from the pubis to the coccyx, the front part encircles the vagina, the posterior part is called the "anal lifter" and in between is the fibrous central core (the centre of the perineum which is for women,

between the vagina and the anus, and for men, under the prostate). It's the muscle of pleasure, one of the most powerful that contracts reflexively during orgasm, but also that which supports the perineum and allows us to avoid incontinence. It's easy to learn how to contract and relax it in a differentiated manner, be it the anterior part, the posterior, one side or the other. Due to its shape it's also called the *Butterfly muscle*.

The importance of contracting this muscle during orgasm was discovered in 1940 by Dr Kegel, a urologist who advised muscular rehabilitation of the perineum for persons with incontinence prior to resorting to surgery. Following rehabilitation, his women patients reported positive effects not only for their incontinence but also for their sex life. He published his findings in 1952.

This muscle of happiness is just as important for men.

The relationship to gravity is very different depending on the positions of each partner; taking into account this factor it's possible to help them find positions which will be the most comfortable according to their particularities (painful shoulders, knees, lower back, disabilities...).

That will be the subject of another article.

### **The importance of revising the fundamentals to be able to develop creativity**

Why is it interesting for the learning process, for maturity and for awareness to discover these anatomical and physiological details? Because we're unable to improvise or to become creative in an area where we don't know the fundamentals. It's through liberating ourselves of these fundamentals that we can find our own path. It's not necessary to "think" which point, which position, which movement.... But to awaken sensations, to explore unusual patterns and to vary the paths. In the same way that a writer forgets how he learnt to read and write, or that a musician forgets how he learnt to play a melody with each note of his instrument. In the present case, the instrument is the person, in all their dimensions, physical, psychological, physiological, emotional...

In a deliberate and non-exhaustive way, I chose to present only the chapter concerning the perineum and the sexual sphere so as to clarify this under-developed field.

However, like every other activity of daily life, a change of habits, of pathways or of rhythm, maintains curiosity, interest and creativity!

### **The Sensitive Touch**

Each and every part of ourselves as human beings is «sensitive» to, or can be awakened, to sensuality. Thankfully, sexuality itself isn't the only moment of the sexual act. Touch, eye contact, sounds and breath are also forms of «sexualised » relations, all depending on intention.

Feldenkrais practitioners undertake a long learning process allowing them to develop a neutral way of touching, observing and questioning as used in FI. So is it possible to imagine: what would the reverse process be? To use the imagination in reverse! What tiny variations this relationship to another may bring in the domains of seduction, intimacy, sexuality? How do we change from having a « skeletal » touch to one more concerned with the flesh? More sensitive? What differences may be explored and/or proposed between a guiding, questioning or indicative touch and a touch whose intention is to caress. And this, not so as to put it into practice but to be able to guide and inform, to be able to find the words to describe these variations in touching and therefore allow the student to explore.

**The pathways of the orgasm (for those feeling sensitive, continue on your path.... to the paragraph "The art of pleasure")**

"The orgasm is the crowning moment in a cycle of desire-excitation-pleasure. A merry-go-round that turns faster and faster until vertigo overtakes." "If the orgasm is the unfurling, the pleasure is a slow, sweeping wave. If the orgasm is a violent explosion, the pleasure is a sensual implosion. If the orgasm is akin to fire-works, the pleasure is a bath of light. This pleasure merits being gently received, appreciated, enjoyed." Dr G. Leleu

This phenomenon can reach great heights, carry one away like a tornado, it may be gentle, intense or voluptuous. It is extremely sensitive to psychological and emotional factors, to one's humour, to the surrounding atmosphere... In men the orgasmic phenomenon is more automatic than in women where voluntary control may limit the process.

### **When all goes well with both sexes**

Each stimulation that provokes pleasure sends information to the limbic area of the brain, which reacts with a reflex action, sending stimulus to particular muscles (the perineum, for example) to contract. In this manner the various stimulus and reflex arcs that are set off to react add to each to such a point that millions of sensory receptors send out information, also combining with the millions of cells in the brain and medulla that participate in this process.

Initially it's voluntary balancing movements, contact and stimulation of the receptors in the genital organs that will, at a certain moment, convert into involuntary reflexive contractions and flood the pelvic floor with uncontrollable rhythmic contractions of higher intensity. It is this complex process engaging the pelvic floor, the lumbar muscles and the flexors that we call "orgasm". This phase of the process is reflexive and irreversible. It's in this phase that prior learning of "not to anticipate" makes sense: allow it to happen, allow the flexion and lengthening of the spine, without control or interruption.

The movement of the spinal column and the perineum are virtually identical. In men, this phase triggers ejaculation, and in women causes strong vaginal contractions.

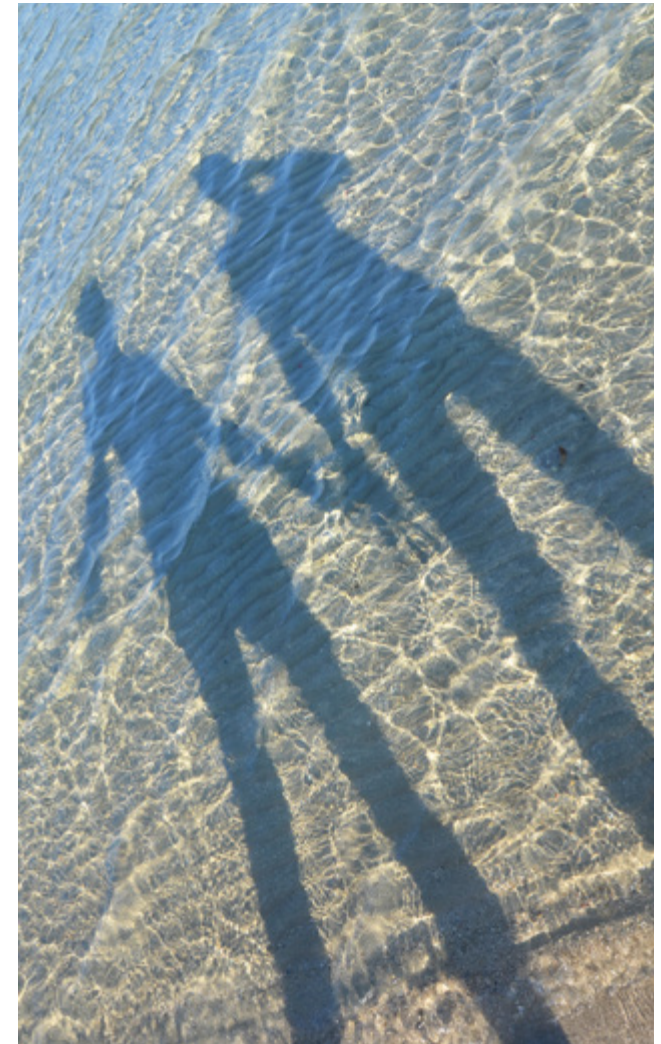
In men, the rhythmic involuntary contractions of the muscles that provoke ejaculation then spread through the pelvic floor and the whole pelvis oscillates. The abdominal flexors contract forcefully and the pubis is pushed upwards and outward as far as is possible as the extensors of the lumbar-sacral region are relaxed. The pelvis then draws back such that the sacrum moves upwards and backwards. The pelvis continues these oscillating movements in synchronisation with the successive ejaculations of sperm.

In women, the voluntary movement that results in friction of the penis against the vaginal walls first appears similar to all voluntary movements. However, the stimulation provokes a reflex discharge, the oscillation of the pelvis continues and increases in rhythm. The movements of the pelvis are part of the reflexive discharge of motor impulses and are as involuntary as the rhythmic contractions of the muscles related to ejaculation, those which cause clitoral erection or those of the vaginal sphincter.

It's therefore the culmination of the fireworks show accompanied by various physiological effects, one of which is the discharge of the neuromodulators by the pleasure centres, a cocktail of endorphins, dopamine, oxytocin.... After a sensorial voyage such as this it's not surprising that one is then overcome by the desire to sleep....

#### **The multi-orgasmic woman**

A physiological particularity in women is that their erectile tissues are slower to awaken and their tumescence is more lasting. Where a man needs to wait some time between two erections, a woman can, if desired, have several orgasms of varying intensity, quality and origin. This being all the easier if her partner takes time, learns to discover her and make her different senses "sing" by his varying caresses....



*Photo credit: Christine Barrat*

## When it doesn't work?

At times it just doesn't go as stated in books....

### **Women's troubles.. The "lack of desire" myth**

Some women experience pain, feel that they're frigid, have little, no or no more desire or orgasms.... After having consulted with a specialist to reveal any organic causes, illness, trauma, surgery... these issues can be dealt with using a global approach of self-knowledge and re-education of the ability to "feel", to "sense". Medical research has only recently started to develop medications for "problems of lack of desire" where hormonal deregulation seems to be part of the cause, but the mechanisms are more complex in women than in men. To this date no medication has been marketed due to their poor efficacy in relation to the secondary effects caused. This encourages us to explore other paths, where developing awareness has a place of choice.

The role of the breath is very important in learning to recognise the moments when reactions linked to inadequate previous experiences or to trauma appear instead of the expected movement, or even the reflex movement that is also perturbed. Personal history, strict education or other factors may limit certain stages of

the development of one's sexuality or even limit the knowledge of the existence of these possibilities.

The role of the practitioner is to re-establish self-confidence by clarifying the self-image in a global manner, preferably from distal to proximal, by proposing lessons that integrate the meta-themes that you find mentioned throughout this presentation, as well as in the section "the art of pleasure" so that one can learn to recognise these sensations in other areas. This may be addressed in individual or group lessons depending on the preference of the person and the practitioner.

### **Men's problems**

What are the potential avenues? For men sexuality isn't "natural" either and requires learning, simultaneously with self-awareness and self-confidence, throughout maturation. More often than not, the questions concern erectile dysfunction and premature ejaculation and at times, pain. When no trauma such as prostate surgery or previous urinary problems is evident, both these dysfunctions are symbolic of a dysfunction in the balance of the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems and are often related to an emotional state that inhibits the reflexive activity. At times there's no erection, or one that can't be sustained. The erection

is due to a vasomotor phenomenon, being an influx of blood flow and not a contraction that causes it. This activity is regulated by the equilibrium of the sympathetic/parasympathetic systems.

Medical treatments have been developed rapidly for men upon whom society's pressure is stronger.

For erectile dysfunction drugs such as Sildenafil, (commonly known as Viagra), Cialys (Tadalafil) – long lasting, Levitra (Vardenafil) – most recent, Caverjet (Alprostadil) injectable, Muse 1000 in the form of a urethral suppository exist.

For premature ejaculation that has been confirmed medically (i.e. systematically less than 3 minutes and with little stimulation), Priligy (Dapoxetine) is given.

These drugs are efficient, however their secondary effects are not to be neglected. Used alone, they simply mask the origin of the dysfunction without allowing exploration of other avenues and the possibility of finding adequate solutions. When medical treatment coupled with awareness is proposed, confidence and self-image are reinforced. At times, this double effect over a long period allows one to cease medication, the stress caused by performance insecurity having disappeared.



On the other hand, regaining confidence, accompanied by allowing the sexuality to develop without a performance goal is very important. This is the basis of re-educating the sensuality, where caressing takes on a leading role as is advised when resuming sexual activity after surgery.

There's personal interest for men in developing awareness of the perineum and breath control because the two combined allow the man to be able to pause when he feels orgasm approaching, thus allowing him to delay it. A strong contraction of the perineum and slow abdominal breathing associated with the creation of less exciting mental images, allows the man to become aware of reversibility. These techniques are far from new, having been described in ancient versions of the Kama Sutra where the man was encouraged not to complete his orgasm thereby conserving his Yang (male) energy, but instead, for a number of reasons often rather amusing to read (one being the calm state it brings him), to lead his partner to orgasm.

### **The art of pleasure**

All our senses have the capacity to give us pleasure: sight, smell, hearing, touch, taste, proprioception and they are all present in this merry-making. Educating them means learning to recognise sensations, i.e. differentiate, and thus develop the ability to sense, feel....

The Feldenkrais practitioner knows how to teach to become aware of the process, to show the moving relationships between the various parts of oneself; this is something he/she is experienced in ATM. Therefore why not apply it to the understanding and development of sexuality, this function so necessary to human beings personally and also socially, a source of somatic-psychological equilibrium, bringing maturity in all dimensions?

Awakening to a conscious sexuality is found through the process of awareness through movement; putting into practice the fundamental concepts of the Feldenkrais Method®:

- Slowing down so as to sense more precisely and distinctly
- Taking the time necessary for the learning process
- Reducing effort so as to reorganise tone

- Letting go of the need for results, goals and performance
- Allowing things to happen without anticipation, allowing the new and unknown to emerge without expectation
- Breath, the basis of an optimal organisation – sensing changes in breathing, playing with one's breathing
- Being completely in the present moment

With this "F point" (as in F method) having been clarified, the benefits of the method seem undeniable for this Function, as they are for any other function in life, be it daily life, artistic or sporting activities! Research of the G point can continue, as this point seems under debate in literature whereas that concerning the F point is still to be developed!

