

# FELDENKRAIS AUSTRALIA

Journal of the Australian Feldenkrais Guild Inc.

2021



**THE GROUND WITHIN  
A LESSON IN RESILIENCE  
ACKNOWLEDGING COUNTRY  
FROM THE GROUND WE CAME**





# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

By Shona Lee

Ground proved to be a very fertile theme for this edition of the AFG Journal....

The layers to Ground that our authors explore in this publication include:

Ground being dependable, a lesson in resilience; what it means to stand one's ground and the resonance it brings to your voice (quite literally, not only as a metaphor). The ground being key for skeletal organization; along with the mind-boggling realization that the so-called 'solidity' of the ground, is actually in constant motion, as we spin through the solar system. Personal practices of connecting with the physical ground of earth, outdoors in nature; how we come from the ground and that Ground can also be found within.

Understanding the importance of ground was a profound turning point in my Functional Integration skillset as a new practitioner. Of course, this key

concept had been emphasized all along, but you *hear* it when it's meaning is ready to be meaningful to you.....! For me this came whilst attending a workshop on working with children with special needs; the exercise was to *bring* the ground or *give* ground, that was it, so simple. And boom goes the epiphany - all we have to do is give ground and the nervous system has what it needs to recalibrate / unwind! Obviously an oversimplification, you start with ground and expand the learning from there, but such a super solid, absolutely essential place to start...

We end this edition on Ground with an Acknowledgement of Country – sharing different forms it could take, for how we might incorporate this dimension of what Ground/Country means into our classes / workshops. Normally this would come at the beginning, however I wanted it to be last thing that was remembered. A bit upside down perhaps, but so is Terra Australis –on a world map! With firm ground beneath you, you have the liberty to be playful.

## THE EDITOR

*Shona Lee (SEAUS1, 2018) practices in Sydney – [www.movingintune.com](http://www.movingintune.com)  
One of Shona's greatest joys is discovering NEW ground. It's only relatively recently that she has come to appreciate the value of consolidating on ground for foundational integrity; in the ongoing ventures of life, growth and the people we come in contact with.*

## ABOUT FELDENKRAIS AUSTRALIA

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The theme for our 2022 issue is 'Image in Action' – contributions are invited.

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# FEATURE : ON THE GROUND



## THE GROUND WITHIN

*By Simon Slieker*

*Simon Slieker (SEAUS1, 2018) is a Feldenkrais Practitioner living and practicing on the Great Ocean*

*Road in Lavers Hill in Victoria's Otway Ranges.*

### **Ground as metaphor**

One term that enjoys growing contemporary currency is 'groundedness'. The quality of being grounded. To be regarded as grounded is universally seen as a positive thing. To be grounded is associated with being steadfast, solid, reliable, dependable. Conversely the flighty, untethered, disorganised character may well be regarded as ungrounded and almost as universally, seen in a negative light.

Is the ground a metaphor; and for what? Am I at ease on the ground, are my feet on the ground; am I firmly connected to reality? Could my 'groundedness' just as easily suggest I am obstinate or implacable?

I have been deeply immersed in these questions whilst developing a series of workshops whose very essence is the exploration of 'finding ground'. So when I saw the theme for this journal, the journal became the perfect 'penny' for my thoughts.



### **How else can 'groundedness' be expressed?**

In a spiritual sense being grounded may denote having balance between metaphysical ideals and day to day practicalities. Intellectual 'groundedness' conjures notions of balance between mind and body. In an emotional sense being grounded suggests a degree of stability in mood or ability to return to equilibrium on a changing emotional spectrum. In the physical sense 'groundedness' conveys the ease with which one feels the ground, responds to it, and finds the means to use it both as spring and support. And it is this capacity I am interested in, as I believe physical or more accurately

kinaesthetic 'groundedness' is easily trained and readily expandable.

The kinaesthetic experience of 'groundedness' can spread to and benefit the emotional, thinking and sensing centres of the self. Sound familiar? Yes, exactly in the way Feldenkrais suggested that improving the movement competence of an individual would carry through to these other realms, so too will an intrinsic sense of ground transfer.

For it is the kinaesthetic, the physical, that is measurable by our somatic experience and fathomable in the immediate. Thus improving a sense of ground in the physical, which is to say in your body, in your experience of yourself, creates a simple solidity that spreads through all aspects of your wider being.

### **Ground and the Feldenkrais Method**

In training to become a Feldenkrais Practitioner one of the first and most important things I was taught was to sense my own connection to ground. This comes before we even begin to touch another person. I'm sure all Practitioners reading this would have had the same experience. So central is it that much of our work is infused with it. It almost becomes invisible. I remember

my Educational Director Julie Peck recounting that the big difference between a Feldenkrais Practitioner and other modalities is the quality of touch one can expect from the former. I suggest that the quality of that touch (enquiring, receptive, light, incisive, responsive, inquisitive, curious) is afforded by the learnt connection to the ground from which the practitioner extends. In some ways the touch of the practitioner is an extension of the ground for the student. The student can feel 'ground' in parts of themselves that are new. Thus for a Feldenkrais Practitioner to be 'grounded', in the most literal sense, is vital.

In my work with clients I have experienced repeatedly that when a student gets a clear sense of ground a host of benefits follow. I see length, strength, stability, softness and trust suffuse the person. It is nothing short of profound. I have seen this when working with feet in lying, sitting, standing and walking, in exploring shifting weight through sit bones in sitting, in tilting the pelvis in sitting and lying. In fact it now seems too reductive to limit it to that. For 'getting' a sense of ground can happen in any position through any part of oneself. And 'getting it' seems to enable a consequent sense of safety and even 'trust'.

### **How to trust the ground when the ground is bucking under our feet**

We live in deeply troubling times where the notion of 'safe ground' is shifting and changing. Finding a sense of safety on the ground needs to begin with our capacity to adjust to the changing ground of our times. Being well grounded can at once enhance our sense of touch and enhance our capacity to trust.

'Trust' in ground. What an interesting idea. If we are able to trust the ground we can make small intangible adjustments in ourselves in response to the ground that in turn create a sense of trust in ourselves. If we can trust the ground we can begin to trust in our response to the ground. The better we are able to do that, the more adept, swift, light and sure we can be in our physical experience. But it's a circular relationship. What comes first the trust in ourselves or trust in the ground?

We are in a very strange position at this point in our history. The ground as a steadfast, solid and unwavering support is currently shifting beneath us. The world is a changing and unsure place. There are all kinds of environmental calamities afoot (sic) and on a deeply existential level we may very well be questioning where to place our next step.

**Provocation: Where do we place our next step?**

*The age of Anthropocene, the age defined by human impact could be the age that ends us. The predictions are ever more dire and with ever more consensus. We live amidst tipping points teetering around us like gigantic existential plates spinning on sticks. And everywhere the noise is deafening and unceasing. We race against time, competing needs and an insatiable demand for our attention.*

*In this tension our senses are heightened and we are frightened, we protect ourselves with distraction and downtime but are never far from the clamour and roar. We are on high alert and constantly alerted by a tsunami of notifications. We are more connected than ever and simultaneously more alone. We live in a paradox. This is the eco-crisis in which we find ourselves. If ever there was a time for us to re-connect to the ground beneath our feet, it is now.*

This is the provocation I lead with in my latest Eco-somatica offering. Eco-somatica is a workshop that draws on sound, rhythm, somatic process,

Awareness Through Movement and Feldenkrais concepts to tend to hearts, minds and bodies in climate crisis overwhelm. Following is a simple somatic exploration to reacquire the participant with the ground; to encourage a shift in perspective from 'ground' as something alien that acts upon 'me' to something I am in relationship with, and finally to something found within. In simple terms making tangible the leap from ground as 'other' to ground as 'self'. It is the ground found deeply within that we can trust the most.



**Exploration: Connection to Ground**

*The ground is a kinaesthetic mirror. It mirrors how we connect. Our physical response to the ground is a reflection of how we move within ourselves to respond and adapt to the world around us and the earth beneath our feet.*

- Our connection to the ground is what gives a sense of 'groundedness'.
- This connection is what grants us freedom to move.
- The more 'grounded' we are, the more liberated from the ground we become.
- The less grounded we are the more threatening the ground.
- That which supports us also threatens to break us and the more threatened we are the more rigid we become.
- This is not limited to our bodies and movement it extends to our thinking - our perceiving and our very way of being.
- So, let's explore this relationship so that you and the body of ground you walk on, might get a little closer; because that body is the way into your own.
- Take off your shoes and venture to some ground that verges on treacherous. Perhaps it is gravel, or grass with prickles, mulch that may have broken twigs, uneven or broken ground. Something that brings up the fear of 'otherness' of the environment.
- Walk slowly upon this surface.



*Notice in yourself:*

- *How do you accommodate the walk in your whole self?*
- *What parts of yourself are rigid, prepared for shock, pre-emptive recoil: what does this afford or close down in the fluidity of your motion?*

When the ground is felt through the lens of fear, the bodily experience is one of self-preservation. If the environment is not safe, then naturally you must ensure your safety by taking protective measures.

