

Envisaging the Future of the Feldenkrais Method
(How close are we to Moshe's vision of Our Profession?)
By Yochanan Rywerant

The future of the Feldenkrais Method lies not only in aiming at a steadily increasing number of practitioners, but also in increasing actively the quality of those practitioners. Moshe Feldenkrais himself has been very keen in asserting that his Method is not to be considered another kind of physiotherapy or movement training. He was ridiculing the opinion of some people that considered his system as a kind of "body - work." He strongly believed that people can learn to have better control over their actions, and hence be healthier. It had to start with clarifying certain ways the brain perceives and acts and seeing the movements of the body as expressing processes within the central nervous system (CNS).

I would like to point out a few areas by which one could in reality follow a possible process of increasing quality. One is to consider the complexity of the ways one may use to adapt oneself as a practitioner to the conditions at hand, as they present themselves while doing an FI or while leading an ATM.

One can distinguish in this context three areas of complexity. First, there is the complexity, or variability of the client's bodily structure, as well as his or her habitual ways of acting or of responding to stimuli. The practitioner's adaptation to this enormous multitude of possibilities makes it already interesting. Take, for example, the distinction between a person's habits and his or her non-habitual actions, just to see how different people could be in this respect.

Second, there is the complexity of the practitioner's doings. Usually, those are either verbal or non-verbal questions ("How about this?" "Do you sense that?") or proposals presented to the client, so that he or she might act, as well as perceive proprioceptive stimuli, perhaps differently from the habitual way.

Finally, there is the complexity of the ways the client might react to these questions or proposals. Accepting them or not or perhaps being indifferent to them. Accepting could mean either tolerating it, or allowing it to happen, and perhaps having an insight that this could be a useful pattern not considered before, or a new adaptation to some difficulty. Non-acceptance could present itself in several degrees, usually with some increased muscular tension, as part of a defensive pattern, all this could relate to ATM, as well as to FI.

The mastering of this threefold complexity means that the practitioner considers, with even the smallest unit of his or her acting, three issues: (a) the client's structural specifics and his habitual ways to perceive and to act, (b) the choice of the question-proposal and (c) the client's reaction. With this a two-way communication between a client and practitioner is achieved, in the true Feldenkrais style.

There seem to be several additional activities that could lead towards a heightened quality of a professional practitioner: participation in advanced trainings; a basic autodidactic attitude for increasing knowledge in such areas as physiology, neurophysiology, and the like; practical experience; and last but not least, a creative, inventive attitude towards the Method's applications.

There are quite a number of ideas, theoretical and practical, that are part of the Feldenkrais legacy, of which many people are not even aware. After all, everyone has a tendency of taking a new idea, or a set of ideas, and categorizing it, putting it, so to speak, in a drawer. We all have in our mind "drawers" labelled with categories already known, and we might say, "This reminds me very much of that. . ." "This is similar to what I know already. . ." "Actually, we could call this so and so. . ." The difficulty arises when it is not so easy to categorize the new idea. What happens then is, either we grasp the new idea as something distinct from the "usual" and remember it as such, or going with a diminished perspicacity-or laziness, if you like-of our mind, we consider the "new" part of the idea less important, perhaps less understood, and ultimately we discard it altogether. Lastly we leave this new idea embedded in a drawer where it hardly belongs.

The latter shouldn't happen with the idea of the Feldenkrais Method. Some of these "drawers" are still out there in the minds of some people: Movement Classes, Movement Therapy, another kind of Physiotherapy, etc. The Feldenkrais Method is, after all, a category in itself.

Speaking of the Method's application (and we can consider both approaches, ATM or FI), the practitioner starts with a tentative plan, namely, he selects the particular way of functioning he is going to address. Having decided on one particular action or way of presenting a change, all depends now on the client's response, or rather on the reaction of that subsystem of the client's CNS that deals with self-defence. This reaction could be nonverbal, and express either "Accepted," or perhaps, "No, this is not my way," "This hurts." The practitioner has now several options to consider. He could, for example, modify one of the parameters, just in case, so that the tendency for self-defence residing with the client might be calmed down and

the proposed pattern be accepted. For example, if it is about moving a part of the body, the parameters apt for modification are: a change of direction, the amount of displacement velocity and amount of force used,

Good sensory ways of ascertaining whether a proposed change is accepted or not are a very welcome property. Asking verbal about this might be appropriate only after the client has already perceived the pattern by way of the senses and recognized it as different; or in other words when it is cortically controlled.

All that activity means that we are implementing certain thoughts and ideas or "principles." if you so will. One such idea is that after looking for the acceptance of a way of functioning, different perhaps from the habitual, we might know better how to ask the next question, or make the next proposal. In other words, the sequence of proposals follows the sequence of what the client has accepted already. Then we provide the insight that actually there is an enlargement of the freedom of choice, and no insistence on avoiding the former way of functioning.

Another idea is to make use of any circumstance that could facilitate the client's acceptance of the proposed changes, while taking into account that the possible resistances might not be intentional. A few examples should suffice: clarifying the image that precedes an intentional action, clarifying the sensory feedback that comes as a result of the action, clarifying the involvement of the proximal body parts, dealing with established defensive patterns and perhaps avoiding them, making use of particular ways of functioning inherent in the brain. Here are a few examples of the latter: the function of the skeleton in the field of gravity, the tendency to equalize the intensity of the neurons' "firing," the functional linkage of antagonistic pairs of muscles, and, more generally, the hierarchical organization of the brain's functions in terms of control of action and perception.

Considering all the foregoing, it becomes clear, for example, that looking for "procedures" or for sequences of movements for the client, supposedly appropriate to the different situations or "problems" presenting them selves, might not be good enough. Moreover, it wouldn't matter whether that particular memorized sequence of movements follows some model as it has been done by a trainer, for example, or a colleague, before; or it is something the practitioner has experienced as efficient in some other situation, or with another client.

Since sequences of "movements" are supposed to follow the sequence of acceptance, they are not repeatable in some stereotyped way, precisely

because the client's reasons for accepting, or perhaps not accepting, each step of the sequence are so manifold. A similar reason comes with the multitude of options we have in choosing alternative proposals. On the other hand, it is probably helpful to have in mind a schematic outline of some patterns, while considering that various practical applications of a certain schematic pattern might vary considerably in their details. We would rather not be imitators of movements, but would prefer to be appliers of principles.

Yochanan Rywerant has recently published a book specifically for Feldenkrais practitioners where he further explores the ideas expressed in this article. In the book, entitled *Acquiring the Feldenkrais Profession*, Yochanan takes the basic principles and clearly discusses each one.

This article was published in The Feldenkrais Journal NO. 15 Winter 2003 and is published here with the consent by Yochanan Rywerant. All rights reserved.

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In 1952 Yochanan joined the ATM lessons given by Feldenkrais in Tel Aviv and continued to participate in them once a week for fifteen years. Yochanan was one of the participants in the first Professional Training given by Moshe Feldenkrais, starting in 1969. For fifteen years, from 1970, Yochanan worked in the same room with Feldenkrais as his assistant at the Feldenkrais Institute in Tel Aviv. He was also one of the invited assistants at the Trainings given by Moshe in San Francisco CA and Amherst MA. Since then, he has worked extensively as trainer in Professional Trainings in the USA, Canada, Europe and Israel. He conducted his own trainings in Sweden 1987 – 1993 and is still training in Tel Aviv and Zurich. His book "The Feldenkrais Method, Teaching by Handling" appeared in English in 1983, and has been translated into German, Spanish, Italian and Hebrew. His second book, *Acquiring the Feldenkrais Method* was published in 2000 and has been translated into German.