### **Sexuality from ... to ... years of age?**

Energy spent during sexual activity is equal to approximately 30 minutes of physical exercise, something between a brisk walk and jogging, but doesn't burn more than 100 calories (as compared to 200 – 300 while jogging). It's therefore an activity of relatively low intensity, equivalent to climbing stairs up 2 floors and not incompatible with a sensitive heart if the rhythm and postures are adapted to the

possibilities of the person. According to several studies it appears that continuing an active sex-life allows one to age well, particularly for the calming effects and the pleasure it brings, thus participating in a physiological and psychological balance. A well-rounded sex-life lengthens life expectancy, protects against high blood pressure, cardiovascular ailments, diabetes, and breast and prostate cancers (“16 good reasons to make love”, Rica Etienne, French Federation of Cardiology).

In conclusion, a phrase from Moshé Feldenkrais which re-establishes the parity, opening up the debate towards the beginning of equality:

*“It is essential to lay stress on the fact that in the sexual act there is more complete equality between the sexes than we are led to believe. Popular ideas of the active role being played by the male, and of the passivity of the female are no more than catch words. (...) A normal mature woman is just as active as the man, and often more so, throughout the act.”* Op. p 132

*“A woman with a mature personality, affectionately disposed, uninhibited by shame, guilt or sinfulness is in all respects an equal partner in the act to the man.”* Op. p 132

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[www.christinebarrat.fr](http://www.christinebarrat.fr), Feldenkrais et sexualité.

Contact Christine Barrat, email:  
[christine@christinebarrat.fr](mailto:christine@christinebarrat.fr) ■





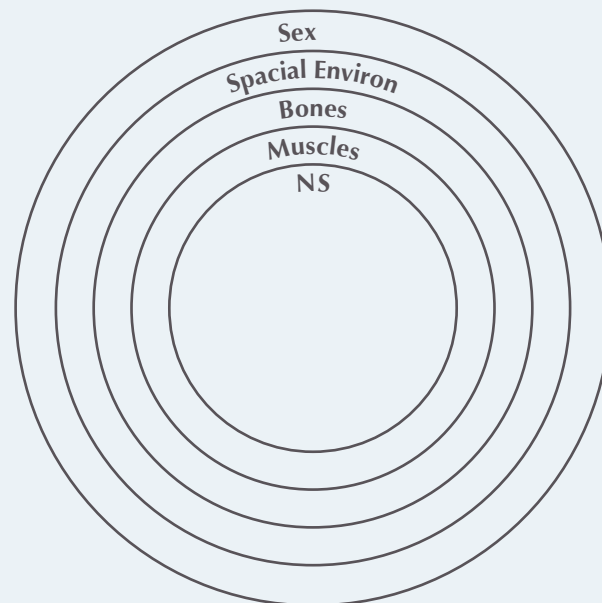
*Moshe, San Francisco, 1977. Photo by Bob Knighton (who is the woman next to him?)*

## HE WOLF, SHE WOLF

*By Moshe Feldenkrais DSc*

*Many practitioners will remember this famous talk by Moshe at Amherst. It's in year 2, week 5, on 9 July 1981: Talk – Knowledge / Story of Wolves / Sex and Society. This excerpt was kindly made available by the IFF (thank you Kai Schaper and Allegra Heidelinde). RAH.*

*(Moshe starts by asking What do we mean 'we know' and then draws this diagram on the blackboard)*



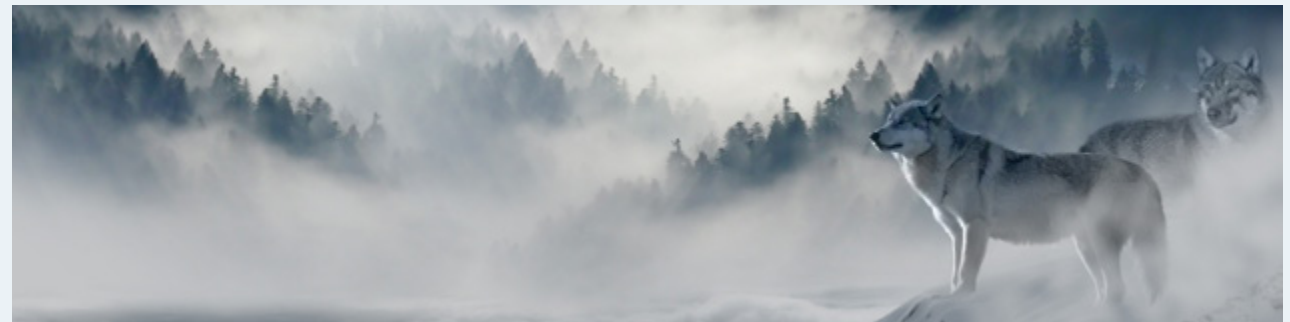
So ..., but you can see in order to have a language and in order to have a mother giving birth to that, the mother giving birth to that, must have some sort of partner to do that. In other words, that social environment is first of all sexual. [Moshe labels the fifth circle with 'sex'.] And that's the first society that can be and that's the foundation of society. It means a kind of symbiotic feeling of somebody allowing somebody he doesn't know to touch him. If you believe in ... in our society, now this touching has become so changed that we don't realize it. In fact, if somebody doesn't want to cuddle with me and do plaplaplala, hiding the fact and we wouldn't do that [Moshe sways his hips right and left.] but would do that [Moshe takes his pelvis forward and back.] so we do this [right and left again] and then twiddle the upper .... Yeah? That doesn't matter ... that it's a ... a development of the original thing.

### **He Wolf, She Wolf**

But you imagine two wolves, a he and she wolf, huh? The first growth of them were not in the same place and the he wolf and the she wolf knew they are competitive. They are just like the capitalist society.

They ... they must fight each other or ... must they? Or they have grounds that if they are in the same place, then they must help each other for food in ... in difficult positions, but how does a wolf get a she wolf to accept him? Or how does the she wolf go find the he wolf?

And how does it happen? They are two that normally they would not allow anybody to come within ten, twenty feet from them without getting ready (*Moshe makes sounds of snarling*) to fight and show the teeth and see something what to do. Heh? Now, there is something in the air because she is in rut and the wind carries the rut into the nose of a wolf who has never had that idea at all. He doesn't know what it is. It's the first time in his life and he feels some sort of irritating smell and he feels impelled to go in that direction. Then they come—two complete strangers being afraid of each other, but so afraid that if one goes a pace ahead, the other goes a pace back. And nothing happens and they stay, sit, wait and, of course, one of them must make up his mind and it's usually the he dog that makes up his mind. You know what he does? He must show that he doesn't mean business. That he means love. Huh? And there is only one way of doing it—putting himself on the ground and taking the head back and giving the throat to attack without



being afraid. Of course, any two wolves, when one gives in and exposes himself internally with his ... all his internal faults and mistakes and risking his life .... Well, nowadays many women are unable to give. If they were she wolves they wouldn't do anything because if ... if the wolf is giving in like that and that [wolf] uncovers himself and tells you all his own difficulties and actually risking his throat, telling you the kind of things he couldn't tell anybody, giving his life to you, putting his jugular vein and carotid at your disposal, if only it's enough for the she wolf to just to grab it once and he is dead. Then he does that and then the she wolf finds out, oh, it's a funny guy. (laughter) It's a funny guy. He is ready to ... he is not dangerous. I could kill him any time I like. He actually lets me do it. So she comes to see what sort of guy is that. If you saw a film of a thing like that, and if you saw how that wolf, with what delicacy, with what functional integration and awareness of movement, he gets up because if he did get up in any sudden sort of way, she would run away because she would think he goes to attack her now, that it was only a trick to call her in, to make her

come near. So you would see he begins to move, not the legs, but the head—lift the head and put it back (laughter), lift the head and put it back (laughter). You're laughing as if you're imagining the thing. And he will lift the head and actually turn to see her and then lie again. He will not move his legs at all. They will be limp, lying like that and he won't roll. He won't do it. He won't do it until she is so near and that he does it so slowly and gets up with such hesitation, so to speak. In other words, he gets up with a minimum of intention and jerk. He is actually meditating or is ....

*[Dialogue missing; break in tape—audio recording equipment off for about 30 seconds.]*

... in the end, find that they have no fear of each other because the stronger partner has given in, has exposed his life; gave it in her hands.

You know why I started that? Because a beautiful, marvelous girl, a marvelous girl here came yesterday and said she wants to talk to me. And when she was talking to me, I touched her diaphragm. Of course, you could feel ... she realized it. She told me this a few

seconds ago that she felt that when I touched her that she had actually not been breathing and actually was in a state of practical anxiety. That is why she wanted to talk to me and her complaint was that as she is a nice—she's actually a beautiful girl, well built and that—that the men here are inferior of the wolf I am talking about. None of them are worth a wolf. And you know what they do? When they find that the girl is ... they don't ... the girl doesn't like them. They come and try to cuddle her and then slowly, they believe that with that they will bring her to the state where she will be like the she wolf, she will like the he wolf. And as it doesn't work, you know what they do? They tell her you have ... you have no sexual function at all; you are asexual because they believe they are so sexually attractive that there is no woman who could resist them. You know why? Because there is a mustache or because ... (laughter) or ... (laughter) or ... and therefore, no woman could resist him. And therefore, the woman who does resist him is no bloody good. She has no sexual desire and she is a frigid. And that's why you find a young girl that man after man—one non-virile man after the other in this society here—came there and because they are unable to be virile and they can't make themselves be attracted ... attractive to the girl. All they can do is to cover their impotence by making the girl feel inferior, actually destroy

her confidence in herself. Therefore, an intelligent, beautiful, nicely built girl feels awful because some very poor human beings tried to be a wolf and they don't know how. (laughter and applause)

Now, you can see that the first time that two beings of a species got together and stopped being afraid of each other and can actually produce one female producing another little wolf that will have to go through the same procedure forever after and that will continue. So that is the first social relation. If there weren't that, there wouldn't be formed any tribes or any families or anything. In other words, this is the foundation of society and, of course, in many, like anything in ... in nature, it is not one function that works like that. It's not only they are attractive—the sex, the attraction to one another—that is the start, but, of course, if it were only like that, then our nose would only be necessary to have a cold. But we use a nose also to smile and we haven't got a single organ in ourselves that makes only one function. In fact, that function which we are talking about now, the sexual function—which is the foundation of society with preservation of species being there, making whatever societies they do—without that, there wouldn't be species and there wouldn't be always one woman that gives birth to somebody. Therefore, the social order cannot be done

without sex and that's the origin of it. And therefore, you can see that when this is not properly organized—properly: how, what or that—we are not insisting that at this moment because it will be more ... there will be a greater divergence and I will receive more letters than about Andrew Carnegie, of that I'm sure. But you can see that ... on that when you talk of a human being, can you see that if you know about his nervous system, about his muscles and about his bones, about this way, how he uses himself against gravity and what the notions of space and tempo ... tempo, rhythm are involved in the use of that self and that that self from the start is related to a mother, that that mother is the only witness of his coming to the world, and is always there. Nobody came to the world without a witness, you see? And that witness is always a female—in whole ... in all the species not only in us, except in those who can fertilize themselves.

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Distribution Center: <https://feldenkrais-method.org/materials/collection/trainings/> ■



## WORKING WITH CLIENTS WITH HISTORIES OF SEXUAL ABUSE

By Louise Runyon

*Louise (Berkeley 2000) practises Feldenkrais in Atlanta and completed a Bones for Life*

*training in 2003. She works with a wide variety of clients including musicians, people with neurological conditions, and those with chronic pain. Louise also offers workshops on the pelvic floor. She is a dancer/choreographer and poet, and has published three books of poetry. This article was originally published in the FGNA Feldenkrais Journal number 28, 2015 and is re-printed by permission of the author. RAH.*

Over the course of my 15 years as a practitioner, I have worked with a number of clients who have shared with me their histories of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is an experience that is somatic and traumatic. Though it is frequently “forgotten,” it lives on in people’s bodies, in their movement patterns, and in the way they hold their musculature. Feldenkrais work can be invaluable in helping people address these issues.

I find it very helpful when clients share their histories of sexual abuse with me. Generally these clients have done psychotherapy but have found that their issues

are not fully resolved, that troubles remain “in the body.” Working delicately and respectfully, I have been able to help some people become aware of their somatic responses to the experience of abuse. Unexplained, intractable movement patterns become clearer, and we are able to shift them. If someone wants to work on sexual abuse issues through Feldenkrais work, I strongly encourage psychotherapy at the same time.

I have also seen clients who I suspect have a history of sexual abuse but who have not told me.