- *Now stop and imagine. What if you knew the surface would not hurt you...? What if it would accommodate your comfort and your safety, how would you walk upon it then? Imagine this in yourself.*

*Now find a section of lush grass, benign ground, or some kind of safe surface like a carpet or a rug. Walk once more.*

- *How do you accommodate the walk in your whole self?*
- *Can you feel from your feet through to your head a softness, a willingness, a 'give'? How does that feeling transform your walk?*
- *Is it easier to relinquish the holding patterns, the protective muscular response?*

When the possibility of shock, pain, surprise is removed, we are more able to be in trust. Trust affords responsiveness, flow, smoothness, ease.

- Now flip it. Instead of asking the environment to prove itself so you can find trust, what if the trust came from your own sense of knowing you can adjust to the changeability, the unknown in the environment, the uneven ground.
- Walk on the uncomfortable, threatening surface again and notice how you are in yourself from feet through to head.
- The more you are able to inhabit your capacity to respond with sensitivity, immediacy, softness, yielding and flowing, the more ease can be found; the 'groundedness' shifts within. Trust is located within yourself. The ground is met and felt for what it is. You are not in opposition, you are in relationship and the conversation follows the myriad contours and trajectories of a wild and unknown surface.

The degree to which you trust yourself is the degree to which you can trust the ground. Your softness is felt by the ground which becomes you.

### The ground within

If we feel a connection to ground, we are able to soften. Our contact is more sensitive and our touch lighter. We know when we touch down and we are quick to adjust. Once we find this softness in our touch our central nervous system will spread it throughout ourselves. Our perspective shifts as we begin not only to 'feel' the ground but to be 'felt' by the ground. This is the state of unravelling where the foundation of ground is found within.



**Eco-Somatica - Finding Ground** will be showcased at the Sydney Opera House, Centre for Creativity in summer 2022. [www.simonslieker.com](http://www.simonslieker.com) ■



## EMBODIED MOVEMENT & FELDENKRAIS AS A WAY OF ARTICULATING A SOMATIC PRACTICE

*By Robyn Phelan*

An adolescent passion and ability for elite competitive basketball has left my adult knees minus anterior cruciate ligaments with a few millimetres of cartilage plus busted finger joints. To add insult to physical injury, my immune system has decided that my joints are an aggressive enemy to be attacked. A diagnosis of Rheumatoid Arthritis confirmed that my pain levels and tiredness were not female hysteria nor menopausal paranoia. Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease that causes pain and swelling of the joints. Our body's immune system exists to fight off infections. Having an autoimmune disease such as RA, means that my immune system is confused in its role of protector and targets the lining of my joints, causing inflammation and joint damage. My particular RA affects hands and feet. Interestingly, or cruelly, these are the parts of my body most required for an art practice that works with clay and responds to working across different sites. A weekly dose of chemicals knocks out my immune system saving my joints from further destruction. To manage RA and my longstanding injuries, a daily commitment to gentle,

mindful exercise has saved not only my mental health but it has empowered my body's ability to sense itself in space. This routine has become a conduit to my somatic practice of embodied art making.

*Imagine you have nothing better to do in this day other than experience this moment.*

*Ingrid Weisfelt, Feldenkrais teacher*

The opening quote from a class recorded by my Feldenkrais teacher and dear friend Ingrid Weisfelt.

I began Feldenkrais lessons at Ingrid's concerned encouragement and under her direct tutelage to manage my Rheumatoid Arthritis once medication had stabilised the condition. The Feldenkrais Method is a universal method for improving human life through better movement, sensation, posture and breathing. As an exercise therapy it was devised by Israeli Moshé Feldenkrais, (1904–1984) during the mid-20th century. Neuroplasticity, the ability of the brain to reorganise synaptic connections after injury, is central to the

effectiveness of the Feldenkrais Method. Trained practitioners use touch, movement, guided imagery and mindful body awareness to stimulate the brain to make useful and lasting improvements to movement and posture. Ingrid began this training after suffering her own injury when she was an international dancer with Meryl Tankard's Australian Dance Theatre and Tanztheater Basel. Feldenkrais is used by performing and creative artists by making, 'small and subtle changes in movement habits that make a big difference to your confidence, quality and safety in performance and repetitive actions.'

[Feldenkrais ref: <https://www.feldenkrais.org.au/the-feldenkrais-method> & <https://www.feldenkrais.org.au/feldenkrais-for-performers>]

When listening to one of Ingrid's pre-recorded lessons, it was her voice, her gentle persuading and importantly her specific instructions that informed how my body could heal itself by finding new ways of sensing, feeling around and through arthritic pain and injury. During the intense focus of one particular session, it occurred to me that Ingrid's mode of instruction, her choice of words, articulate how I approach my ceramic practice. In the mindful state of a session, I find myself drifting and dreaming, imaging and planning possible



## EMBODIED MOVEMENT & FELDENKRAIS AS A WAY OF ARTICULATING A SOMATIC PRACTICE *By Robyn Phelan*

art projects. Ingrid's voice would soon pull me back into my body and through my breath.

A necessary shift in practice was required during the Covid-19 pandemic and especially into Melbourne's second lockdown, where our movements were restricted to a five-kilometre radius from our home and no more than one hour of outside recreation per day. This pandemic winter brought a deeper attention to my immediate surrounding as repetitive visits to local parks occurred over the many, many months. On these walks I applied the instructional affirmations of Ingrid's lessons to a new body of ceramic work.



To quote from Ingrid's instructions, '...be curious about what happens... to do whatever you need to find the possibility'. My tacit approach to material and site is an embodied movement flowing in and out of what I feel, sense, think and do. This interior process or flow of decision making is subtle, fleeting and perhaps beyond written language. And yet, in Ingrid's instructions, I find a clarity of language and direction that corresponds with how my consciousness responds to the activity of making. I wondered hesitantly if I could quote and apply her words to a creative writing piece. She was curious and delightedly gave her permission to do so. Following this preface is the resulting creative

writing piece. I directly transcribed a lesson of Ingrid's recorded live in Melbourne in 2019, capturing the key terms that relate to how my practice unfolds in my imagination. This piece articulates how a tacit art practice responds to a deep understanding of my body, an intimate attention to site, and my skill and material awareness of clay. Alongside Ingrid's words I have intersected my field notes written after collecting clay impressions through compression from a Black Wattle tree in Royal Park Melbourne for use as source material for sculptural work in July 2020.

*Robyn*



*Ingrid*

Robyn is an extraordinary ceramicist, educator, explorer and discoverer. Throughout the time I have known her she has weathered events that have caused her much physical and emotional pain, and that have threatened a diminished experience of life, love and creative expression. As clouds darkened familiar pathways, Robyn went searching and found cracks of light. Then with an incredible amount of self-compassion, wisdom, and insight, she turned these cracks into rays of warmth, creativity and possibility. Like the trees she draws inspiration from, she found the ground beneath her, sending deep roots to receive back nourishment, support and new growth for her creative practice. It's been an absolute pleasure walking alongside her in her artistic journey and a constant reminder of the beauty, simplicity and profound impact that a practice in the Feldenkrais Method can have.

Imagine you have nothing better to do in this day other than experience this moment

*my bike skims across the hard and impervious streets  
contained within the five-kilometre radius of the inner city  
bitumen, concrete, bluestone, and tram lines  
I have no physical connection with this land, my early morning immersion is all atmospheric and cerebral  
a bracing breeze stings  
the tip of my nose and fingertips  
winter is brisk, icy, scent-less  
like opening a freezer door  
no mask for bike riding, no-one has breathed this air  
recently  
my breath is getting deeper and heavier now  
my heart beats in syncopation with the pedestrian crossing alarm as I cross into  
Royal Park  
immediately I smell the scent of eucalyptus  
I hear lorikeets  
and scan for Black Wattle*

you have this time  
where you can start to explore for yourself  
your own body and your own movement  
in your own way  
there is no expectation  
there is no right or wrong  
you are seeking light, easy, soft movement,  
smooth connected movement through your whole body  
in your way



## EMBODIED MOVEMENT & FELDENKRAIS AS A WAY OF ARTICULATING A SOMATIC PRACTICE *By Robyn Phelan*

*I am now on foot, walking, scanning for the feathery fronds that indicate Black Wattle  
looking for the lime green pods that are yet to burst into bloom*

as you are quietly sensing and feeling through your body  
bring your attention to how your breath feels inside your body  
perhaps you can sense a slight shift, a rise, a fall, an opening, a closing

*standing quiet  
I connect to the ground through my feet  
acknowledge this place, sovereign land, Wurundjeri land  
use soft eyes and deep attention to see and sense what the engagement will be at this time  
use soft eyes to caress leaf tips, filigree twigs, sweeping branches, robust trunk, and buried root  
the place I will work with is found  
unpack prepared coils of clay*

notice what happens if?  
how does the weight shift?  
if you move one part of you, how does the rest of you respond?  
pause for a moment

*white porcelain, perfectly plastic and malleable  
cold and damp yet willing to respond to my hand movements  
compress a piece of clay into a form that can be received by the tree*

play around a little bit  
how can you do this movement differently?  
allow  
how does this change your contact with?  
flatten



## EMBODIED MOVEMENT & FELDENKRAIS AS A WAY OF ARTICULATING A SOMATIC PRACTICE *By Robyn Phelan*

*place the clay onto the tree that calls my attention  
here is a knot, a piece of bark, and growth lines  
hold my left palm flat against the clay surface  
tap fingertips to flatten clay against the tree body*

and then keep still  
what do you need to do to the centre of yourself?

