

# Body and Mature Behavior

Moshe Feldenkrais

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Foreword of Robert Schleip for the German edition:

It is 1943/ 44, in the middle of the second world war. In a remote part of Scotland the British government has hidden a small circle of scientists away who are considered as especially valuable to them. They are all without exception the best in their field and come from all possible areas. Amongst them is Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais. He has just had quite an adventurous journey getting here, having landed recently in England via boat from France, with two highly controversial suitcases in his hands. Content of those suitcases: the collected technical information of the first French nuclear fission experiments on which he had worked together with Joliot-Curie in Paris.

Since there is a great lack of research possibilities and just about no materials at this remote location in Scotland, the scientists spent part of their time by debating with each other in the form of evening lectures. These scientific lectures are usually followed by open discussions. The topics discussed vary considerably. Not all of the speakers know how to fascinate their audiences, and sometimes it happens, that listeners fall asleep. However there are also those speakers who stimulate everybody and are very much in demand.

One such speaker causes some considerable excitement with his lectures. His lectures become more and more popular, leading each time to inspired and heated discussions. He believes he has found a new way to stimulate the human brain and help with its evolution. His proposed method of getting there appears as almost ridiculous: simple, easy and slow floor exercises. He is able, however, to back up this controversial system with convincing neurological proof. His underlying theory and lectures cover such different areas as: human learning, gravitation, anxiety, human sexuality, the special role of the human balance-organ, and a new concept of human maturity. Not all his concepts are readily accepted by every scientist present, but they are met with great interest and a sense of excitement.

But who is this lecturer who finally gets part of the audience to regularly roll around on judo mats in the nearby school-building? It is of course the all round genius from Paris, Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais. A sort of adventurer with a sharp creative mind, and a man with a colorful background. Already as a 14 year old boy he had left the home of his Jewish parents in Russia to help in the building of Palestine. Later in Paris, he worked with the Nobel price laureate Joliot-Curie on nuclear-physics. Here he also earned - as the first Westerner ever - a black-belt in judo. There he also set up - on the request of the judo-founder Jigoro Kano - the very first judo-club outside of Japan. Moshe Feldenkrais' first published books dealt with martial-arts, self-defense, and the work of the French hypnotist Emile Coue. Besides the two hot suitcases which he had carried with him on the boat from France, Feldenkrais had obviously also brought some different hot mental material with him to the United Kingdom.

After this time in Scotland, where he helped the British army in its counter-espionage against Germany, he left to become chief of the electronics-department of the Israeli Ministry of Defense. The movement and brain gymnastics exercises, which he later called "Awareness through Movement" were presented for the first time in those lectures in the little village in Scotland. Later on he would teach them at leading universities in North America, Israel, at the Sorbonne in Paris, and other places in Europe. Brilliant figures like Moshe Dajan, Margaret Mead, Ben Gurion, Charles Pribram and Yehudi Menuhin would become some of his most enthusiastic pupils.

The book presented here is based on the manuscript of those lectures held in Scotland, in which Moshe Feldenkrais – than just 40 years old - presented the basic ideas of his method for the first time, and which were so exciting, provocative, and animating to many of his colleagues. Let me give you - dear reader - just a little appetizer for reading these lectures: watch out for these lectures are mental dynamite, they are profound stuff! These pages are written to stimulate your brain. They are packed with information and often with dense flashes of inspiration. The academically inexperienced reader might first feel overwhelmed by some of the scientifically more elaborate chapters. If that happens, you might prefer to turn directly to some of the more easily readable chapters - for instance those about sexuality, learning or emotions - and return then later to the other chapters. Yet my suggestion is that it is worth to read them all. You will find in these lectures inspiring ideas which later on became the ignition for many groundbreaking ventures; not only for those around Moshe Feldenkrais, but also many other people.

One practical realization of the early ideas of this book is what is known today as 'the Feldenkrais Method' world wide. This method comes in two modalities. First there are the group-sessions, called 'Awareness through Movement'. These are verbally guided movement explorations, mostly on the ground, yet also sometimes in sitting, standing, or walking. Then there is the one-on-one application, known as 'Functional Integration' in which the student is treated or taught on a knee-high treatment-table with gentle manipulations by a qualified 'Feldenkrais Practitioner'.

Readers familiar with the Feldenkrais Method will find in this book many of the basic ideas, which were realized later in the practical work of the Feldenkrais Method and also in his best-selling books (e.g. "Awareness through Movement, or "The Case of Nora - Adventures in the Jungle of the Brain"). A not yet so familiar reader will get an extensive and profound introduction into the theoretical foundation of this work.

The reader should please note that the lectures reprinted here were based on the top level of science ... in the forties. Many ideas then regarded as 'state of the art' have meanwhile either been modified or proven wrong. For example the attempt to understand the nervous system as a mostly electric entity has since been changed. Today the dynamics of the brain are rather explored on a molecular-biological basis, in which "wet" regulatory processes are seen at least as important as the 'dry' electrical wiring. When Feldenkrais was giving these lectures the explanation for most of the neurological questions primarily were placed around the electro-physiological processes of the nerve cells, and the nervous system was somehow seen like a huge, centralized telephone operator cable network of that time. Today the attention is directed more and more towards the complex dynamics around the wet synapses and the interaction of small liquid (and gaseous) neuropeptides in the body.