Unlike a stroke, car accident, or cerebral palsy, this is not something immediately apparent to the outside observer, nor is it routinely shared on a client’s first visit. A person may not even consciously recall this history. At the same time, it may be an enormous factor in her organization.

It sometimes happens that our work triggers memories. One client, someone who suspected she had a history of abuse, was grateful to have memories of it opened up by a pelvic floor lesson; she went on to pursue the

issue more fully with a psychotherapist. The experience of Functional Integration® (FI) lessons can also allow a client to verbalize unspoken thoughts and bring his traumatic experience more into the light of day. As an example, I worked with a man in his seventies who wanted help with incontinence following prostate surgery. As soon as I touched his legs they began to shake in an unusual way, and I realized he was crying. He told me he had been sexually abused by a babysitter as a child and had lived with the memories his whole life. He had never told anyone until he shared the story with his wife just five years prior.

Another of my clients with a sexual abuse history related to me that the Feldenkrais Method® of somatic education—both FI and Awareness through Movement® (ATM) lessons—has opened her heart, though somatic patterns remain. This client does not want to explore the history of abuse any more than she has already done through psychotherapy. She has very compressed lips, and I have often worked with her face and jaw. The last time I did so, she elaborated on the nature of the abuse and told me she did not want to re-open the can of worms by further work with her jaw.

Although I believe she could make gains by dealing with this history somatically, that would only be the

case if she wanted to do so. Certainly, the opening and expanding of her heart is a great gift.

### **Greta**

I have worked sporadically for many years with a woman I will call Greta. Working with me and with another Feldenkrais practitioner, she has been involved with the Method for over 20 years.

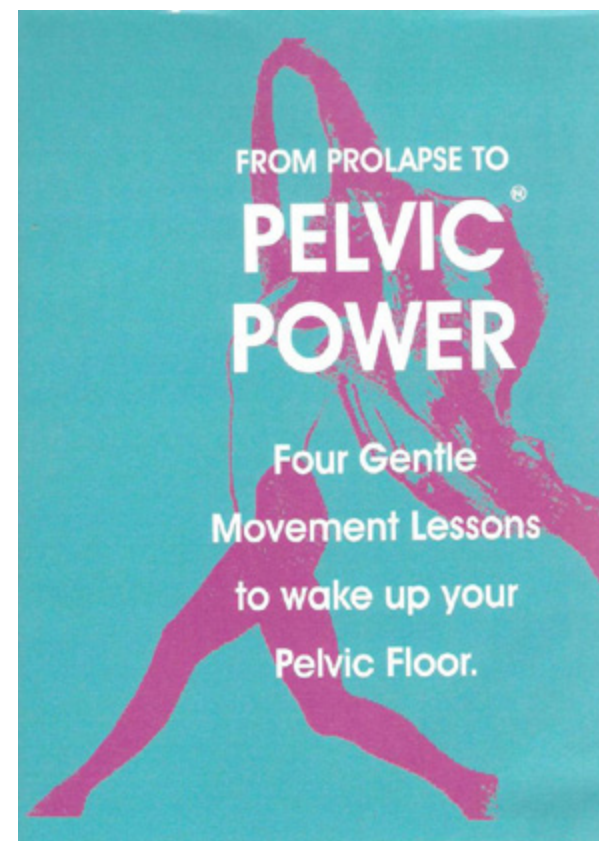
About 11 years ago, Greta mentioned to me that she had recently discovered she had been sexually abused as a child. Since that time, while taking many ATM classes, she has come for only occasional FI lessons; some months ago, however, she began working with me on a weekly basis.

I wondered if she would bring up this issue again, and how it would affect our work. Greta tends to come late or early for appointments and classes. She frequently does not come and does not call. When I call her, or when she shows up at the wrong time, she responds with surprise, saying something like, “Huh! How did that happen?” She has a wall calendar, an appointment book, and a watch, but often she does not consult them. Her general response to many things is one of “not knowing.” Greta keeps her head and chest back, her pelvis forward, her weight on her heels, and her

hands behind her back, as if she is gazing at something from a distance. Her first Feldenkrais practitioner told her, “It looks like you’re walking backward as you walk forward.” I began to wonder what Greta’s time issues and stance might have to do with her history of sexual abuse.

It occurred to me that the issue of “not knowing” might have to do with not wanting to know, and that her posture might be an expression of distancing herself to avoid delving into the work. I was curious about bringing Greta to some awareness of these possible relationships, but I wanted her to bring up her history of sexual abuse again herself.

Over the last 14 years, I have been teaching workshops that deal with the pelvic floor. These are based on the lessons of Australian Feldenkrais practitioners Barbara Bell and Judy Pippen. I often teach some version of these lessons, or other sphincter lessons, to individual FI clients. When Greta came in with a major bout of constipation—a lifelong issue for her—I suggested we try one of these lessons. We did so, and in that context I spoke to the issue of trauma generally. At the next FI lesson, Greta again brought up her history of sexual abuse. She expressed an interest in pursuing her abuse in our work together.



*CDs by Barbara Bell and Judy Pippen*

We discussed the value of exploring the issue through movement, and I strongly encouraged her to work with a psychotherapist, which she has been doing. Our work of the past six months has been in this context, and it has been extremely helpful for her to address the question directly. Issues and memories regularly come up in our FI work. These are issues that might not otherwise have emerged, and which she is then

able to pursue with her therapist. In her seventies, after 20 years of Feldenkrais work, Greta's stance has altered dramatically. Though her longstanding pattern is still present, she now sits and stands "stacked up," head over spine over feet, her rib cage hanging down vertically. She is far less likely to lean back when looking at or talking to me, and she has recognized other situations in her life in which she wants to be sitting squarely on her sitz bones.

Greta is beginning to let her buttocks release, having realized she has been propelling herself through space with these muscles for many years. She remembered that, as a young girl, she made a conscious decision to tuck in her pelvis so as not to call attention to her rear end. She is now able to experience softness in her buttocks and legs, to "stick out her butt" and be "sassy."

Her legs and feet are now able to roll outward in back-lying. She is beginning to be able to move her chest forward through space in walking, to stride and to lunge. Most importantly, she is happy with her new posture, her new self-awareness, and her new lack of avoidance.

Greta still has issues with time, but now she has some awareness of why this is so. She recently missed an appointment and said she knew it was because she

was anticipating a big shift and was afraid. She also reported that the anticipation was much worse than the shift itself. I remind her that the work is at her pace, and I regularly check in with her on that.

#### **Thinking about histories of sexual abuse**

I have been influenced in my thinking about the question of sexual abuse history by several people: two therapists whom I know personally, and a cousin who was sexually abused by a priest. My cousin, a playwright, has developed a one-man show on the subject, *Conversations with My Molester: A Journey of Faith*<sup>1</sup>. He has found it tremendously healing to create, perform, and discuss this show within the Catholic



*Michael Mack, Conversations with My Molester: A Journey of Faith. Photo by Timothy Hanson*

Church. Others dealing with such histories have also found the performance and subsequent discussions very valuable to their healing. Many talks with my cousin have made me better able to think about and to understand what some of my clients may be going through. The two therapists have helped me understand how widespread this issue is, how devastating it can be, how responses may manifest themselves, and how I can broaden my vision in working with such clients.

Childhood sexual abuse has become a much more public issue in recent years. More individuals and practitioners of different modalities are examining how to address the needs of those affected. I advertise my pelvic floor workshops as dealing with multiple issues—prevention and reversal of prolapse and incontinence, enhancement of sexual function, healing from abuse, and improved mobility of the pelvis—but I have always made incontinence the main focus. In my most recent workshop, however, I was bolder in addressing the issue of "old scars," in response to one of the participants publicly asking when we would be dealing with healing of abuse within the workshop. I found out several participants had sought out the workshop because of their histories of sexual abuse, and my bolder approach seemed well-received by the group.

In my pelvic floor work, both in workshops and with individuals, I discuss the pelvic floor as a central, intimate part of one's self—but only a part. Likewise the scars there—they do not need to define a person, although they may do so if never addressed. Sexuality in our society is often seen as “all or nothing,” either flaunted or completely swept under the rug. In the Feldenkrais Method®, our approach is one of integration, of always looking at both the forest and the trees. I have found verbally-guided pelvic floor lessons with FI clients to be a valuable way to work with the legacies of sexual abuse. I always check with the client before beginning, to see if she is comfortable with such a lesson.



### **Taking off the blinders**

The ramifications of sexual abuse—to individuals, among multiple generations, and in current family situations—are huge, both as a result of ignoring stories and revealing them. There are many reasons people choose not to look at these issues. Neither abuser nor abused may want to open a can of worms. Some of the reasons for their silence may have validity and, if so, should be respected. But where and how does the cycle stop? In many cases, the difficulties cannot be resolved without bringing the issues into the light of day. The cycle continues endlessly, affecting new generations: more children abused, more relationships made impossible or ruined, more people denied the realization of their full human potential, and thus further intractable physical and movement issues.

It can be difficult bringing these issues up within the Feldenkrais profession—we all have our own histories and our own levels of comfort with the question. But the value of taking the blinders off, recognizing the gravity of what our clients are or may be dealing with, can be life-changing for them.

We are not psychiatrists, nor are we psychologists trained in movement. We are, however, capable of addressing the somatic experience of abuse with clients who are ready to explore it.

Finding ways to address these issues, and to facilitate our clients' understanding, can contribute immensely to their growth, their learning, and the expansion of their human potential. Looking at the whole person in this way, always going at the person's own pace, can mean both recovery from the shock of abuse, and development of the ability to realize avowed and unavowed dreams.

Taking off my blinders about sexual abuse has helped me have more recognition of and more compassion for the devastation of this experience, just as, having worked with people with neurological conditions, I am now much more aware of what can happen when the brain is injured.

Having seen how people carry such tremendous emotional, social, and physical burdens as a result of sexual abuse, I want to continue to bring this issue to light, both for those who have experienced it and for the people who work with them.

<sup>1</sup> See [www.michaelmacklive.com](http://www.michaelmacklive.com)

Contact Louise Runyon  
email: [louiserunyon@aol.com](mailto:louiserunyon@aol.com)  
web: [www.FeldenkraisAtlanta.com](http://www.FeldenkraisAtlanta.com)



## POETRY IN MOTION

By Shona Lee

Sexuality. Sensuality;  
heightened sensory Awareness  
your internal response to external stimuli.  
Desire following curiosity,  
exploring the unknown  
how does it makes you feel?  
What moves you?  
Are you holding your breath? The thrill of discovery...

Cross motivation or mono-motivation?  
How clear is your intention in action?  
A whole body experience  
of Connection,  
from your pelvis up your spine,  
sending a wave throughout your system,  
changing the pace, the cadence, the rhythm,  
not mere repetition  
but alive and responsive and adapting  
keeping you present; internal and external at the same  
time.

The decision is yours, what you do or don't do.  
How much is habit?  
Where did we learn our patterns from?  
It's in the rests that we experience the after effects,  
assimilating what we've been doing.

Learning to let go of control,  
Initiating and letting it happen, rather than "making it  
happen".  
The end ta-da. Staying in process,  
Where is there tension?  
What creates and dissipates that? How do you play  
with it, where is that fine threshold?

When you know what you're doing you can do what  
you want.  
A clear line of force.  
Connecting with another system;  
seeing the whole person; not parts.  
Maturity draws on Experience, evolving, refining.  
Awakening. To your contact with  
The Floor  
Gravity, pulling you Down.  
Rolling around on the Ground  
Looking for the pleasurable sensation.

Do it in a way that you like the way it feels...  
And heals.  
Notice what's changed, is there a difference?  
How long does the lesson continue to resonate with  
you?  
The same lesson will mean something different for  
each of us.  
And there's always more to discover within it.  
Revealing the layers. Uncovering the essence.  
The complexities, the nuance.  
Yet exquisitely simplistic when it all comes together.

### 8 March 17



*Shona (Melbourne 2018) is based in Sydney, practising as a Feldenkrais practitioner and remedial massage therapist. Rearranging spaces, to be both functional and aesthetically pleasing, is something she has always enjoyed, so she is delighted to have found a vocation in Feldenkrais, where she gets to do this daily with people's movement patterns. RAH.*

Contact Shona: [shona@movingintune.com](mailto:shona@movingintune.com)

Website: [www.movingintune.com](http://www.movingintune.com) ■





## 'DOWN THERE' AND THE FELDENKRAIS METHOD®

By Deborah Bowes DPT, GCFT

*Deborah (San Rafael 1987, Trainer 1999) is a physical therapist and practises Feldenkrais at the Feldenkrais Center for Movement*

*and Awareness in San Francisco. She has produced sets of lesson recordings including Discover Easy Movement and Pain Relief and Pelvic Health and Awareness. RAH.*

Beginning in 1949, Moshe Feldenkrais published his first book, *Body and Mature Behaviour, A Study of Anxiety, Sex, Gravitation and Learning*, including sexual function as fundamental to maturity. In *The Potent Self*, published in 1985, he explores sexual function and dysfunction with subheadings in the latter half of the book called: On Sexual Apprenticeship; The Abdomen, the Pelvis, and the Head; Abdominal Control; Cross Motivation; Premature Ejaculation; Is There a Way Out? He discusses the issues as he sees them and offers a path for improvement.