*is this flattening enough to secure, even momentarily, the clay to the tree?*

rest for a moment  
notice what impact this has had on

*the body of the tree  
the porcelain clay has become as one with the branch  
the white material alludes to a bandage  
has there been an injury?*

*no  
care and attention has been paid to this application*

continue with same exploration  
start to play a little bit with all the different ways you can manipulate or change  
while keeping the same movement  
roll, lift, feel what you need to do



*consider the correspondence between my body and the branch surface  
use knuckles to press along the clay length  
watch how the clay spreads and reaches away from this compressive action*

what impact does this have on  
softening and folding  
look for ease and softness not correctness  
it is not about the range of the movement but about the quality of the movement

*pay attention to the action and experience  
I see rhythmic indentations that tell the story of my movement across the porcelain  
these indexical marks ripple like the surface of water furrowed by wind  
does this tree ripple also  
tickled by the cold clay against its skin?*

imagine you have nothing better to do in this day other than experience this moment

*gently peel the stretched clay away from the tree surface  
peeled like a skin  
a sheath of bark in simulation*

be curious about what happens

*see the language of the tree surface collected by the clay  
it is an embossed language like a Rosetta Stone  
observe the indexical record of this compressive correspondence on both sides of the clay surface  
an intimate and gentle conversation*





## EMBODIED MOVEMENT & FELDENKRAIS AS A WAY OF ARTICULATING A SOMATIC PRACTICE *By Robyn Phelan*

rest

*take up more clay pieces  
look for another surface that calls for your attention*

do this movement many, many times  
sense your contact with  
this moment

*this time  
keep this piece on the tree  
add and accumulate more pieces of compressed clay  
along the outreaching branch*

sense what changes in your body  
how can you soften and find possibility?  
shift, fold, arch, roll, reach  
to do whatever you need to find the possibility  
keep your breath soft  
your belly soft  
work within a small range  
do less and feel more  
as you send this force

*from my feet, through my body, along my arms, into my hands and fingers  
and down and through the clay*

how does your body respond?  
how do you track this force that you are generating?  
how can you shift, move, and organise to make this a glorious, fluid, constant movement?

## EMBODIED MOVEMENT & FELDENKRAIS AS A WAY OF ARTICULATING A SOMATIC PRACTICE *By Robyn Phelan*

*my body pushes  
my hands work in small movements  
not quite a rhythm but in connection to how the clay spreads across the surface of the tree trunk*

*All my clay has been applied to two adjacent tree boughs  
like outstretched arms the tree has received and holds the clay tablets*

rest  
you are resting but your mind is scanning, sensing, feeling, noticing  
differences  
this is where all the learning is happening  
stay with this quiet and internalised focus, notice  
  
what is happening in the middle of yourself?  
is it clearer, simpler?  
is there something that your body learnt?

*I gently collect these tablets of clay  
try not to damage the intimate trace of correspondence  
pack pannier  
ride back to studio  
reengage, reimagine, reframe this experience*

*I turn to farewell the tree  
as I leave  
a trace of porcelain has remained on the branches  
dried now to pure white  
the ghostly remnants of our conversation*



You can find out more about Robyn's beautiful art at:  
<https://www.robynphelan.com.au/>

*Robyn is a ceramicist, writer, educator and PhD  
Candidate in the School of Art, RMIT University*

Ingrid's Dancers Series can be found at:  
[https://www.melbournefeldenkraisstudio.com/  
Melbourne\\_Feldenkrais\\_Studio/Home.html](https://www.melbournefeldenkraisstudio.com/Melbourne_Feldenkrais_Studio/Home.html) ■



## THE GROUND AND A LESSON IN RESILIENCE

By Melissa Maxwell

*Melissa Maxwell has been a student of the Feldenkrais Method since 2013. She has used the practice to recover, endure and thrive and looks forward to guiding others to create awareness within; graduating with the 2022 SEAUS 3 class.*

The Ground is a concept that is spoken of across many practices, from grounding in nature outside to connecting to the Earth in Yoga where you make sure all points of yourself are grounding down. For those practicing the Feldenkrais Method, it presents a new paradigm in a sense of trust in the ground beneath you and knowing it with your whole sense of self. The Feldenkrais Method introduces you to a concept that regardless of where you are in space and time and experience, the ground will always catch you. The sense of gravity is solid. Falling does not have to hurt. Your body has the intelligence to do it with grace and ease no matter the obstacle that presents itself on the paths surrounding you. This gives you a sense of resilience in an ever-changing world.

The Feldenkrais Method has been one of the greatest discoveries of my life. Like many, I found it when

nothing else had “worked”. I was living in the tropical Whitsundays, working 12 hours a day on roster in a white collar job in a blue collar world, being paid accordingly and living the same. Life was wonderful as we jetted about here and there during our time off (boosting the Aussie economy!) anywhere we could. We bounced between islands, sailed on boats and took jet ski trips to islands for lunch. It was an amazing way to live, work and mostly, play.

An acute attack of appendicitis left me in one of the worst shapes of my life. During keyhole surgery, the surgeon managed to clip a nerve and slowly the movement of the left side of my lower body became worse and worse until the use of my leg left was limited to a shuffle. The pain was enough to keep me in bed for the majority of the hours in the day. I had gone from doing everything, to doing nothing. I couldn't hold my partners hand and walk. I couldn't do the dishes without smashing glasses or bowls. My entire life ended up on its head; and not in a good way.

I had a sound knowledge of many healing practices I had studied over the years, as I found the human body an extraordinary creation in its beauty and complexity. Conventional medicine had put me on many strong

painkillers and nerve blockers. I had lost my way entirely. I felt pain all the time; felt useless and numb everywhere. I couldn't work, I couldn't play and I was mourning living.

I knew there had to be another way as this one was not working. I tried massage, I tried physio, I tried exercise physiology. I tried Bowen Therapy, I tried acupuncture and Chinese medicine; I even looked for a person who does the fish thing that is on the private health insurance ad! Anything anyone suggested or recommended I tried. Shortly into the journey I realized – I had to fix me. It wasn't up to someone else, I had to do it.

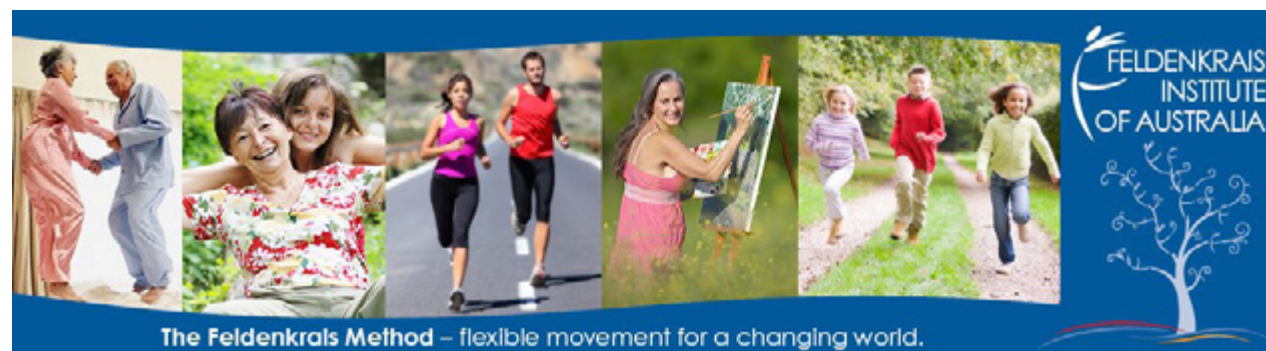
I knew I was not going to spend the rest of my life this way, but I couldn't find my path out. However I knew it had to be my path. I had to take ownership of my body and advocate for myself, as conventional medicine was not helping and all other medicines and therapies I was familiar with were also lost in translation. I was now well familiar with rock bottom - the sense that you can't get much lower than where you are now. I was blessed to have my partner beside me, supporting me, but at the same time we were so young and this life was far removed from the life



we had before. Whilst he never offered anything other than unwavering support, I knew I had to get well so we could live our life as we intended - full of life, movement and play. *Needless to say I married this man and thank my lucky stars every day for the extraordinary man, husband and father that he is.*

So began my relationship with the ground and its lesson in resilience. The ground had become scary for me. It hurt to take each step. My connection with my feet was lost in my belly or pelvis, somewhere in the middle. Nothing felt stable, everything felt like a threat. All the time. Every waking moment.