Back in the forties - still fascinated by the so-called industrial age - the brain was thought of as a rather passive mechanism responding primarily to outside-impulses. Today it is seen rather as a permanently active, self regulatory organism which is primarily occupied with itself. Yet this very idea of the brain as a constantly active and creative organism - nowadays often proclaimed as a revolution in our understanding - appears already in these early lectures, revealing Feldenkrais' role as a brilliant pioneer.

Nevertheless there are also aspects of the book, for example his description of "fatigue", which are primarily influenced by the idea of electric current conduction in the brain which were dominant at that time. Today these ideas are now obsolete. Another example where time has not stood still is for instance in the field of comparative behavioral studies where the process of early 'imprinting' is now seen as an intimate cooperation between inherited reflexes and learned behavior. Feldenkrais however saw little connection between the two and claimed a sharp distinction between genetic reflexes on one side and freely learned behavior on the other side - as a clear cut difference between animals and man.

Therefore I as editor of this new edition have updated some comments and organized them in footnotes in an appendix. While revising this important book, which is now finally been published in Germany, it was my intention to keep the translation as close as possible to the original. I have tried not to put anything into the author's mouth, which he didn't say, but which might be "right" from today's point of view. Instead the reader finds in the appendix three types of footnotes:

- *corrective ones* (with hint on how the particular content is seen differently today),
- *explanatory ones* (which are commenting and clarifying),
- *and also affirmative ones* (if e.g. a thought then expressed by Moshe Feldenkrais, today has already evolved into a sound scientific concept).

For the clarification of some scientific questions I have consulted several experts from different fields. I would like to thank especially the neurophysiologist Dr. Maria E. Moneta (Chile) and the neurobiologist Manuel Palitzsch (Munich) for their cooperation. A big thanks also to the Feldenkrais trainers Garet Newell (London) and Edward Dwelle (Munich) for their valuable support.

Who ever has kept in touch with the breath taking developments in the life-sciences (biology, medicine, anthropology, etc.) might think that the substance of these lectures given back in the forties, would cause experts today to only shake their heads. Surprisingly this is however not the case. Part of the explanation for this lies in the fact that Moshe Feldenkrais was a true pioneer. He discovered early on many trails, which later on became well established highways. Several of his thoughts represented in this book, were later on taken up, and put into action by others.

A main part of those ideas has been utilized by himself in what became later known as the Feldenkrais method. However it seems to me that the next forty years of his life following these lectures were too short a time to allow Feldenkrais to put all those creative insights into action. While studying this book thoroughly I realized that not only can one find the original seeds for his later work in those lectures, but one can also find several other germs in them which have not yet been applied into work. This would have taken him probably a few more lifes to realize them all. Today many of

his thoughts which are presented in this book have found resonance in the daily practice of a Feldenkrais Practitioner; yet you will also find plenty of other brilliant suggestions in the lectures, which have not been put into practice yet

So it is my biggest hope - and I consider this to be quite possible -, that the republication of this book will animate one or the other reader, to unlock some these powerful germs and to develop them fruitfully ; whether that be either as a new educational learning concept, or in the development of new toys and tools to stimulate the vestibular balance organs, a new therapy for sexual disturbances or anxiety attacks, a self defense method for women, a specific application in the field of geriatric, or in a better way of handling infants.

Finally let me tell you an anecdote related to all this, which I first heard from Franz Wurm, the editor of the first German Feldenkrais books: The great Russian neurophysiologist Luria had sent a telegram to leading brain surgeons in New York, in which he proposed a new surgical procedure, which was based on his newest findings. He suggested to remove a smaller than usual part of the brain in the standard lobotomy operation in heavy cases of epilepsy. This telegram resulted in a meeting of several leading neuroscientists to discuss this idea, amongst them was the well known neurophysiologist from Stanford University, Charles Pribram (who had been nominated for the Nobel prize for his concept of a 'holographic brain'). As Luria´s suggested intervention was being discussed, Pribram was suddenly struck by an idea. He saw how and why this intervention would not at all be necessary, and how it was possible to achieve exactly the same outcome completely non-invasively. For the explanation he briefly left the room and then returned with a book in his hand, from which a specific passage had given him the inspiration. The book was 'Body and Mature Behavior', the book you have in your hands right now.

No matter - dear reader - if you are a brain-surgeon, clown, body-therapist, midwife, teacher, or dancer, or if you just simply like to conduct your own "non-invasive brain-surgery" on yourself once a while, I am sure that this book can give you several powerful and creative impulses. In spite of my own obvious excitement for this book, I will nevertheless not be provoked into claiming that "this book will change your life!" - ...yet I cannot exclude this nice possibility either.

Robert Schleip, Munich, 1994

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