Ruthy Alon in 1996, published *Mindful Spontaneity* with a chapter called *Movement for Life, Movement for Love*. From these three books alone, we can see that Feldenkrais Method has something to offer to improve one's sexual maturity and function. Both Alon and

Feldenkrais weave together how movement, attitudes, thoughts and compulsions are integrated into the fabric of sexual expression.

Here's a quote from the preface to *The Potent Self*:

*'At first glance it may seem that undue importance is attached to the problem of sex and too much space allotted to it. The thoughtful reader will soon recognize that there is no intention to bring this problem to a position of predominance in human behavior.*

*Although I as a teacher set out to increase the student's mature sexual potency, it is not for the sake of lust or pleasurable indulgence as found in the immature person. Sexual maturity arrives at the end of the development period, and is the most vulnerable function because of that. All the consequences of improper and inexpedient habits formed through personal experience in the preceding growth period bear on it and mark this function more than any other function that matures earlier. Any arrest in development that may occur during this susceptible period of childhood and adolescence will of necessity affect the function that has yet to mature. Similarly,*

*it is impossible to correct and reform adequately the general use of oneself without recovering sexual spontaneity.'*

My first response to being asked to write for the journal about Feldenkrais and sex, was sure. Of course, Feldenkrais Method improves your sex life. I've heard from students in training, from experienced practitioners and from my clients how they had an 'aha' moment during sex. Often, this discovery is related to a physical movement, the movement of love as Ruthy calls it. Perhaps it's feeling more connected to the self, or more fluid and graceful. Maybe it's that the hips and legs are comfortable, the pelvis can move and differentiate from the ribcage, the jaw and tongue can express desire, or one's touch is more sensitive and satisfying. The learning, the awareness and the movement of the Feldenkrais Method makes it easy to connect various body parts, to have more sensitive touch, to feel the other and oneself, and to do so comfortably, even during times of injury or recovery.

Sex and its associations to certain movements and sensations is ubiquitous in Feldenkrais training programs. Trainer roasts performed at post training

The parasympathetic must be dominant and the sympathetic dormant before we can relax and become responsive to the opposite sex. .... It is an absolute necessity, therefore, for everyone to learn to distinguish compulsive self-assertive motivations that are carried on and actively maintained when they should, in fact, be given up so that parasympathetic dominance may be allowed full freedom.

### The Potent Self

parties often have hilarious, off color jokes and skits that are luckily not on YouTube. These jokes get the biggest laughs. Is it the recognition that you, too, have had those thoughts? The mind and body as one, the mind stimulated by body movements. The echo of pelvic rocking, hands overhead, legs drawn to the chest, finding comfort on hands and knees; hinting and driving the memory of other times when we were in this position.

Sexual feelings, thoughts and memories come unbidden and as a Feldenkrais practitioner, I want my teaching to be clear, clean, my boundaries strong. Carl Ginsburg, a Feldenkrais Trainer and author said, 'Awareness Through Movement lessons are 'context-less'. I don't tell the student what the lesson is for. I want to let my student discover meaning and find for themselves, what did this lesson bring to their awareness. I am careful not to bring sexual references or innuendo into an ATM lesson. I once was in an ATM class that explored opening the jaw and moving the eyes up and down, while rocking the pelvis. The

teacher made what she thought was a funny comment and said, 'I wonder what Monica Lewinsky's jaw is like?'<sup>1</sup>

Yes, if you cringed reading this, that feeling went through the room like a whip. It was wrong on many levels. It gave a context that was loaded with so much ex-formation<sup>2</sup>. Each student had their process hijacked and was not able to be in their own experience. This reckless comment was also risky, and not only for students with a history of sexual trauma.

In ATM, people are often in an altered state and thoughtless comments can trigger traumatic memories, or make the environment seem threatening.

Making sexual comments during ATM or FI limits choices for the student. It's not fair to distract them from having their own experience, and to channel that experience in one direction. My friend, Nora Burnett, an experienced dancer and yoga teacher, describes having 'internal celibacy' when one is teaching.

I teach several workshops a year called Pelvic Health and Awareness. They are usually for women only, and occasionally they are for both men and women. I am careful in how I talk about the functions involved with the pelvic floor, especially sexuality along with voiding, balance, digestion, breathing. I feel the responsibility of the professional trust people give me and the vulnerability one feels when working with such intimate themes. I introduce the workshop to make it feel safe, comfortable and enjoyable. In addition to focused ATM lessons, I include educational content about how it all works 'down there' and I direct attention to clarify the role of the parasympathetic nervous system. To improve the function of the pelvic floor, one must be able to sense it, and sensing need a calm and relaxed parasympathetic state.



As students begin to experience the parasympathetic state, they often ask questions about how their body and pelvic floor work and share quite personal information. I always thank them for their question, hold it in respectful regard, and respond from my experience with the Feldenkrais Method. It appears that Moshe did not teach any specific lessons called pelvic floor, however, he refers to it in many lessons as 'between the legs'. And of course, I have been quoting what he says about the pelvic floor throughout this article. I think that if Moshe had had a baby, had pushed it out and birthed it from his body, and then had to retrain and learn to use those parts again, he would have come up with lessons to address this directly. Just as did for his ailments, like his eyes and knees.

*We act in accordance with our self-image.*  
(*Awareness Through Movement*, MF)

Self-image is a dance of thinking, moving, sensing and feeling. Some ideas in *The Potent Self* can be helpful when students ask about sex and what to do:

*The moving: The first thing to do is to restore to the pelvis full mobility.*

*The thinking: ...learn to distinguish compulsive self-assertive motivations that are carried on and actively maintained when they should, in fact, be given up so that parasympathetic dominance may be allowed full freedom.*

*The feeling: ...the sympathetic is brought into action by the self-assertive efforts of the will to succeed and the attempt to 'control oneself.' Thus, instead of poise one feels irritation and disgust, muscular tension instead of relief.*

*The sensing: We must also learn to distinguish the unrecognized habitual motivations of self-assertion sustaining muscular tensions that interfere directly with the involuntary contractions of the pelvic floor, lower abdomen, hips, and anal sphincter and never allow orgasm to build.*

So, what can you do?

Be clear in your intention, maintain internal celibacy, recognize that many people who have pain, pelvic floor dysfunction or other physical issues, also have had trauma, including sexual trauma. Don't make sexual comments during ATM or FI. Make being with you feel safe. Teach people to recognize what

parasympathetic dominance feels like in their body. If you are comfortable talking about sexuality, your students may ask for help. Meet them where they are, just as you do for any other concern.

*The Potent Self*, and *Mindful Spontaneity* are a great resource, full of ideas that you can turn into FI or ATM. Learn to sense you own pelvic floor and how there is seamless integration with all your actions.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The illicit affair between Monica Lewinsky and U.S. President Bill Clinton was all over the news at that time.

<sup>2</sup> **Exformatio** (originally spelled eksformation in Danish) is a term coined by Danish science writer Tor Nørretranders in his book *The User Illusion* published in English 1998.

All the shared body of knowledge which is not explicitly used when people communicate, but without which communication would be impossible.

Contact Deborah Bowes  
Email: [deborahjbowes@gmail.com](mailto:deborahjbowes@gmail.com)  
Websites: <http://www.feldenkraissf.com> and  
<http://www.learningforhealth.com> ■



## NEVER TOO OLD FOR FREEDOM

By Lavinia Plonka GCFP

*Lavinia (New York 1994) has taught The Feldenkrais Method® for over 25 years, is an Assistant*

*Trainer and is a Certified Teacher of the Alba Method. She was an artist in residence for the Guggenheim Museum and movement consultant for theater and television companies around the world, from the Irish National Folk Theater to Nickelodeon. Lavinia's international workshops explore the intersection between movement, emotions and the mind. She is currently the director of Asheville Movement Center in Asheville, NC. Lavinia's writing includes several books and audio programs as well as her popular column CosmiComedy.*

*Lavinia is visiting Australia this November to run Advanced Trainings in Perth, Sydney and Melbourne. RAH.*

At the end of our fourth year of training, a group of us put together a sketch using blacklight? Shadow puppets? - I can't remember after all these years - of bones coming together to form a sexy dancing skeleton. It danced to a popular song of the time,

"I'm Too Sexy. For My Shirt". Everyone was hooting and hollering, and pelvic thrusting was evident everywhere.

And yet.

I don't remember any explicit discussions about sex and The Feldenkrais Method® during my training. No guidance on integrating this important life function, except from the irreverent and potent mouth of Moshe Feldenkrais himself via the Amherst videos. He laced his teaching with sometimes ribald commentary on the importance of addressing sexuality.

*In his last published book, *The Potent Self*, he states, *Full orgasm accompanied by intense gratification is a physiological necessity for the smooth running of the protective, self-assertive, and recuperative functions. Physiologically, full orgasm is as important as procreation..... A smooth balance between the self-assertive and recuperative functions cannot be obtained in persons without the ability of full orgasm. Without full orgasm, there is no biological function fulfilled; such sexual intercourse does nothing but lower the vitality of the entire frame.**

While I'm a big fan of orgasm, I'm not sure it can always serve as a measure of health. I often ask myself if Feldenkrais ever considered the dilemma of the sex addict, or of those who use sex as a form of power. As I age, I also find myself interested in how this function can evolve to allow for an experience of potency even as the clock ticks towards my expiration date. What is the role of sexuality in aging? How do we, as Feldenkrais practitioners, support the evolving self-image in relation to ourselves as sexual beings?

Bert is pushing 70. He was once what we call in the States a "player," a man about town, dedicated to sex, drugs and rock 'n roll. He now struggles with several health challenges and has difficulty walking due to severe arthritis. Currently on his third marriage, he is still incapable of fidelity. He has an insatiable desire for the excitement of sexual relationships. He is a compulsive flirt and always makes sure that women know he has plenty of money and is available. His ploys now evoke pity, except among women who like his extravagant spending. He doesn't come to see me for his intimate issues, but for relief from pain. Yet he can't stop complaining about his wife and bragging about his current lover. Seduction, adventure, sex and orgasm are the ways he bolsters his self-image as a ladies' man

even as it's wearing him out. There's no question that Bert experiences full orgasm, but at a price. "I can't help it," he sighs, "I just love being loved."

I once taught a series of Awareness Through Movement classes for a community of active seniors. At the end of the Pelvic clock lesson, the group was wiggling and swishing, hooting and giggling as they sashayed around the room. It was hard not to feel pleased to see such playful freedom, until Karen came up to me and said, "Thanks a lot for ruining my day."

"What?" I was shocked.

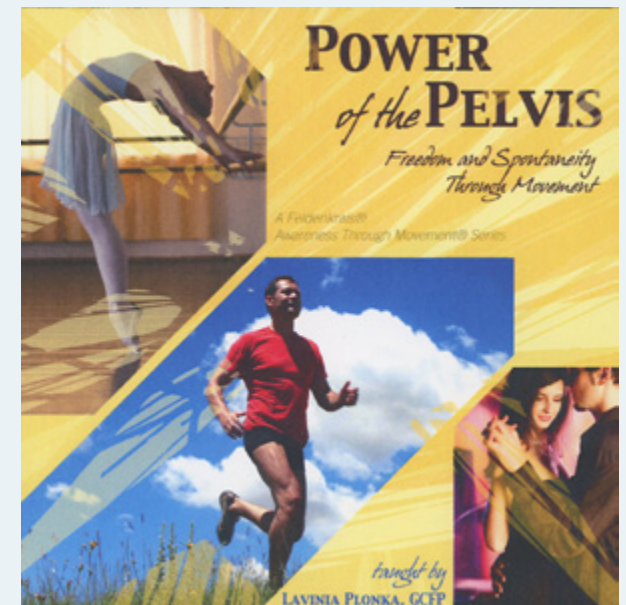
"What was the point of all this? What am I supposed to do with this?" She pointed to her pelvic area. "My husband died five years ago. I'm 70. I've convinced myself I'm just fine alone, that I don't need sex, or even companionship. Now look what you've done. You've awakened something I can't do anything about. Thanks for nothing." And she stormed off.

I was stunned. And chastened. I'll never know if, somehow, she integrated that experience and was able to move on, because that was the end of the series.

Both of these stories serve as a reminder to me that our relationship to sex and to sexuality is complex.