I had managed to get an appointment with a specialist Naturopath who was my last resort. I knew if he couldn't provide some guidance to make some improvement in my life I was lost. It was then that I discovered the Feldenkrais Method. I was flicking through a magazine in the waiting room and a picture piqued my interest. It was of two elderly people jumping on the bed like toddlers do. They were full of life, glee and mischief. I wanted that. It was beautiful. I had found my guidance. I wanted to be that older couple jumping on the bed, up in the air, full of glee and life and movement.



It was an advertisement for the Feldenkrais Institute. I had never heard of this method but was intrigued. So my journey began. I kept the magazine as it was a freebie; cut out the picture and began to look for where I could try it.

What I had not realised at the time is that the Feldenkrais Method and the introduction to this way of being would change my life. It would re-introduce me to the ground in a way I had not been familiar with since I was an infant. It would create trust and knowing within myself in a way I had never known as an adult. It would give me the strength to come out of my head and back into my body, when life's experience threw curveballs my way that no one should have to navigate. Not only did I learn how to be in my body again, how to live my life again, with this practice I got a life back that was better than before - I was not "cured" I was new and improved. My life outlook changed. I was more grown as a person. More whole. More aware. Everything had changed. I knew I would be a student

of this way of being for the rest of my life. The tools I have learned and what I have learned about myself is beyond measurement.

The Feldenkrais Method took me from a place with nothing to lose, to a place with everything to gain. Its explicit, gentle, simpleness expanded my perspective when I already thought I was incredibly broad minded. When I felt I had nothing, the Feldenkrais Method helped me find something. My new baseline became being aware of my strengths even when I felt I had none. Every other practice or treatment method focused on lack or deficiency. This method was different. It focused on enhancing what I could do and setting goals around what I dreamed of doing. It gave me more, invited me to live in a way I had never done before. That feeling after a one-on-one Functional Integration, when you place your feet on the floor - you can feel every fibre of your being saying hello to the ground through your feet. The stability that comes with standing when your body stacks itself above your

feet as your skeleton was designed; to hold your entire being with the littlest effort from the rest of your entire body system. Who knew we could even feel like this? At the beginning everything had changed and then over time, you look for the familiarity that comes, feeling like your feet are securely in place whilst seeming to float within each step. Truly so lovely.....

The astounding practicality of this method is that it enables you to create this 'centred-grounding-float-like-walking' for yourself; through an Awareness Through Movement Class. These classes are profound: in how you can be guided to create efficiencies and experiences within your being, that modern society instils can only be created by another in a practitioner setting.

Using this method, I got my life back, I got my movement back and I got my joy back. Moshe Feldenkrais is quoted to have said "Movement is Life, without movement life is unthinkable" a statement with so much loading that I'm not sure you can grasp the enormity of it until you get to the point where you are stuck and there is no way forward.

For me - Movement is the key, the Ground is the Door. Movement gives you the invitation to come out of

your head and back into your body, to centre yourself when life is just too much at times. This too-much-at-times can be home-schooling your kids throughout a lockdown whilst trying to work. This too-much can be watching your child, partner or parent endure cancer treatment as it threatens to take their life after every round. This too-much can be watching your child go down the path of drugs and addiction with no way to help because they have shut you out. This too-much can be watching your partner or parent face Parkinsons, Alzheimer's or Dementia; seeing them become quiet within as their confidence diminishes, as they try to face the world around them, but it doesn't feel as it did before. This too-much could be a first time Mum trying to recognise herself and her babe after an incredibly traumatizing birth where nothing makes any sense and she can't seem to see straight. This too-much could be no toilet paper in the supermarket because everyone has lost their minds through fear of lack. It comes in many ways, shapes and forms. The reality is anything can set it off – even spilt milk. Your life experience will dictate how severe or shallow the experience will be, but when you are the one experiencing it, it is all encompassing. Blinding. It presents an impossibility of not being

able to see past or through it. It is in these times that the ground and movement has never been more important. The practice of coming back to your body and quieting your mind - remembering your strengths and daring to dream.

So I invite you to go on a journey to seek out your safe place, when the world gets too much and too mighty and you can't see straight.

Explore your body the way you did as a child when you were learning to make sense of gravity.

Go from laying to sitting to standing. Spend time on the ground. Feel the way it comes to meet your body. Or your body relaxes to meet it. Roll around if you can. And if you can't, wriggle the bits you can play with and allow the sensation of really feeling, to creep into your ever thinking mind.....

Let yourself become aware of something other than your thoughts about something or someone; after all, they are just thoughts, tit-bits of information, your mind trying to reclaim centre stage. Trust me when I say, sensing your feet in how they meet the ground, the Earth – your life is so much more fulfilling. ■



## GROUNDING YOUR VOICE TO HARNESS YOUR VOICE POWER

By Rhonda Ohlson

*Rhonda Ohlson (Brisbane 1993)  
is an Assistant Trainer, Body  
Psychotherapist and Bones For*

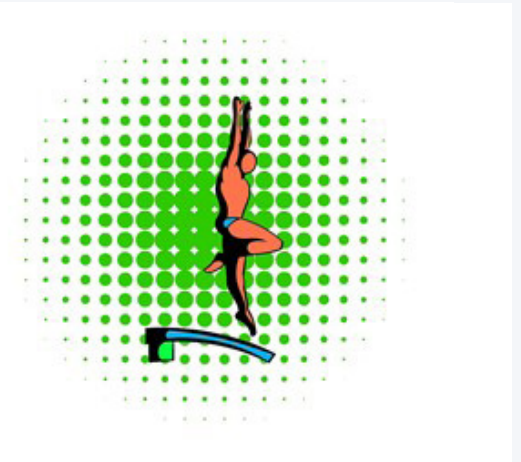
*Life Trainer. Her former profession as an English, Speech  
and Drama high school teacher, and her life-long love  
of singing, sparked her curiosity about enhancing vocal  
power using the Feldenkrais Method.*

Do you wonder what these images have got to do with grounding your voice and harnessing your voice power? They both need to align their bodies and surrender to the ground forces in such a way that they become a springboard to harness their power to rise up. To harness your voice power, you need to align your spine and put your foot down - to activate your internal springs to lift up your voice, to sing your unsung song.

It has taken me many years to build a sacred temple worthy of housing my authentic voice. Here is my story. I hope it inspires you to discover this “Elusive Obvious” to improve the quality and power of your voice.



My first introduction to the Feldenkrais Method came at a voice workshop with Judy Pippen and Diane Keaton. I was amazed, how after lying on the floor doing gentle movements for an hour completely transformed the quality of my voice. I was a high school teacher at the time, and was finding I was losing my voice and constantly getting laryngitis and throat infections. I was also a very shy person, who would rather hide my light behind a bushel and not be seen or heard. I had a sweet singing voice but never felt



confident enough to sing in public. I also had a very strong inner critic, who would judge me as soon as I opened my mouth. While this protected me, it kept me locked in my box.

When I was 21, I was involved in a serious car accident resulting in head injuries and whiplash. Years later, after having children, I developed terrible headaches. I discovered there was degeneration in my neck caused by the accident years before. Feldenkrais lessons helped me release the trauma frozen in my

body. I was able to move my neck freely without pain. I could walk with a spring in my step again! To my surprise, my voice was stronger and more resonant. This enquiry into the connection between the body and the voice has enthralled me for the past 30 years.

As I learnt to stand up for myself, I also learnt to speak out for myself. And, at the age of 67, to sing out for myself! So I started teaching others about this connection between the body and the voice.

In 2019, I wrote a book called "Sovereign Woman - Use your voice and body to turn your pain into power". I also developed a program called "Express the real you and let your true colours shine through". At the recent Online Feldenkrais Summit, Move Better Feel Better, I shared a lesson from my book, called "Tune your body, tune your voice: how to stand your ground and let your true voice resound". It obviously struck a chord with people. I received so many comments from people all around the world. They were surprised and delighted to feel the connection between their feet and their voices. How their voices sounded stronger and more resonant when they put their "foot" down and found that spring in their step.

It wasn't easy for me to put my foot down....In my early childhood, there was not a firm foundation of support. It wasn't safe to put my foot down. I learnt to live in my head and not share my feelings. My friends used to say I was off with the fairies; because I spent so much time in my head.

At times in my life when I have felt afraid, I have been stopped in my tracks; unable to move forward. When I was eight years old, I had to stand up in front of the whole school and recite by heart a speech that the nuns wrote. I was so terrified of making a mistake that I froze. Nothing came out of my mouth. I ran off the stage in shame. Many years later, a few days before my son was born, I sprained my ankle; at the end of my Feldenkrais Training, I fell down the stairs and sprained my ankle. This was not a good look - accepting my certificate as a Feldenkrais practitioner on crutches! Then when I was 67, again I sprained my ankle - this was two days before singing the lead in an opera called Dido and Aeneas.

In my Feldenkrais Training, I remember how I cried when I finally realized I could stand up from a chair by surrendering my weight to the ground, harnessing ground force. This was a revelation. Firstly, to trust that I could let go and not slip into

the void. Secondly, to feel the support from the earth empowering me to step forward.

Another thing I discovered was that when the trauma from my childhood was triggered, I would blow a fuse, much like a faulty lamp does. The circuit breaker "trips" and needs to be reset to switch the power back on. I would unearth myself.

At times when I was happy and joyful, like when I was dancing, my feet supported me very well. When I was singing and no one was watching I could sing my heart out. I couldn't understand how suddenly I would become very clumsy and fall over when I was stressed.

In 2002 I was diagnosed with Osteoporosis when I put my foot in a hole and broke my little toe. I had just left my husband and was feeling unsure of my footing. This led me on another incredible journey doing the Bones for Life Training with Ruth Alon, and I learnt how to lengthen and strengthen under pressure, to find that spring in my step.

I became a Trainer in Bones for Life and was amazed at how I learnt to feel more confident - to stand up, speak out and sing out for myself. I started to pay attention to the sensations in my feet. I noticed that my toes were



very curled, almost as if they were trying to get away from the ground, especially when I was stressed.

I played with pressing my toes into the floor while keeping the sole of my foot and my heel on the floor. To my surprise I felt the arch in my foot lift. I experimented with lying on the floor pressing my foot into the wall, and gradually found a place where the toes of the sole of the foot and the heel pressed and the arch lifted. My spine lengthened, and I felt a distinct activation in my pelvic floor muscles. I thought about the Roman Arch that had a key stone in the centre, that when in place gave strength to the structure and when removed caused the structure to collapse.



My pelvic floor was another problem area. As a child I had repeated bouts of cystitis, which weakened the walls of my bladder. When I was 28 and in labour, my son came out in a rush, and all my internal organs were hanging out. At 67, when I started learning to sing opera, I was dismayed to feel how my pelvic floor muscles dropped out between my legs.

I came across a book called “The Secret of the Ring Muscles” by Paula Garbourg, that gave me more insight into how the ring muscles (sphincters) enable us to have that spring in our step from the ground up. While switching on the pelvic floor muscles did help, it was discovering the secret of pressing my whole foot into the ground that activated the keystone in the arch of my foot. This enabled my spine to lengthen and my pelvic floor to lift while I sang.

Then I discovered how the activation of the pelvic floor muscles sent a chain reaction up my spine, activating the breathing diaphragm and also the diaphragms in the throat. My soft palate lifted, the false folds retracted, enabling the true folds to move unimpeded.

Any fear of speaking up can affect the voice and pull the rug from under our feet. To be able to speak out for

ourselves, we need to be able to stand our ground, put our foot down and find the spring in our step.

This is a snapshot for you to help you **ground and harness your voice power.**

*Stand or sit. Breathe slowly through your nose into your lower belly.*

*Purse your lips, then blow out your breath gently, as if you are trying to blow out a candle.*

*As you breathe in, open your hands letting fingers extend.*

*As you breathe out, draw fingers up and back gathering fingers around thumb.*

*This is called the “Bell movement”.*

*As you breathe in, bend your knees slightly and sink your feet down into the ground. Feel how the toes spread out and the arch lowers a little.*

*As you breathe out, press the whole foot into the floor and feel the arch lift to support your spine.*

*This engages the key stone arch mechanism in the foot that then supports the spine and gives a sense of safety and security.*

## GROUNDING YOUR VOICE TO HARNESS YOUR VOICE POWER *By Rhonda Ohlson*

*Feel if the pelvic floor muscles engage as well.  
(Turning toes slightly inwards and placing a cushion  
between knees and squeezing gently may help you  
activate these muscles.)*

*When the pelvic floor muscles engage, this activates  
the breathing diaphragm and the diaphragms in the  
throat. The breath can be the wind beneath the wings  
of the voice.*

*Repeat several times, blowing out a candle on the out  
breath.*

*Now add a gentle sound “ooh”.*

*Change this into an “Ugh”.*

I would love to hear how are you feel after doing these  
lessons and any suggestions that you may have.

Gail French has done some wonderful lessons that she  
calls jelly fish breathing which you may like to explore.

In my book “Sovereign Woman-Use your body and  
voice to turn your pain into power”, I share in detail  
many lessons to light up the true colours of your voice.

*Here is a short video of my journey learning to sing  
with my singing teacher Kim Kirkman at the Lift Gallery  
in Maleny: <https://youtu.be/NNke7erxADM>*

*If you enjoyed this article and would like to know  
more, you can obtain a copy of my book and CD's  
Sovereign Woman, and connect with me through my  
website [www.womanshine.com.au](http://www.womanshine.com.au) ■*



## GROUND

By Alan S. Questel

*Alan S. Questel is known for his clarity, creativity and down to earth style of teaching. He brings a depth of understanding, humor*

*and a gentle human perspective to the learning of the Method and creates lively conditions for learning. Trained by Dr. Feldenkrais (Amherst 1983), Alan directs professional Feldenkrais Training Programs worldwide.*

### What do we need to be skeletal?

Years ago I was teaching Skeletal Power, an advanced training course I designed, when I asked my students: “What do we need to be skeletal?” the first answer given was, “We need a skeleton.”

I replied, “what else do we need?” Again they answered: “We need muscles and a nervous system to help organize and move our skeleton.” These are all good and accurate answers. Yet, what else? Another reply, “Intention.” Yes, and...?

To my surprise one of the most important aspects of being skeletal wasn’t mentioned - **the ground**. To move skeletally we need to move against a surface -

the ground, a chair, something that can help transfer the force through us, and use this force to move us through space.

In trainings, advanced trainings and workshops, I have continued to ask this question: “What do we need to be skeletal?” To date, no one has mentioned the ground. I find this fascinating. Once I mention the ground it is obvious to everyone. Perhaps the answer is so obvious we automatically presuppose it... and... never mention it. Yet bringing this idea of the ground into the foreground (*hmm... a word with ground in it*) changes our understanding of ourselves and our experience of ourselves; both in our movement, and again, in how we inhabit our lives.

One of the basic tenets of the Feldenkrais Method is the idea of being skeletally organized. To understand this, we need to know the function of the skeleton. In terms of movement and action, the skeleton has two major functions; to bear weight and to transmit force. What happens in a Feldenkrais lesson, whether it is an Awareness Through Movement (ATM) or Functional Integration (FI), is a quieting down of our muscular habits to more easily allow the transmission of force *skeletally*.

From this point of view, the somatic work that I do is the identical process: regardless if it is with a child who has Cerebral Palsy; a professional athlete; a proficient dancer; a person who has suffered a stroke; someone who has Multiple Sclerosis; or a person with back, neck or knee pain. I create circumstances that allows movement to translate more easily through their skeleton. This helps bring about a different connection through their skeleton with greater differentiation, creating a broader and more even distribution of movement, muscularly and skeletally. The result is that their functioning improves; pain is diminished – sometimes eliminated, and there is a change in the person’s self-image.

When this occurs in a lesson, the individual is often able to utilize and maintain the results; which is great. However, sometimes they don’t maintain results. Being unable to maintain the results can happen for a number of different reasons: they may need more information; they may need more time to get used to the changes; they may need more time to practice it; or they may need time to adapt to the shift in their self-image.

I discovered that introducing the skeletal relationship with the ground is key to sustaining and accessing

the new information — working with the ground brings focus to movement in an aware and intentional way. By bringing our attention to the surface we are moving against, we immediately engage ourselves more skeletally.

### **Hypermobility and pain**

I am not very flexible. I am fairly agile and can move well, but touching my toes has always eluded me. When I see a person who is extremely flexible, I am a bit envious... okay, maybe more than a bit. When I was an actor (previous career), I thought; “If I was more flexible, I would be a better actor.” Then I would meet people who were extremely flexible, yet they weren’t great actors... hmmm.

Within my Feldenkrais practice, most people with whom I’ve worked, benefitted from gaining more flexibility. A small percentage of my clients were already quite flexible; hence, becoming more flexible wasn’t beneficial to them. At one point, early in my practice, I was quite puzzled when an individual, who was extremely flexible, came to me because they had pain. I mistakenly thought; “How can they have pain when they are so flexible?” Eventually I became aware of the condition called hypermobility, which is an unusual or abnormally greater range of

movement in joints. This increased range often results in the hypermobile person needing to work harder muscularly to maintain their skeletal integrity. The problem is this increased muscular work can over time lead to discomfort or pain.

Initially I was confused as to how to help someone with this condition. Honestly, there are times when I still find it challenging. Thankfully, I discovered two courses of action that will often make a difference in helping them manage this pain and find greater skeletal integrity. These two courses of action are certainly helpful to everyone; yet, they are essential for the overly-flexible or hypermobile person.

The first course of action is to create a clearer sense of skeletal connection, a greater kinematic linkage. Rather than making a person looser, it is important to clarify with them that the movement of a bone in a joint connects to the next bone and the next, etcetera, through-out their skeleton; instead of a movement reaching the end range in that joint and not continuing on further through their skeleton.