Blanket statements like: *No matter how varied one's life may otherwise be, without the occasional absolute abandonment of the protective and self-assertive habits—as occurs only in frank, spontaneous, and harmonious relationship between a man and a woman—there always remains an anxious longing for something sensed as an ideal state of peaceful well-being*, can be misinterpreted in dozens of ways.

Still, there is no question that most of us living in "First World" cultures need to have a better relationship with our pelvic region. Compulsion and bodily function go hand in hand, and the ability to bring awareness to the possibilities contained in our geographical center is key to health and happiness. When I created the audio program, *The Power of the Pelvis*, I wanted to bring possibility and curiosity to people who may not even understand that movement from the center of oneself was important. The lessons I chose explore the links between pelvis and jaw, the sphincters and pelvic floor, the spine and the head. The subject of sexuality is not explicit. Instead the focus is on freedom and spontaneity – both aspects addressed by Dr. Feldenkrais as key elements of "potency." *In the properly matured individual, activity is spontaneous in all familiar circumstances and potent when a more*



*refined control is required. The spontaneity and the potency are possible because the mature adult has learned to dissociate emotions from body patterns, she has lifted compulsiveness from her behavior, and she makes her habits in accordance with what she deems necessary or desirable. This lifting of compulsiveness from behavior results in greater freedom and independence, similar to the recognition of necessity that lifts the compulsiveness from social behavior.*

As we age, the biological urge reduces, and many people, like Bert and Karen above feel diminished by the relationship of aging to sex. Both men and women resort to artificial means, such as Viagra, to bolster the

## NEVER TOO OLD FOR FREEDOM

By Lavinia Plonka GCFP

experience after Nature has reduced the libido. Does this make one more potent? Is it possible that as we age that “potency” is channeled into other directions? Can one be an elder and still be “sexy?”

Many of my clients are sexual abuse survivors, and the process of helping them find a safe way to experience spontaneity and joy is completely different from freeing someone like Bert from a sense of obsession and desperation. Yet both involve awareness, movement, and non-judgment. These are the gifts Moshe left us.

Contact Lavinia Plonka

Website: <https://laviniaplonka.com>

Email: [laviniaplonka@gmail.com](mailto:laviniaplonka@gmail.com)

*The Power of the Pelvis* set of recordings is available on Lavinia’s website:

<https://laviniaplonka.com/product/the-power-of-the-pelvis/>

For her Advanced Trainings in Perth, Sydney and Melbourne, November 2018, contact AFG Inc. in those states. ■



## SEX, GRAVITY AND THE LIGHTNESS OF BEING

By Ralph Hadden BA (CFP)

*Ralph (Sydney 1990, Assistant Trainer 2012) member of AFG Inc., practises in Melbourne.*

*He has taught Feldenkrais and Advanced Trainings nationally and internationally.*

### Focussing on the pelvis

In our practices it is useful sometimes to specialise, to cater for particular niches in the marketplace. This can be because of our own interest or enthusiasm and/or because the needs or interests of our clients take our work in some direction. Various Feldenkrais practitioners have specialised in different aspects of human function: vision, sleep, pregnancy, pain, golf, skiing, running, aging, to give just a few examples. In the last few years I have chosen to focus on the pelvis.

The pelvis is central to human functioning in four key ways:

1. Mechanical
2. Reproductive
3. Excretory
4. Sexually

*Mechanically* the pelvis cradles the centre of gravity and has the biggest, strongest bones and muscles of the body. It is therefore central to powerful and graceful movement of the whole body. It’s central to *reproduction* (conception, pregnancy and birth) and hosts our *excretory* functions. And, of course, it’s central to our *sexuality*.

I offer classes, workshops and one-to-one sessions that focus on the pelvis. My aim is to improve the functioning of each student’s pelvis in relation to their whole body and to their whole being. My aim in this work is to develop and improve the student’s sensing and coordination of the area, to become conscious of habitual restrictions and inefficiencies and to access greater freedom, power, grace and self-expression.

I give importance also to integrating movement of the pelvis with the whole body, the whole being. Ruthy Alon says it nicely:

*... people easily accept the concept that the movement involved in lovemaking is limited to the sexual organs only. If, in addition, the only style we know is the style of effort, then the intensity of the pelvis’ movement*

during sexual activity, which makes a critical demand on the back, is sharply blocked at that very same vertebra of the lower back that gets caught in a compression and hinders the transmission of the pelvic movement on to the rest of the body. All this takes place at a high level of emotional involvement which, if it is further burdened by anxiety, a need to prove oneself, or hidden reservations... will carry the person far from the ground of self-care. Sexual movement, if its style is limited to local emphasis, can become a trap for back pains. (*Mindful Spontaneity*, page 133)

### The Pelvic Floor

Pelvic floor health is important for us to consider. Most women after giving birth have disturbed or depleted pelvic floor function and may have problems with incontinence. These may resolve in time without any intervention, or they may not. There also many people, of any gender, who have pelvic floor dysfunction and incontinence issues as they get older and/or as a side effect of trauma, illness or surgery.

It's interesting that Moshe Feldenkrais, amongst the multitude of lessons he taught, never taught a pelvic floor lesson (as far as I know- can anyone enlighten me?). This is surprising, given that he applied his ingenuity to so many aspects of human function and

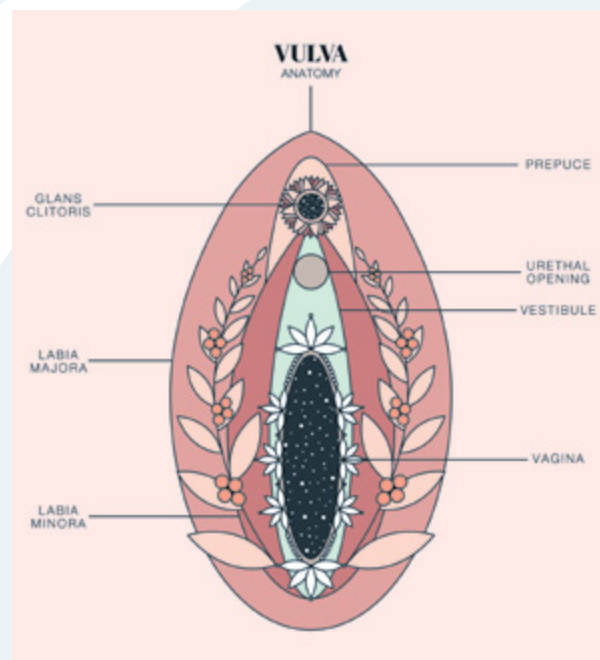


Image by Duvet Days

also his belief in the primacy of sexual wellbeing.

There are physiotherapists who are specialists in the pelvic floor and they are doing marvellous work in pelvic floor recovery. Here's a video of a physiotherapist based in Edinburgh, introducing pelvic floor exercises to a group of new mums at a baby yoga class. She takes a light-hearted approach, adding an additional enticement to do the exercises by saying "you will be having better orgasms in two weeks!"

Click on this link to watch the video: [Elaine Miller, pelvic floor physio and comedian](#)

We can also help people with our work. The Feldenkrais Method® is applied to many activities, exercises and performance skills. We give our students clever and intriguing ways to re-train their movement skills and improve their performance. So it seems obvious that Feldenkrais thinking and learning methods can be applied to pelvic floor exercises as well: refining skills, differentiating left/right, front/back, reducing effort, and so on.

U.S. Feldenkrais teacher Deborah Bowes and Australian Feldies Judy Phippen and Barbara Bell have done just that. They have done our profession a great service by adding pelvic floor lessons to our ATM repertoire. They have made their work available to us, and the general public, through their recorded lessons. Deborah Bowes has produced *Pelvic Health and Awareness* and Judy Phippen and Barbara Bell have produced *From Prolapse to Pelvic Power*.

### Neutral

All of these functional aspects – mechanical, reproduction, excretion, sexuality - are available for the student to consider and in the class discussion before/after the ATM any of these may be discussed. But during the ATM I maintain neutrality (I'm echoing Deborah Bowes' comments in her article, and her

## SEX, GRAVITY AND THE LIGHTNESS OF BEING *By Ralph Hadden BA CFP*



quoting of Carl Ginsburg- *ATM lessons are 'context-less'*). I take the students step by step through the movements and the paying attention to sensation, without making any inference or suggestion. It is left entirely to each student to discover or infer the life applications or outcomes that may emerge from their movement learning.

It is a little different in the one-to-one work because there is opportunity for dialogue. So any of the pelvic functions may be discussed. But, even so, I leave it entirely to the student what they may wish to bring up for us to talk about (or not).

### Outcomes

Applying this neutral stance I find, in practice, that the outcomes are rich and varied. Here are some examples of feedback received from students after their workshops or one-to-one sessions. They indicate the wide range of responses possible:

- ... afterwards I had a much greater range of trunk

*rotation and the hips felt great too for a number of days.*

- ...my sacrum was locked. After the workshop I could move it which was great
- There was a clear freeing up within the hips
- I felt emotional and for a few moments nauseous and that whatever needed to release was releasing. The session left me feeling ... an easier flow of movement in my hips.
- ... a massive release I had in my left hip that opened up probably the entire left hip and upper leg regions. It was quite profound and felt amazing
- Something else that is happening that is rather nice is that I am starting feel sexual again – something that has eluded me for a few months. Sexual desire is returning and this is a nice thing to have happen.
- I found some strong feelings arose a few days afterwards (ranging from joy to anger)... hadn't expected this but completely loved it.

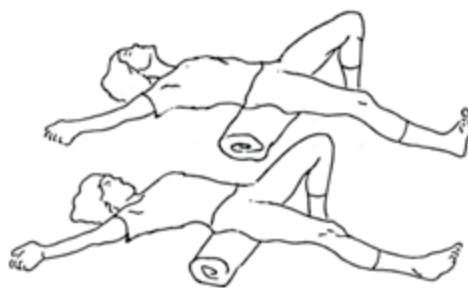
And here's a story from Ruthy Alon of an outcome of roller work with the pelvis:

*Several days after a workshop in which I guided the process of the roller, one of the participants came to me for a private session. She told me something I hadn't thought about in quite this way before. She said that when she returned home from the workshop, she found her boyfriend suffering from backache. So she gladly showed him what she referred to as the trick with the blanket roller. Later, not only was his pain gone, but also the quality of movement in their lovemaking was improved beyond anything they had previously experienced. (Mindful Spontaneity p 131)*

### Pelvic ATM workshops

I offer several different pelvic workshops, most of them as half days but I also do a one day version. They are amongst my most popular workshops and I also find them very enjoyable and fascinating to teach. I usually begin the workshop with the *Pelvic Palpation ATM* (see box). I first give an anatomy lesson on the pelvis, pointing out on a skeleton the various bony landmarks as well as the adjacent lumbar spine and the femur. I then take the students through the palpation ATM to help them build a clear sensing of the structure and actions of their own pelvis and surrounds. It's a





*Image from Mindful Spontaneity*

practical orientation to the area, preparing them for the subsequent ATMs. I then continue, structuring each workshop so there is a good mix and balance of different parts explored, relationship to the whole body, different positions, easy/hard, simple/complex. Here are some examples of ATMs I include:

- Pelvic rock, pelvic clock
- On the roller – explorations on a Ruthy Alon style rolled up towel/blanket. Pelvic rock and other moves. (see quote from Ruthy, below)
- Bend knees wide – supine, legs long, bring knee(s) to upright, foot/feet standing via wide pathway
- Sit bones – chair lesson, based on AY 508, *On the right ischium*
- Bounce on pelvis – adapted from a Ruthy Alon *Bones for Life* lesson
- Pelvic floor lessons – based on Deborah Bowes ATMs in her *Pelvic Health & Awareness* CD set; but also inspired by *From Prolapse to Pelvic Power* by Judy Phippen and Barbara Bell
- Prone, head and pelvis – based on part of AY 523 *The head on the left side – knee movements*
- Pelvic ‘wristwatch’- small, asymmetrical pelvic clock style movements, based on part of Alan Questel’s *Sacral Clock* from his *Balance* set of recordings

There are many ATMs that include the pelvis and surrounds (in fact it’s hard to find an ATM that *doesn’t* include the pelvis!) but the above are some of my favourites, especially for my Pelvic workshops. I also include in each workshop a lesson which has a whole body movement supported by the pelvis – *Arm reach and roll* (based on a Frank Wildman lesson) for example.

What would you teach? If you could offer an ATM, a workshop, a class series or a set of recorded lessons focussing on the pelvis, or on sexual wellbeing, what lessons would you include?

### **Does your body know how to align itself so that your heart can believe you are loved?**

(Ruthy Alon on the power of working on the roller.)