The second is, yes you guessed it, the ground! Working with students who are hypermobile and have pain, transitioning from lying down, to sitting up, to standing can reduce or even eliminate their

pain by intentionally moving against the ground. Unsurprisingly, this does take concentrated, focused attention, yet over time the habit can and will develop. If there is gap in their attention and the pain returns, they can quite quickly find their way back to rediscover the pain free ways of moving by once again, paying attention to moving against the ground.

### **The emotions of the ground**

Obviously, the ground doesn’t have any emotions. Yet, at times we do describe ourselves in an emotional way that relates to the ground: *feeling grounded*. When we express ourselves in this way it usually refers to a complex set of sensations we think of as feelings: secure, safe, confident, centred, connected, supported. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines grounded as: mentally and emotionally stable: admirably sensible, realistic, and unpretentious.

When people come in for lessons, they often describe themselves as not feeling grounded, or they say they want to feel more grounded. When someone tells me this, I bring to their attention that they can only know they are ‘not grounded’ because they have felt ‘grounded’ in other moments of their life.



Unfortunately, while the words: secure, safe, confident, centred, connected, supported, mentally and emotionally stable, admirably sensible, realistic, and unpretentious are descriptive of a particular state, they don't help us understand **what we have to do** to find these states.... A person needs a concrete sensation or action that will help them access the feeling of being grounded.

Interestingly, one of the answers to the question, "How do I get grounded?" is in the question itself:

**It is... the ground!**

To intentionally move, while *feeling* the ground, can provide us with a distinctly skeletal use of ourselves which will lead to the feelings of being secure, safe, confident, centred, connected, supported, mentally and emotionally stable, admirably sensible, realistic, and unpretentious.

It isn't enough to tell someone to 'feel the ground'. A person needs to have a range of experiences relating to the ground that is separate from the moments when they are 'not feeling grounded.' You may ask; "But why not do this when they feel ungrounded?" It's possible; however when feeling ungrounded, our attention is already occupied with these uncomfortable



feelings, and therefore is less available for new kinds of information.

Can you think of the perfect place to practice this? Of course you do — it is through participating in Awareness Through Movement (ATM) lessons! We can also do this in Functional Integration (FI) lessons, but in ATM lessons a person is doing the movements of their own volition, and this self-propelled action is showing them that they have control over all of it.

ATM already utilizes this strategy. Moshe noted that with ATMs he took 'the function out of the movement.' His meaning is that when we do a lesson, we most often do not know what it is about or where it is going. The lesson is a process that leads to new understandings and new ways of knowing ourselves. If we begin teaching a lesson and say, "this is for your tennis serve," you will continually compare the movements you are doing to the experience or the

image you have of a tennis serve. Doing the lesson from this point of view narrows your chances of discovering something new, something you didn't know before.

The great value in this learning context is it less connected to any particular outcome or goal, be it physical or emotional. If a person can discover the experience of a different relationship with the ground in the lesson, the experience increases the likelihood of the behaviour being incorporated into their daily life.

An ATM lesson is a structure of movements that for the most part have strong functional themes like rolling, turning, lifting, reaching. These themes are all based on creating lines of force through our skeleton. One interesting aspect of ATM is how each lesson can be influenced by the intention of the teacher. It is possible, in many lessons, to overlay a meta-theme that can shift the focus, and hence alter the experience of the lesson. A meta-theme is an instruction, a place to focus one's awareness that is repeated throughout the lesson; thereby directing one's attention to a particular idea. Through this action the experience of the lesson is changed.

Examples of meta-themes are: paying attention to your breathing, taking better care of yourself, connection through yourself skeletally, and... not surprisingly, moving in relation to **the ground**. The same lesson can simultaneously feel different and can have different outcomes depending on the choice to focus on one of these meta-themes. The ground is a great meta-theme to explore in many lessons. Practicing 'moving in relation to the ground' is one of the ways one can become more grounded. It is the back door to a new way of experiencing ourselves in our everyday life.

### Higher Judo

Moshe wrote *Higher Judo: Groundwork* (originally published as *Judo for Black Belts*) after he wrote *Body and Mature Behavior: A Study of Anxiety, Sex, Gravitation and Learning*. Through his writings one can trace his thought development from the beginnings of Feldenkrais to the interesting idea of using groundwork as a fundamental aspect of learning Judo.

Moshe's writes about furthering improvement in Judo:

*"When improvement in the standing position has come to a standstill, it should be given up in favour of groundwork. In the horizontal position, lying on the back with the head and the limbs lifted off the ground,*

*the pelvis is forced into correct relative position with the body. It is, perforce, held in the position of least mobility, and the muscles of the legs and the head are relieved from bearing weight. Now they can, and do, assume configurations that are habitually avoided... In general, therefore, it would seem advisable to insist on groundwork for people with poor body mechanics, and only after some improvement has taken place, to proceed with throws. All students, however, will find considerable improvement of their standing position technique, after periodic insistence on ground work only. This is especially advisable to those who begin with a more or less adequate body control and who normally take to the throwing technique almost exclusively. The ground work will not only increase their strength and endurance, but will greatly improve them all round."*<sup>1</sup>

This is a good (partial) explanation of why most ATMs are done lying down; it reduces the necessary activity we engage in when upright, and we can find ways of moving we normally do not do. In *Higher Judo: Groundwork*, chapters V through XII, there are explanations and drawings that illustrate the emphasis of movement in relation to the ground and how it can influence one's abilities in Judo. One can readily see

that there are many familiar movements from various ATMs. In my training programs I ask the trainees to read the first four chapters of Moshe's book, *Higher Judo: Groundwork* and to replace the word *Judo* with *Feldenkrais*. This is an extremely interesting exercise; I highly recommend you try it.

### **Avoiding the ground**

Probably the more usual relationship people have with the ground is avoiding it. Falling is something we do our best not to do.

Moshe discusses falling in *Higher Judo*:

*"Our parents themselves being clumsy and incapable of falling without more or less inconvenience or injury, cannot help themselves but pester Johnny with "be careful, darling," every time Johnny attempts to learn for himself how to control his body in trying situations. Johnny then grows like his parents – unable to fall without hurt and afraid of any sudden change of position. The fear of falling, or more correctly, the reaction to falling, can be observed immediately after birth. Again, therefore, by teaching the art of falling properly, we further the person's maturity towards a more adult independence of the gravitational force. In*

*some people we observe a fear of falling so great, that we must take special precautions and care in teaching them to fall. They stiffen themselves so strongly even if their balance is ever so slightly compromised, that the body presents numerous angles which make contact with the ground very harsh and uncomfortable."*<sup>2</sup>

The fear of falling is one of the ways people feel 'ungrounded'. It affects our sense of balance; it affects how we move and how we navigate through different environments. In my recorded workshop, *Falling...*, I ask an important question: 'What is the difference between falling and moving?' There is only one significant difference between the two: *Falling is irreversible*.

Moshe said when we move in a way where we *know what we are doing*, it is reversible. Hence, we move until our movement becomes irreversible; which then results in a fall — a fall happens in relationship to the ground.

Learning how to fall is an important way we can create a friendlier connection with the ground and can help how we move overall. Improving *how we fall* is the means to reducing the anxiety we have of falling; it provides us with a new perspective, resulting in a more beneficial relationship with the ground. ATMs that

revolve around balance and falling are yet another way we can come closer to feeling more grounded.

### **Awareness Through Movement lessons for you to explore**

While writing about ideas and concepts is beneficial, making the abstract, concrete is the real environment where we discover and learn. In light of this, here are three lessons for you to explore:

<https://aqmisc.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/The+Ground-Lessons+to+explore.zip>

I hope you enjoy them and find them informative.

Alan Questel is the creator of 19 CD workshops in the Feldenkrais Method, the DVD program for pregnant women, *Pregnant Pauses – Movement for Moms*, and author of *Creating Creativity-Embodying the Creative Process*. His upcoming book *Practice Intentional Acts of Kindness* will be released sometime in October.

<sup>1</sup> Moshe Feldenkrais, *Higher Judo: Groundwork*, (Blue Snake Books 2010), p. 50-52

<sup>2</sup> Moshe Feldenkrais, *Higher Judo: Groundwork*, (Blue Snake Books 2010), p. 20 ■





## EPPUR SI MUOVE

By Ralph Hadden

*Ralph Hadden (Sydney 1, 1990)  
is an Assistant Trainer (2012)  
and has a Feldenkrais practice  
based in Melbourne. He has also*

*taught nationally and internationally. In recent years he  
has taken a particular interest in teaching Feldenkrais  
focussing on the pelvis and sensuality.*

“Eppur si muove”, attributed to Galileo Galilei,  
translates as “And yet it moves” (or “nevertheless/even  
so, it moves”).