*All of us want loving relationships. Do you know how to receive love? Does your body know how to align itself in such a way that your heart can believe that indeed you are loved? Does the manner in which you organise your body influence what takes place in your heart? Is*

*there a way to enhance your readiness to accept being loved, through the style of your movement?*

*Working on the roller gives rise to several perceptions about the way in which you coordinate yourself, and the way this reflects upon your ability to feel that you are accepted for what you are. The movement against the roller’s support invites your organism to respond with greater fidelity to the pull of the earth, to let go of your weight so that it can lean more innocently on the ground, and not rely on your muscles’ effort. (Mindful Spontaneity page 141)*

### **Pelvic FI/bodywork**

I have developed a specialised form of one-to-one work focussing on the pelvis. It uses the gentle, and sometimes firm, touch and movement of Feldenkrais and bodywork applied to the pelvis, hip joints, thighs, buttocks, sacrum, coccyx, lumbar spine and abdomen. Included are:

- Step by step tactile exploration. The gentle touch giving the client a detailed sensing of their tissues, growing their awareness of the area.
- Connecting movements, via skeletal landmarks and points of leverage. Linking these parts to each other, and to the whole body

- Inviting deep release: a sustained, stronger (but comfortable) manual pressure on soft tissue zones of tightness
- Talking the client through awareness of the pelvis and surrounds, ATM movements and pelvic floor exercises

#### **Consent, control, boundaries**

Because I am working with private, intimate areas of the body I am very mindful of being clear on my boundaries and the communication between me and the client. I spend a good amount of time at the start of the session having a “consent conversation” with the client. I explain what I plan to do in the session, my boundaries and the client’s control and choice. Included in the conversation:

- There won’t be any sexual interaction between us
- Because I will be sometimes touching close to the genital area you may feel sexual sensations. This is natural, is allowed but there won’t be any intentional sexual stimulation
- You may feel some emotional or somatic response to the work – there may arise thoughts, feelings, memories, images, associations that have strong significance for you. How you handle this is up to you – you could ask me to pause, you could talk



*Matrix of Creation by Ila Rose*

about it with me (I will be a sympathetic listener) or you could just remain with your own thoughts. Or you may like to take this to a conversation later with a friend or therapist

- Client control – “you can, at any time, say Stop, or Pause and I will stop/pause and check in with you.”
- I may apply deep pressure sometimes, going slowly to allow you to process the experience. You can at any time guide me by asking for more or less pressure
- Informing: At the start of the session (after we have talked about what the client would like) I give the client an outline of the areas I plan to work with in the session and check with them that that’s ok. And then during the session I advise the client at each

stage what I am about to do “I am now going to press into the soft tissue at the edge of the sacrum. Is that ok?”

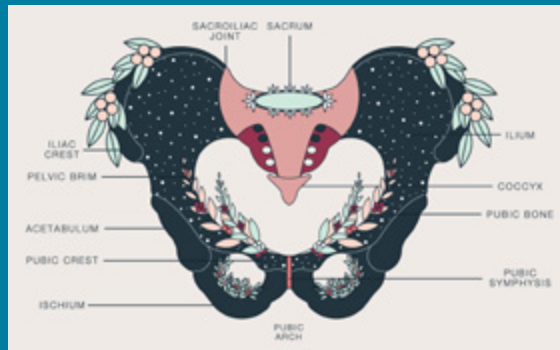
The client remains clothed during the session. I advise them to wear light pants, such as tracksuit or yoga pants, or to be in underwear that covers all the genital area.

Feedback from clients is that they appreciate the clear boundary setting, as it enables them to feel safe and relax into the experience.

#### **Practitioners specialising in the pelvis, sexual wellbeing?**

As I said earlier, various practitioners have chosen to focus on particular parts or aspects of human function. I am curious. Are there any other Feldenkrais practitioners specialising in the pelvis and/or sexual wellbeing? I, and the Feldenkrais community, would love to hear about it. For me, exploring this pelvic focus with my clients has been fascinating and rewarding (for me and my clients). And it’s been very satisfying to witness my clients’ significant learnings and outcomes. I think this is an important area of specialised work that many practitioners will find very interesting to explore. I look forward to hearing about your journeys.

## Pelvic palpation ATM



*image by Duvet Days*

Note, this lesson aims to improve your awareness and connection to your pelvis. So, I invite you to touch and explore all parts of the pelvis. And this will include areas that will feel intimate, private. Not everyone will want to touch all areas. Please only do what you are comfortable with, only what feels right for you. You can imagine, or just ignore, areas you don't want to explore with touch.

### A. Position 1: Supine, legs long.

Scan, observe contact with the floor, particularly pay attention to the back of the pelvis and any left/right differences.

### B. Bend knees, feet standing.

Test move (a) Do 'classic' pelvic rock movements... touch fingers to iliac crests and track movements as you pelvic rock... similarly touch pubic bone, track

with fingers how the pubis moves.

Test move (b) Roll pelvis a little side to side... similarly touch iliac crests, pubic bone and track movements with your fingers, hand(s).

### C. Position 2: Side lie.

This will be a one-sided lesson and you will be palpating the side of the pelvis that is uppermost. So choose your preferred side to lie on and/or your preferred side of the pelvis to explore.

Use your hand(s) and fingers to locate, touch, trace outlines of and follow movements of these landmarks:

1. Iliac crest- trace forwards till bone disappears beneath soft tissue. Trace backwards to the sacrum. Gently probe the soft tissue bordering the iliac crest. Cradle crest with hand, fingers and learn how it moves while you do pelvic rock, tilt side of pelvis towards/away from head, roll side of pelvis forwards/back
2. Buttocks- hand, fingers feel shape, tone of soft tissues of buttocks and around greater trochanter. Knead muscles with hand. Clench buttocks, move leg in various ways to feel under your hand the action of muscles in this area
3. Greater trochanter, hip joint, femur- trace around the greater trochanter, learning its shape and

location, feel the upper thigh, its muscles and (if you press in deeply) you will probably be able to feel the femur. Move the leg around to feel the movement in the hip joint and action of the muscles

4. Sacrum, coccyx- feel shape, texture, outline of sacrum, coccyx. Gently probe soft tissue bordering the sacrum, coccyx. Trace down to touch tip of finger to tip of coccyx. This feels uncomfortable or unpleasant for many people so, of course, proceed cautiously, honouring what's comfortable for you. With the tip of a finger on the tip of the coccyx, do the pelvic rock, as if moving your tailbone forward and back. Press the finger gently into the soft tissue between the coccyx and the anus, contract and release the pelvic floor
5. Ischium- Move your touch laterally to find the ischial tuberosity, explore its shape and surrounds. Hold contact with the ischium while moving the pelvis- explore all directions, rock, tilt, roll, discovering how the ischium travels with these movements
6. Pubis- bring your hand(s) around to the front to touch the pubic bone. From above gently push into the soft tissue, contract, release the abdominal muscles. Feel the thickness and width of the pubis. Frame the top and bottom of the pubic bone with thumb and fingers. Do the pelvic

rock, tracking how the pubis moves. You can also add contact with your other hand with the tip of the coccyx or the ischium to get additional kinaesthetic input on how these parts travel, relative to the pubis, as you move the pelvis.

7. Perineum- touch the pelvic floor between the anus and the genitals, contract, release the pelvic floor
8. Pubis to ischium- reaching between the legs, see if you can trace the bony connection from the pubis to the ischium. Hold contact with this bony link and explore movements of the pelvis.

**D. Return to position 1, supine, legs long.**

Scan, observe contact with floor, compare right and left sides. Are there any differences in sensation from the side you have been palpating compared to the other side?

**E. Bend knees, feet standing.**

Repeat test moves (a) and (b) - pelvic rock and roll pelvis side to side. Are you moving, sensing differently?

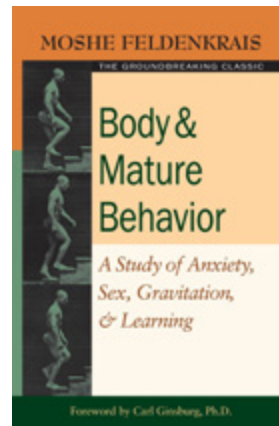
**END OF LESSON**

## RESOURCES

### Books

Ruthy Alon *Mindful Spontaneity* (1990 Interface) I recommend particularly chapter 4, "Movement for Life, Movement for Love", where Ruthy writes beautifully about Feldenkrais learning in relation to love-making.

Moshe Feldenkrais *Body & Mature Behaviour* (1949 International Universities Press 1981),



*The Master Moves* (1984 Meta), *The Potent Self* (Harper & Row 1985). Note that although *The Potent Self* was first published in 1985, after Feldenkrais' death, it was written around the same time as *Body & Mature Behaviour*.

### Recordings

Deborah Bowes *Pelvic Health and Awareness*

Judy Phippen, Barbara Bell *From Prolapse to Pelvic Power*

Lavinia Plonka *Power of the Pelvis*

Donna Ray *Sex the Feldenkrais Way*

Ruthy Alon *Bones for Life*

Alan Questel *Balance*

### Podcasts

ABC radio Podcast *Ladies, We Need to Talk*, episode "The pelvic flaw in all of us". An excellent overview of pelvic floor problems and mainstream solutions: <http://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/ladies-we-need-to-talk/the-pelvic-flaw/9934402>

Ralph Hadden and Missy M Podcast: *The Sex Whisperers*. Conversations on sexuality, love and relationships. Episode 1 is about consent negotiations. <https://itunes.apple.com/au/podcast/the-sex-whisperers/id1439001294>

## CONTACT

Contact Ralph: [ralph.hadden@gmail.com](mailto:ralph.hadden@gmail.com)

Website: [www.themovingmindcentre.com](http://www.themovingmindcentre.com) ■



## OF FELDENKRAIS, POTATOES AND SEX

By Ilona Fried

*Ilona found her muse in Moshe Feldenkrais and his method, which helped her address writer's block. During and after the two years of her training (in Santa Fe and San Francisco), she penned dozens of essays and articles about her experiences with the Feldenkrais Method in an effort to translate the work to the public. These appear on her blog, à la carte spirit, The Huffington Post, Elephant Journal, Thrive Global, The Wisdom Daily, The Feldenkrais Journal and Senseability (published by the Feldenkrais Guild of North America). This article was originally published in Ilona's blog, 6 May 2015'. RAH.*

Can potatoes be sexy? Can sex be potato-ey? And what does either have to do with moving slowly in a Feldenkrais lesson??

First, can you recall a potato dish that made you swoon, salivate or succumb? Maybe potatoes mashed with butter until creamy, drizzled with truffle oil and dotted with beluga caviar. Or perfectly prepared french fries, thinly cut, crisp on the outside, tender on the inside, served hot in a sturdy paper cone and paired with dipping sauces. Chances are whoever created

such memorable dishes didn't whip them up on the first try, or even the second or third.

Now, are you someone, or do you know someone, who prefers sex just one way, like a person who insists on baked potatoes? There is nothing wrong with baked potatoes; sometimes they hit the spot, either on their own or as a side dish. Simple foods have their rightful place in the menu of life, ditto for familiar positions. But without curiosity or a sense of play in either the kitchen or the bedroom, life can get dull quickly. The Feldenkrais Method®, which fosters choice, can add spice to movement of all kinds.

In one of Moshe Feldenkrais' Amherst lectures (or monologues) (25 July 1980), he explained the essence of Functional Integration. He said that a practitioner must be clear about how they themselves move in order to help others find easier ways to move. As he sat, back straight, on a wooden stool at the front of the Hampshire College auditorium, he said:

*It's [Functional Integration] not a question of therapy. It's not a question of healing. It's a question of reorganizing the nervous system in such a way that it*

*keeps on improving, like everything we do well, our system keeps on improving.*

To illustrate his point more concretely, he said:

*...anybody who can cook well makes new dishes all the time. Anybody who can cook will not cook the same potato in the same way every time...*

I paused the recording to jot down that 'elusive obvious' tidbit. It occurred to me that, without making a formal goal out of it, my culinary repertoire had actually increased since I applied Feldenkrais principles to switching to a gluten-free diet<sup>3</sup> and returned to eating meat last fall. The constraint of no longer being able to quickly toast a bagel for breakfast, rely on sandwiches for lunch or, in a pinch, pop ravioli in a pot for dinner, required me to expand in new directions and examine my belief that cooking "takes too long". In recent months I've sought out different recipes for fish, lamb, and even humble carrots and potatoes. The more I prepare my own food, the easier it is to modify or create a dish on the fly, rather than treating a recipe as gospel, and to use ingredients I once rejected (hello, anchovies!). To my surprise, I spontaneously riffed on one of my father's recipes I once held sacred, adding white beans to chicken paprikás, a pleasing alteration that might dismay if not perturb some Hungarians.

Valuing the process of cooking rather than trying to reproduce results or “perfect” a dish is relaxing and fun. Since each moment is fresh, yet some ingredients might not be farm fresh, to expect little to no variance across time is unrealistic for a home cook. Odd surprises often lead to better outcomes in subsequent iterations. So far, even the less successful creations have been edible, if not elegant. My facility at the cutting board has improved, and I’m more willing to try recipes I would have once deemed “too complicated”. The process of becoming a more versatile cook has felt organic rather than forced. While I wouldn’t liken myself to a chef, I know that continued practice and sense of play will lead to further refinements, improvements and inventions. It’s hard now to reconnect to the time I lived in Manhattan and, deferring to a boyfriend’s culinary skills and intimidated by the New York restaurant scene, I cooked less often and with less curiosity, sticking to what I already knew. In comparing myself to others, I curtailed my exploration and learning.

Unlike that former boyfriend, Moshe Feldenkrais was an unabashedly earthy man, for whom the topic of sensuality was not, um, a hot potato.

*...and, by the way, it’s not only with potatoes, he said, it has to do also with our intimate life with another...*

*if they [a couple] do it well, it’s certainly not the same thing, it’s not the same potato every day. Now, those who don’t feel the difference eat potatoes until they vomit it and therefore they divorce. Or they don’t even marry at all, they separate long before that, and try another potato.*

The group laughed. Some students applauded. I chuckled, and wondered if the childhood ditty, “One potato, two potato, three potato, four” would now have a completely different meaning.

Moshe Feldenkrais emphasized in his teaching that to have true choice there needs to be at least *three* ways to do something, not two; learning multiple paths to do a movement is highlighted in many Feldenkrais lessons. In that spirit, and in honor of Moshe’s birthday (May 6), here are some ways to bring aspects of the Feldenkrais Method into the kitchen:

- Using a single knife, into how many different shapes can you cut potatoes (or carrots)?
- Do those shapes require variations in how you handle the knife or how you stand?
- Can you breathe easily while cutting, or do you hold your breath or clench your jaw?
- If you try this exercise with the messier mango, what happens?

For a more advanced challenge, how many ways can you modify a family heirloom recipe without rendering it completely unfamiliar or shocking older relatives? Is that something you’re even willing to consider?

As for fostering variety in intimate matters, I’ll leave that to you. I’m off to find some red bliss potatoes.

You can find links to all of Ilona’s writing on her website, [www.ilonafried.com](http://www.ilonafried.com). You can also follow her writing on Facebook.

Contact Ilona Fried: [Ilona@ilonafried.com](mailto:Ilona@ilonafried.com)

<sup>1</sup> Link to the original blog, Of Feldenkrais, Potatoes and Sex: <https://alacartespirt.com/2015/05/06/feldenkrais-potatoes-sex/>

<sup>2</sup> Blog: *What’s Pain? A Portal to Feldenkrais Magic*: <https://alacartespirt.com/2014/12/17/pain-portal-feldenkrais-magic/>

<sup>3</sup> Blog: *Feldenkrais, Food and Self-Image*: <https://alacartespirt.com/2014/10/15/feldenkrais-food-and-self-image/>





## IN FI WE FORM A NEW ORGANISM

*Excerpt from an article by Martin Weiner*

*Ilona Fried shared this excerpt with me. It's from an article by the late Martin Weiner (San Francisco 1977) in the FGNA journal, number 19, 2006. RAH.*

But Moshe did say that in FI when we touch another person, we form a new organism with two bodies, four arms and four legs. Why not explore the possibility that in this new entity in which two central nervous systems become one, one part can experience what is happening in the other part without taking on that sensation? Since the consciousness of the practitioner now includes that other entity as part of itself, the sensation is already there in the 'shared space' of the two but occurring in the body of only one of them. Isn't this what happens at the finest levels of skilled love-making where each person seems to know what the other is feeling and can heighten their partner's pleasures accordingly?... Moshe often compared FI to a form of lovemaking and I suggest that one look again at videos of him working, keeping in mind the model I am suggesting, to see this in action.

I can also say from my personal experience of his touch during many lessons with him that it literally felt that he was in my body experiencing it and moving it from the inside. It was as if he was using his musculature and brain to move my body directly as an extension of his, and this experience became encoded in my brain as the experience of how I could feel and move even without his assistance. He would often point out when he was moving someone that you could not tell whether he was moving the person or the person moving him. They were so connected that it looked ostensibly the same. ■

# UNSPEAKABLE ENJOYMENT OF LIFE

## Thoughts about intimacy in the Feldenkrais work and in somatic sexual coaching

By Ramona Ludwig

*This article was originally published in 2016 in Feldenkrais Forum, the journal of the German Feldenkrais guild (FVD, Feldenkrais-Verband Deutschland). Translated from German by practitioner Martina Neville (Melbourne, 2018). RAH.*

When the Feldenkrais Forum suggested to me to publish part of my final essay, I was very excited. Intimacy<sup>1</sup> and sexuality are still taboo in our society. They appear to be shrouded by a veil of shame and excitement. Why is it like this that this subject is touching us in such a different way?

Sexuality represents a vital part of our lives: vitality and life energy, which is experienced in intimacy. The core appears to be deeper than just sexuality: we all want to lead a powerful and healthy life, but the thought of the end of life is often shelved.

In the consideration of sexuality its origin is often divided into good or bad. In between there is nothing. During the course of our lives and through holding on to old patterns which we no longer need, we lose the natural swing between these two poles. It is not a

question of curbing this but of choice. More than black or white and man or woman.

And this is where the Feldenkrais method comes into play. It has become the method for me which enables me to dance between contrasts.

It has managed to take away my fear of uncontrolled chaos and has given me back the pleasure of the variety of life. The quality of the path is the actual goal-not the arrival. How often have we read this sentence in all the wise books? And how much of it arrives truly in our bodies?

### **The reflection on my movements**

Born into a family of artists, I felt these questions early in my life: what is reality, what is an act? Where do I stand in this? Who am I and how do I operate? This unrest, paired with ignorance and not knowing how healthy conflict should look, fostered the splitting within myself. So I jumped from extreme happiness to extreme sadness and in between there was nothing. I did not know any better, I did not know any other way.

The analysis of my body movements, through my classical ballet training, took up a big space in my life. Perfection instead of feeling, the show must go on! In drama school I learned “Method Acting” which draws on one’s own experience, eliciting the associated emotion needed for the role. Did I act actually in an authentic way? New confusion! In my studies I explored vocal training for classic, pop and musical and inside myself on a delicate level, the chaos just got bigger.

Breathing was an important theme in all branches of my education. However it never was discussed what was good and conducive for me and what not. I gave my body to expression, it was a tool for different techniques. Again and again I felt the natural impulses, like when I was a child playfully dancing and moving. But I did not know how to include this into my functional working life. My body and my biochemistry served my job and did not further the development of myself. I did not know how I could have combined both.



### **Intimacy and familiarity with oneself**

This is where intimacy comes into play. My very personal intimacy to myself. For me the balance between inner and outer intimacy is the key for health, love and flow of life energy. The inhalation and exhalation, the letting go and the boundaries. On the path of self-exploration I explored unsuccessfully several talking therapies. For me, as a kinaesthetic person, I was missing the connection to the body. The Feldenkrais method reinstalled this connection and explored the core, the origin; thus creating the greatest intimacy with myself and to others. The Feldenkrais method has given me a valid, loving and therefore truly authentic way to connect with myself and my surroundings. Under intimacy I understand the proximity to oneself first and secondly to the surrounding environment on its different levels. To what extent do I feel myself? How close can I be to myself or to what extent do I allow myself conscious distance? Because I consciously know where it is, I allow myself to feel it intuitively.

Only through this me-self-feeling, me-self-trust, me-being-able, me-be-myself with all aspects, is a value-free loving perception of myself and my counterparts possible. This is my personal experience and therefore also a part of my belief pattern.

After a lexical definition of intimacy it seems that indiscretion, of the verbal and physical kind, will hurt intimacy. From psychosomatics we know that the consequences are not only of a psychological, but also of a physical nature. Typical symptoms are panic attacks, phobias and the like.

Could it be that the Feldenkrais method can be supportive to those people whose intimacy and familiarity to themselves, through an indiscreet moment, has been hurt? I definitely think: yes!

Intimacy, moreover, is an extensive subject to which I will give room to express my personal thoughts and hope the readers will be inspired to explore their own considerations.

### **No one-way street from psyche to physique**

Moshe Feldenkrais' work shows that with conscious movement, physiological changes in movement patterns can be achieved. His insights are based on the basic learning ability of the brain, which explains that changed movements are responsible for new neuronal impulses in the body. By practising exploration over a long period of time these impulses can create new synapses in the nervous system and provide new information to the brain and subsequently facilitate easier movements.

To put it simply, it has been shown that the learning ability of the body is not a one-way street from Psyche to physique, but is working in both directions. Physical movement can also change psychological processes.

Nowadays the biggest challenge is implementation. How can we create change to create lasting benefit? The brain remembers repeated use paired with positive emotions. In Feldenkrais work one can undo old patterns with comfortable movement.

In my own therapeutic work the question arose, how can this knowledge can be used to resolve sexual perceptual issues. Difficulties with intimacy are always associated to problems with one's own boundaries. In many cases difficulties with personal boundaries arise from a lack of self-image.

Self-image and the existing believe system on how something has to be, also play a big role. In my own experience the Feldenkrais method is a deciding factor to explore one's self-image and to consciously accept it. This paves the way to playful exploration in dealing with the self. The recognition of one's own condition opens the door to loving intimacy with oneself and subsequently also the environment.

### **Proximity and Distance**

Proximity and distance are dualistic life experiences and we perceive the world through our body. We need both poles, we feel because there are differences. It is important to find balance and a clear understanding of boundaries. It is not about avoidance of body contact and affection, but to pay attention to the limits. Any desired touch creates proximity. Every unwanted touch creates distance. Proximity can lead to security and trust, but also to constriction and limitation. Distance can lead to freedom, self-discovery and independence, but also a lack of interest, carelessness and lack of stability. Self-reflection plays a decisive role. Here too, questions arise which one should answer honestly; how secure am I with dealing with proximity and distance? Do I know my needs? What do I look for in my contact with my fellow man? Do I know my boundaries? Do I understand my body language?

My own sensitivity and empathy at any given moment are a crucial factor in contact with others. The more I succeed in perceiving others' body language, the more can I align my actions with them.

Not, "I know what is good for you", but "I will try to find out together with you, what is good for you".

Important behaviour rules in private and professional contact between client and therapist are: ask permission, gentle approach, being careful, patience, small steps, taking back an offer when unsuitable- and staying in the present. This becomes all the more important the more intimate a contact.



### **Intimacy and sexuality**

This naturally includes self-love and partnership. Part of any intimate partnership is sexuality. In my training as sexological body worker<sup>2</sup>, I have discovered with great excitement many parallels to the Feldenkrais method. It was very interesting for me to perceive an intimate and authentic level and realise how essential a loving connection is to oneself: also the maintenance of one's own boundaries and those of my fellow travellers.

I was equally fascinated with the invitation of creative exploration of emotions in relation to sexuality. The conscious play with proximity and distance. This careful research opened many doors which would have remained unlocked behind social and cultural norms and family imprints.

This creative exploration which one starts initially because of self-love, could be done in society, in relationships and with others.

Through this work sexual connection which was stuck in a rut and impaired intimacy in a relationship, have a chance to be healed.

For this reason one has to explore one's inner feelings alone and with the partner. Many questions need honest answers. For instance: how much do I feel myself and my boundaries? What do I need? What does my partner need and what do we need together? How much am I prepared to give? What can I contribute and what not? How do I handle this? What solutions can I find?

However a pure linguistic approach is unsatisfactory, learning will only take place when the body is integrated. To this end, the Feldenkrais method, in combination with sexological bodywork is an option.

### **How do we learn sexuality?**

In general one assumes, "if love is true, so is sexual life". Is this really so? If yes, for how long? Why does one assume that there are no stuck patterns? To maintain playfulness for a long period in life and in a relationship there has to be courage to re-invent yourself, to explore one's needs and the knowledge of creativity, engagement, self-love and the enjoyment to search. It's always the whole person who has the longing and therefore a need for it. Somatic sexual coaching combines counselling with sexual bodywork. The intention of this approach is to develop a differentiated experience of body sensations with the intent to cultivate life-force. This is where the parallels to the Feldenkrais work can be found.

All the learning will be reflected in the body and in one's actions. The approach of somatic sexual coaching is therefore mainly body oriented with the aim to dissolve stored patterns and blockages.

Moshe Feldenkrais indicated that *awareness gives us freedom to make a choice. No matter how much we search it is difficult to find a mental act which does not affect our body function in some way.* We also have a choice to archive the seemingly impossible within

ourselves and around us. Sometimes this is painful, but mostly consoling and life affirming.

Through my Feldenkrais work I learned that the only constant in life is change. Subsequently there is not only one way. I still have dual emotions. I still hold my breath in pain of recognition and at the same time unthinkable joy of life arises which I can pass on nowadays. I have experienced on different levels with my own body, how exploration and play with duality can start motion. When motion has started, duality can connect. Splitting is an illusion, because every change is connected; psyche and body are connected; psyche and body are not separated. The choice to say yes or no and to maintain this option is opening the path to inner freedom and creativity, which is for me, foremost, to love myself.