### A MOMENT OF WONDER

I was standing at the pedestrian crossing on the Pacific Highway in North Sydney, waiting for the lights to change. This was 30+ years ago and I was in Sydney doing a segment of my Feldenkrais Practitioner Training Program. Waiting there, at the lights, I was suddenly struck by an amazing realisation.

“I’m standing still, and yet I’m moving!”

I was in something of an altered state. All those who have done a practitioner training program will recognise the feeling. For five days a week, for the four weeks of the segment, I was spending hours every day on the floor doing ATM lessons. It was an intense experience, spending all that time practising directed attention to sensation, attending in detail to every part of me that moved and responded in the ATMs. I was very much in tune with my physical self, sensing everything acutely. So, standing at the pedestrian crossing, I was quite still but also aware that I was constantly in motion. There was the pulsing of my heart, blood flowing through my arteries and veins, I breathed, there was postural sway as I subtly adjusted to maintain my upright stance. My eyes moved, observing traffic, people, the traffic lights. I felt

completely at ease, quite still and yet full of life, bathed in constant motion. It was wonderful!

### GALILEO AND THE INQUISITION



painting by Cristiano Banti

Astronomer, scientist Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) stood before the Roman Inquisition in 1633, accused of blasphemy. He had published a book, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* in which he presented a Socratic argument that the earth and other planets orbited around the sun. He had built and used telescopes and his observations led him to support the Copernican view that the sun was the centre of the solar system. This contradicted the religious dogma



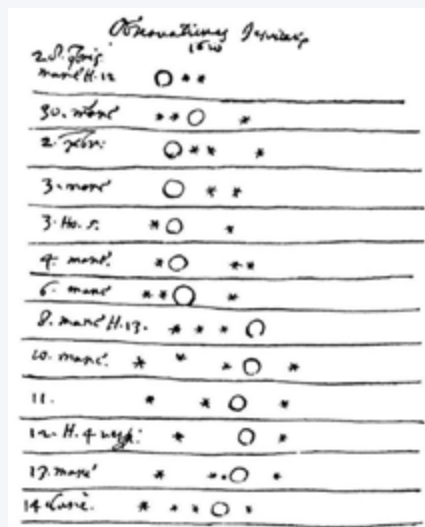
of the day that said the earth was created by god as the immobile centre, while the rest of the universe moved around it. And so he incurred the wrath of the Inquisition and was imprisoned. Under the threat of dire punishment Galileo recanted. But, legend has it, when he was released from prison he looked up at the sky, stamped his foot on the ground and said, *Eppur si muove*.

### SCIENCE: KNOWLEDGE MOVES

Dogmatic religious faith that is fixed and unmoving, is usually based on texts written thousands of years ago. Or more accurately, the dogma is based on contemporary religious leaders interpreting these scriptures in whatever way suits them.<sup>1</sup>

Science changes, it moves. Facts are observed, explanations are proposed. Later, more facts may be observed and new explanations are needed. To the objective observer, centuries ago, the ground seemed solid, immovable. So, the earth as the still centre of the universe was a reasonable hypothesis.

And yet, the motions of the sun, moon, other planets and stars were complicated, difficult to explain. A new explanation emerged, the Copernican- the moon orbits



*Galileo's notes on his observations of moons of Jupiter*

the earth, the earth and other planets orbit the sun. This theory was a better fit for the observed facts.

Fundamentalist religious dogmas say the truth is fixed. Science says "and yet it moves", knowledge and explanations change and evolve.

### FELDENKRAIS AND CHANGE

Change is difficult, it can be frightening, even painful. I remember accepting the care of a battery hen, recently rescued from a life in a tiny cage. I released her into the open space of my backyard. For a few minutes she seemed to be stunned, scarcely able to move. The unaccustomed freedom must have been so

strange for her, perhaps even terrifying. Gradually she began to move around and over the next few hours she slowly reclaimed the life she should have had. She walked, explored, scratched and foraged. She became a happy free-range chook, joined my backyard flock and rewarded me with lovely, fresh free-range eggs.

The Feldenkrais Method® is a powerful tool for change. By learning how to be aware of, and then change, our patterns of movement we also learn how to change our habits. And this equips us to also change behaviours.

Our Feldenkrais practice then becomes a resource for being more comfortable in making changes in life. We can perhaps leave an unsatisfying job, make changes in a troubled relationship or rearrange the furniture in the bedroom, to give a few examples. We can make these changes by choice, or it may be that the unexpected happens and change is imposed on us. Our Feldenkrais adaptability and resourcefulness supports us in responding constructively and flexibly to the vicissitudes of life.

Can you think of any changes you were able to make in your life after doing Feldenkrais? How did you pursue your avowed and unavowed dreams?

<sup>1</sup> For a delightful take on this, look for the article "Why can't I own a Canadian?" it's a response to the radio personality who said that, according to Leviticus 18:22, "homosexuality is an abomination". Here's a link.

## PERPETUAL MOTION



*David Hockney Tunnel series*

Returning to me at the pedestrian crossing: within myself I was still, and yet in motion.

But also the ground beneath me, apparently solid and immobile, was actually in motion. The earth was rotating around its axis, turning every 24 hours. It orbited the sun every 365 days, the solar system floated through the Milky Way galaxy which drifted steadily through the universe.

And time was in motion, seconds, minutes, years, centuries. The seasons cycled, trees came into bud, blossomed, fruited, shed their leaves. I and all those around me moved through childhood, adulthood, birth and death. Plants and animals go through their life cycles and over eons evolve into new beings. We move through our personal biorhythms- sleep/ wake, menstruation, ovulation, hunger, thirst, desire, satisfaction, arousal, relaxation, digestion, excretion... always there is motion.

Our world is forever moving, knowledge grows and changes. Each individual grows, learns and changes. As the Buddhists say, "All is impermanent". Eppur si muove. Always there is change, we might as well enjoy the ride.

## ATM: MOTION IN STILLNESS

*I taught a longer version of this ATM in the recent Bonus ATM day of the AFG Online Summit 2021. A recording of it is available on the AFG website.*

Position: any that is comfortable will do but I recommend sitting on a chair or standing.

I give the lesson instructions for chair sitting but you can adapt for other positions.

- SIT, SCAN: Sit towards the front of the chair, have your feet on the ground, settle, get comfortable. How do you feel right now? Do a scan, observing yourself (in your own favourite way of scanning)
- BREATH IN ALL DIRECTIONS: Breathe easily, quietly. Sense the movement of your breath in your chest, belly, back; down into the pelvis and in any other place you notice a response to your breath. Forwards, sideways, upwards, to the back, down into the pelvic floor...
- HEARTBEAT, BLOOD: Can you sense your heartbeat? Or feel your blood circulating? Touch your wrist or your neck to feel the pulse.
- POSTURAL SWAY: Can you feel a slight swaying, a response in your muscles and bones, adjusting to small shifts in your position?
- EYES: Notice any movement of your eyes as your attention shifts to different parts of yourself
- ANYTHING ELSE? What else do you notice, in motion within yourself?
- THE MOTION OF TIME: Think of yourself in the here and now. Then think back in time. How were you 10 minutes ago? 10 hours ago? 10 years ago? What was this location like 100 years ago? 1,000 years ago. Come back to here and now, then think into the future (thinking in a positive way, if possible). How would you like to be in 10 minutes, in 10 hours, in 10 years? Can you imagine this location in 100 years? 1,000 years?
- SIT, SCAN: Come back into the here and now. Sit comfortably, scan. How do you feel now?



### TRIBUTE

And so, with all this in mind, I recently came to the decision to have a tattoo. As a tribute to the beauty of science, in appreciation of the wonder of motion within me, as recognition of my life's work in movement and as acknowledgement that all is moving and that all is impermanent, I had *Eppur si muove* tattooed on my arm.

Do you have a tattoo? Or, if you imagine inscribing a tattoo on yourself, what would it be....? ■



*Tattoo by Brian Graydon of Heart and Soul Tattoo*





## FROM THE GROUND WE CAME

By Jenni Evans

*Jenni Evans (Melbourne 2, 2001) is a certified Feldenkrais Assistant Trainer. She has been practising the Feldenkrais Method for over*

*20 years, and gardening for almost 70. She runs regular 'Everlasting Gardener' programs, helping people to find easier, more comfortable ways of sustaining their love of gardening.*

*"Naked as from the earth we came, And crept to life at first,  
We to the earth return again, And mingle with our dust."*

*Isaac Watts*

Many traditions hold this image of our life coming from the ground and returning to it. We know that we are made from the same stuff as our planet. But this leaves a span of many years for most of us, where our relationship with the ground seems to go to the background of awareness. Yet it is essential to the very essence of our design and adaptation to the environment in which we have evolved to live.

Humans are uniquely suited to live in relation to the ground, in this specific environment of a gravity of 0.98 Newtons. Our nervous systems detect this relationship between gravity and the ground, adjusting our muscular activity accordingly. Optimal strength comes from the ability to use only the muscles directly involved in a particular movement, leaving the others at rest until they are required.