<sup>1</sup> Intimacy...an intimate relationship that involves physical and /or emotional intimacy. *Wikipedia*

<sup>2</sup> You can find out about Sexological Bodywork on the website:  
<https://www.sexologicalbodywork.com/doku.php>

Contact Ramona Ludwig: [ramonagoeshappy@yahoo.de](mailto:ramonagoeshappy@yahoo.de)



# FEATURE : ANGER



## ON ANGER

By Molly Tipping BA  
(Dance) 

*Molly (Perth 2012) practises Feldenkrais and Pilates in West Perth, specializing in dance, anxiety, pain and children's learning. Molly also lectures at the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA). She is the co-producer, with Brigit Cosgrove, of Move Over Anxiety, a Feldenkrais audio program. Molly's article includes questions and input from Daniel Christensen. RAH.*

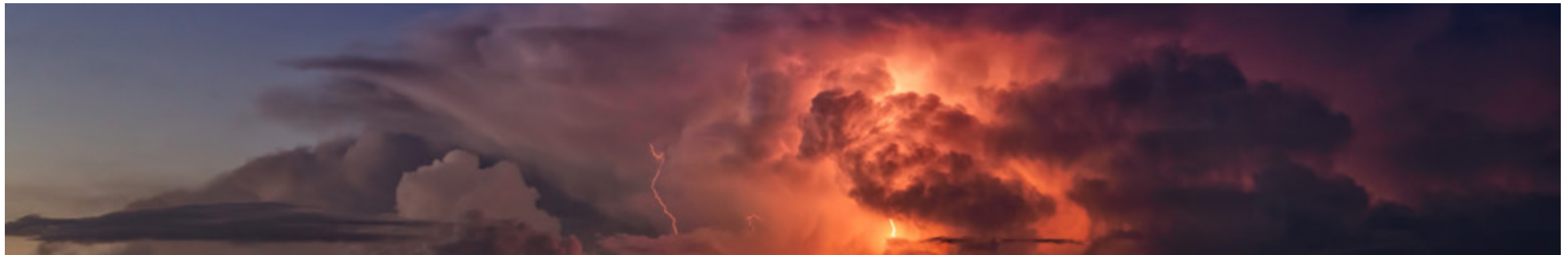
Recently a client, Daniel, asked me "What is the Feldenkrais perspective on anger?" Daniel had been attending Feldenkrais sessions monthly for a number of years and had a consistent home practice drawing on a wide range of CDs from many practitioners. Aside from his interest in the Feldenkrais Method® Daniel was a keen martial artist and spent his days working as a statistician.

Daniel had come to me through a CD series I developed with Brigit Cosgrove called *Move over Anxiety* (available on Molly's website, see below).

Over the years, Daniel and I had explored these ideas, as well as pain reduction, improved movement and function, and strengthening. When Daniel and I first spoke about anger my response was general and not altogether different from what I might say on anxiety:

*It is an experience of emotional impotence that affects an individual's posture, muscular patterns, and their ability to achieve what they want. When we understand our patterns and habits and find greater choice in our actions we can have a more mature experience with it.*

But Daniel's question sent me back to Dr Moshe Feldenkrais' written material to see what he said on the subject. Moshe spoke of anger, aggression, violence, power and impotence intentionally and through his, at times, fierce embodiment and demonstrations. His ideas on anger are peppered throughout his teachings. The infamous 'Love and Violence' talk in the Amherst Training, the Body and Mind chapter of *The Potent Self* (chapter 9, page 62), and in the 'Jaw, Tongue and Aggression' lesson in *The Master Moves* (lesson 10, page 155), are where we find his most discrete accounts of anger, specifically the distinction between aggression and violence.



He consistently stated that our experience and expression of all emotions, including anger, can be traced back to our earliest stages of development and while all emotions are a physiological and psychological process: *The earliest interaction of the child with the external world is entirely physical. The earliest emotional movements become, therefore, associated or linked with muscular and postural patterns.* (*The Potent Self* pg. 82)

In other words, how we were parented, educated, and inculcated into our society shows up in our bodies, in our emotional competence (or incompetence), and our daily actions, relationships, and habits. This distinction between aggression and violence is at the crux of what Feldenkrais asks us to consider when understanding anger. Knowing how we embody anger is perhaps the best place to start. Where is it located in you? What are its patterns, rhythms, directions, repetitions, connections, and relationships within your body, your relationships and to how you live my life? What fears or shame do you have around your anger?

## Body scan

Because we sense anger *long before it is externalized* (*The Potent Self* pg. 82) a simple body scan can help us get clearer. (This body scan is informed by Andrew Wright's work on anxiety as well as Adam Cootes' work on chronic pain):

**1. Take a moment to sit comfortably and then consider something you feel angry about.**

How does your posture or breathing change? Do you feel a change in your belly, do your eyes converge, do you feel changes in your jaw or facial expressions, how has your breathing changed, or maybe you notice something change in your dominant arm and hand or leg and foot?

**2. Now slightly exaggerate this postural change a little. Everything about it exaggerate it just a little, make it more intense, connect the discrete feelings into one complete connected postural experience.**

What are you doing? - Digging your heels in? Holding yourself back? Clenching your teeth?

Are you stopping yourself from doing anything? - Punching? Crying?

**3. And then stop and give up thinking about it.**

How specific could you be about what you sensed? Consider

- Location
- Tone
- Direction
- Pattern
- Relationships

How specific can you be about what you felt? Was it powerlessness, loathing, defiance, aggression, violence, or something else? Maybe it was a cocktail of emotions?

## ON ANGER *By Molly Tipping BA (Dance) CFP*

We can fail to understand anger because we may not allow sufficient time to fully consider, sense, and feel it in ourselves. But we can also fail to understand it because we may use the term too broadly. Anger can be used to describe frustration, which is an essential phase in learning. As a practitioner, frustration is something I often support clients through when they're learning a new movement pattern.

Anger can be used to describe fear, which is an instinctive response to danger. It can be confused with the 'fight' in the 'fight, flight, and freeze' response. Anger can be used to describe aggression, which, as Moshe says, is a natural part of our biological repertoire for survival and success.

Anger can be used to describe violence, which is action intended to elicit fear and can be subtle and pervasive or have more damaging consequences. And anger can be used in place of pain or helplessness, in which anger serves as a distraction for deeper hurt in times of injury, illness, and disease.

If we consider Feldenkrais' distinctions of aggression and violence in the context of animals and children, we can see its biology. Puppies and kittens bite, scratch, pounce, and chase instinctively; caring

mothers may be shocked when their bundle of joy bites at the nipple, snatches a toy, pulls hair, throws cutlery, kicks, and screams. If we consider these actions in an alternative context, people bite ravenously into a juicy apple, kick vigorously when boot scooting, scream wildly on a roller coaster, pull hard when reaching sexual climax, snatch quickly when playing tag, and punch repeatedly after aching a tennis serve.

Actions, when considered in context, do not equal anger. But are they aggression? Moshe would say yes. This distinction can leave some people uneasy. Surely aggression is not something we want to cultivate!?! But *aggression is essential to life* and a human being needs to be able "to caress and to kill." *Without cutting trees we couldn't have toilet paper* (*The Master Moves* pp 167 - 168) and "without killing the beast we would have no meat."

In modern terms, to steal the football from an opponent, a striker must play aggressively, to save a child from oncoming traffic, a parent must be swift and aggressive, and to show leadership, a CEO must make calculated and aggressive decisions. But we *inhibit aggression in children, which is idiotic. It's incorrect. It's because we don't distinguish between aggression and violence. But aggression is an essential part of life.* (*The*

*Master Moves* page 164) If a child's early expressions of aggression are confused with violence, parents or teachers may try to curb their behavior. Alternatively, other parents may encourage aggressive behavior. This may allow a child to 'fit in', but it can also lead to a chronic sense of powerlessness and a lack of confidence.

While many clients and peers have had often confronting or confusing responses to the ideas and specifically the words recent conversations with clients have yielded some interesting insights. An older client who prided himself on being a kind man and "not having an aggressive bone in (his) body" later commented as he struggled to open a chocolate wrapper "Perhaps I could do with a little more aggression."



A young dancer made the connection between his anger and anxiety. Acknowledging his struggle with competition in class and an inability to put himself in the spotlight, he found himself verbally attacking his teachers, his fellow students and himself, if only in his head, to cover up his anxieties. A young lady, annoyed that she kept “picking fights” with her husband, remembered she had often got into fights at school because she struggled to stand up for herself any other way. Perhaps she “still did not know how to stand up for (her)self without fighting.”

Feldenkrais would often say ‘do not just agree with me’. One of the reasons for this, I believe, is that submission inhibits our capacity for true learning. In reflecting on anger however, submission can be a dangerous and fertile ground for eroding an individual’s sense of autonomy and allowing anger to take hold.

For this reason it’s vital to take sufficient time to consider what you think, sense and feel for yourself and to put autonomy at the forefront of the questions. “What do you sense and feel?” “What do you agree or disagree with?” “How do you want to improve?” and “What do you want?”

We may not choose our initial learnt and embodied responses to anger, or any emotion, but as adults we have choice about how we act now. Do we want to repeat our habits, maybe they are good or sufficient, or maybe we want to learn new ways of attending and responding? Whichever way you choose it is your choice now.

#### References

Moshe Feldenkrais *The Potent Self* (Harper & Row 1985), *The Master Moves* (Meta 1984)

Connect to Molly Tipping: [tippingmotion.com.au](http://tippingmotion.com.au)

Email: [tippingmotion@inet.net.au](mailto:tippingmotion@inet.net.au) ■

# PAST ISSUES



December 2016

*The Dancer Within, Rewriting the story of Youth Scoliosis* by Seth Dillinger, in collaboration with Daniela Picard, appeared in our 2016 journal. It has been translated into German and re-published in the 2018 issue of the German Feldenkrais guild's journal, *Feldenkrais Forum*. Well done Seth and Daniela!



November 2014

For further interesting reading on Habits I recommend *The Power of Habit, Why we do what we do and how to change* by Charles Duhigg ((Heinemann 2012). See my comments in the editorial.



October 2015



June 2014



December 2013

You can read past issues of this journal on the AFG Inc website. Go to <https://www.feldenkrais.org.au/resources>. ■





## AND IT'S GOODBYE FROM ME

*By Ralph A Hadden*

I took on the position of editor in 2012 and have produced 8 issues of *Feldenkrais Australia*. I am now ready to step down and, I hope, pass on the role to another (or others).

I have enjoyed editing and feel proud of what I have achieved. In particular I made the change from paper to digital and to having each issue laid out by professional desktop publishers (The Wizarts - thank you Daphne Lim). This has meant that the journal could have an attractive look, in colour, with appealing photos and illustrations; a good advertisement for our profession. Going digital has also saved on the labour and expense of mailing out hard copy (though a paper version is still made available to some members).

I have also supported making the journal openly available on the AFG Inc website so that anyone can read it. In this way we raise the visibility of our profession, spread information and promote discussion of our work. It also encourages more visitors to the AFG Inc website.

Thank you to the AFG Inc national committee for allowing me to get away with it for all these years; thank you to secretariats Leith Kinross and Liz Carey for admin support; thank you to all the contributors. And most of all, my thanks to you, the reader.

Oh and also thank you to the advertisers. Thanks in particular to Sherry and Jacquie Ogg of Micro Moves who have consistently supported the journal by buying advertising space in every issue since June 2014. Pay a visit their website to express your appreciation. ■

# NEXT ISSUE



## NEXT ISSUE

*By Ralph A Hadden*

The position of editor is now vacant and the next step will be the AFG national committee reviewing the position and (I suppose) inviting applications. I look forward to handing over to a new editor or editors and will be happy to give support and advice in the transition. The next issue will be due in 2019 and, as usual, your contributions are invited. We welcome feature articles and discussions. Also welcome:

- Book reviews
- Reports on workshops and Advanced Trainings
- Case histories
- Stories
- Descriptions of ATMs and Fls
- Recommended reading, listening, viewing
- Links to videos, podcasts and other web resources
- Images- photos, illustrations, diagrams, cartoons
- Comments on previous issues

For a handy guide and form for submitting articles and reports, follow this link: <http://jotform.com/form/40381389362862>

Email contributions, comments, feedback, suggestions to [nationalnewsletter@feldenkrais.org.au](mailto:nationalnewsletter@feldenkrais.org.au) or post a comment on the Feldenkrais Australia Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/FeldenkraisAustralia/>

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**Australian Feldenkrais Guild Inc.**

PO Box 285

Ashfield NSW 1800

[afg@feldenkrais.org.au](mailto:afg@feldenkrais.org.au)

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