*"In Greek mythology, Antaeus was a giant who was born out of the earth and who consequently derived all his strength and prowess from contact with the earth.*

*This meant that every time he was brought to the ground in a fight or wrestling match, every time he seemed to be beaten, he wasn't beaten at all; instead, he was gathering his strength, recharging his batteries, getting ready to rise again, refreshed and fighting fit. ...*

*Hercules turned out to be a match for Antaeus in brawn, and more than his match in brain, for he realised, in the course of their wrestling match, that the way to defeat the giant was to hold him high, rather*

*than hammer him down. The way to bring him low was to elevate him. So instead of throwing his adversary, Hercules lifted him up until all the strength drained out of him."*<sup>1</sup>

Readers of the Harry Potter novels know that a simple way to incapacitate an opponent, is with the spell 'Wingardium leviosa', in which the person or object becomes suspended in the air. They cannot propel or locomote, their physical strength is neutralised.

The Feldenkrais Method® provides us with opportunities to detect how much of this spell is residing in our own organisation. Through quietening your system, becoming aware of which parts are pressing hard into the ground and which parts are held away from the ground, you have the opportunity to let your nervous system readjust the musculature to a more balanced and neutral tone. This is the place Moshe Feldenkrais referred to as the place of ideal posture/acture - where we can move in any direction without prior adjustment. When we are ready and free to move in any direction, we can access optimal strength, with minimal effort.

Gardeners know the experience of gaining refreshment and strength from working in and on the ground,

particularly when they befriend it, so that it not only provides nourishment and protection for their plants, but for themselves as well.

They do this in 3 specific ways:

### **Finding support**

When you have a clear contact with the ground through your feet, knees, sit bones or hands, your brain recognises that your skeleton can do the work of holding you up. It can then free up muscles that you might have been using for balance or superfluous activity, to do the moving activities with delicacy, precision and power. Creating a clear and solid base of support, where gravity flows through your bones rather than muscles, allows your arms and hands to be light and free. You can experiment with how you place your feet and how much movement can come from small shifts of your body weight. How much easier is it to pick a soft, ripe berry, without crushing it, when your feet are solidly underneath you. Compare this with when you are at full reach.

### **A place to move from**

In order to walk, reach for something or lift a load, we need a solid, grounded place to push against. Astronauts, require jet propulsion systems to be able



to make even the smallest movements, in the absence of something solid to move away from. As infants, our apprenticeship to standing and walking, was discovering this relationship. We had to learn to shift weight away from the part we wish to move, grounding it somewhere else that would support us. You can experiment with beginning to roll over as you lie on the floor. You will notice that some part of you needs to take more support from the ground – to press more

clearly, so that something else can begin to lift. How much easier is it to push a mower, wheelbarrow, or vacuum cleaner when you push from your back foot, rather than with your arms?

### **A place to rest**

In the course of our days and activity, we collect muscle tension. Some of that, gives us our familiar shape and movement patterns, and some might be due to a sustained activity during that day. If you have participated in an Awareness Through Movement® lesson, or practice any of the self-awareness disciplines, you will have noticed that when you start to pay attention to your body, there are invariably some places that are tense or tight. Lying on the ground is a simple way to provide information to your brain about what is ready to let go and rest. You may also discover that some parts require support, in order to be able to let go. Without a clear sense of the safety and support of the ground, it can be impossible for muscles to release and find rest. You might have noticed that sometimes the simple act of placing a cushion or roller under a part of your body, allows you to find that connection to the ground, so it begins to soften.

Often the primary role of a Feldenkrais practitioner is to help someone clarify these relationships with the

ground. They frequently work with the client lying on a firm surface, so that much of you can be directly supported. They bring the ground to meet your body by filling gaps with padding or their hands, as they help you rediscover the connection through your skeleton from the ground all the way from your feet to your hands and head.

When you next notice that you have collected some tension in your body, you can experiment by lying on the floor or the grass, and simply noticing which parts of you are busy holding you away from the ground, and which parts are taking more than their fair share of the load. You might try moving them very slowly through the smallest range you can manage (even imaginary movements can be effective). This generates the data input to your nervous system that initiates the readjustment needed to reset, recharge and reinvigorate your movement. You may also discover that it refreshes your mood and allows your thoughts to move freely as well.

In our language and culture, we recognise the value in being grounded. It is a compliment to be described as 'down to earth'. By becoming aware of how we can optimise our connection to the ground on which we live, we can find the strength of Antaeus, then using the intelligence of Hercules, stay connected to the earth as we move lightly and potently over it.

*From the ground we came, on the ground we live, to the ground we return – as frequently as possible.*

Jenni Evans July 2021

<sup>1</sup> *Excerpt from Seamus Heaney's Birthday speech 13th April 2009*

Jenni's Everlasting Gardener Course -

<https://feldenkraisinstitute.com.au/event/your-place-the-everlasting-gardener-week-1-2/> ■



## FELDENKRAIS AND AIKIDO: LEARNING FROM THE GROUND

By Ruth Frommer

*Ruth graduated from the first Feldenkrais Training in Melbourne in 1991, and shortly after started her Feldenkrais practice*

*and training in Aikido. Currently Ruth works in her private practice and is senior instructor at her Aikido Takemusu Dojo. She is a Black Belt 6th Dan. Ruth also enjoys working as an assistant trainer at Feldenkrais professional training programs and conducting continuing education for her colleagues.*

**“The essential aim of Judo is to teach, help and forward adult maturity, which is an ideal state rarely reached, where a person is capable of dealing with the immediate present task before him without being hindered by earlier formed habit of thought to attitude.”**

*Moshe Feldenkrais -Higher Judo- Ground work*

This quote could equally describe the Feldenkrais Method. It clearly demonstrates how Moshe's thinking and creation of his work was influenced by “higher Judo”.

On completing my Feldenkrais training in Melbourne in 1991 I was keen to study a martial art and not knowing which art to explore I asked both a Judo teacher and a Karate teacher for their recommendation. To my surprise they both recommended Aikido Takemusu. And, the same teacher - Sensei Barry Knight who had studied under Morihiro Saito in Iwama, Japan. I have always been thankful for this recommendation, as Sensei Knight's passion was to explore how to execute Aikido techniques with efficient movement organisation and mind focus. Both in my Aikido training and Feldenkrais, the ground and my relationship to it have been pivotal in my personal and professional journey.

In Aikido and Feldenkrais, the ground forms an integral part of the environment for you to learn how to become aware of your habits and how to find new possibilities in how you move, think, sense and act in

your life. As an infant the ground provided you with a constant set environment that you had, to learn to roll over, crawl upon, sit on, stand up, and eventually walk on. You discovered preferred ways of moving, interacting with ground and the environment around you. Your preferences may have developed into habits which enabled you to act quickly without thinking. However, if you rely upon your habits too heavily, they can limit your potential.





## FELDENKRAIS AND AIKIDO: LEARNING FROM THE GROUND *By Ruth Frommer*



Both Feldenkrais and Aikido use the ground to create scenarios which offer you the opportunity to become more potent by finding non-habitual ways of paying attention and moving. They do this by using the ground as a form of kinaesthetic feedback. By sensing your connection with the ground, you feel your movement and stability and accordingly can make adjustments.

Awareness Through Movement® lessons classically use the ground as a mirror to reflect your habits and changes that have occurred. Aikido Takemusu techniques are similar to Functional Integration® as they are generally done with a partner. Both partner practices afford you the opportunity to expand your attention to sense not only the ground under your feet but also to sense your partners relationship to the ground. In a Functional Integration lesson the ground under your feet provides a solid foundation in organising your movement in relation to your student. Throughout the lesson you shift your attention from



sensing how your student is responding to your hands-on work to sensing, through the ground, your own self-use.

In Aikido you train barefoot, which allows for more connection to the ground. When your feet are placed in a sound position, as part of a technique, you gain a bio mechanical advantage of being well aligned and at a distance where you can more readily carry out a technique. As you perform a technique your awareness of the ground shifting under your feet gives you moment by moment feedback as to the effective control you have over your training partner. You can feel when they are de-stabilised and to what degree they are pinned to the ground.

Aikido and Feldenkrais teach us to relate to the ground with dynamic functional stability. Constantly we are adjusting to the ground and gravity to ensure that we stay upright as we walk and move through the world. This constant adjusting to the ground underneath our

feet creates a useful metaphor relating to the ability to adapt to changes that occur in our daily life.

Most of us have a fear of falling. Feldenkrais and Aikido address this fear by increasing your confidence and skill in how you can move up, down and from the ground. Many Awareness Through Movement lessons can teach someone how to do a martial break fall or Judo roll. Falling is integral to Aikido and once you have mastered break falling and judo rolls they become a natural part of training. The ground becomes a place of transition which leads you to the next step. Falling and getting up again and again, as a part of training, builds confidence and resilience.

The ground is pivotal to the learning that occurs in Feldenkrais and Aikido. By discovering a more refined diverse use of self in relation to the ground you have the opportunity to progress along the road to adult maturity and living a more potent life. ■

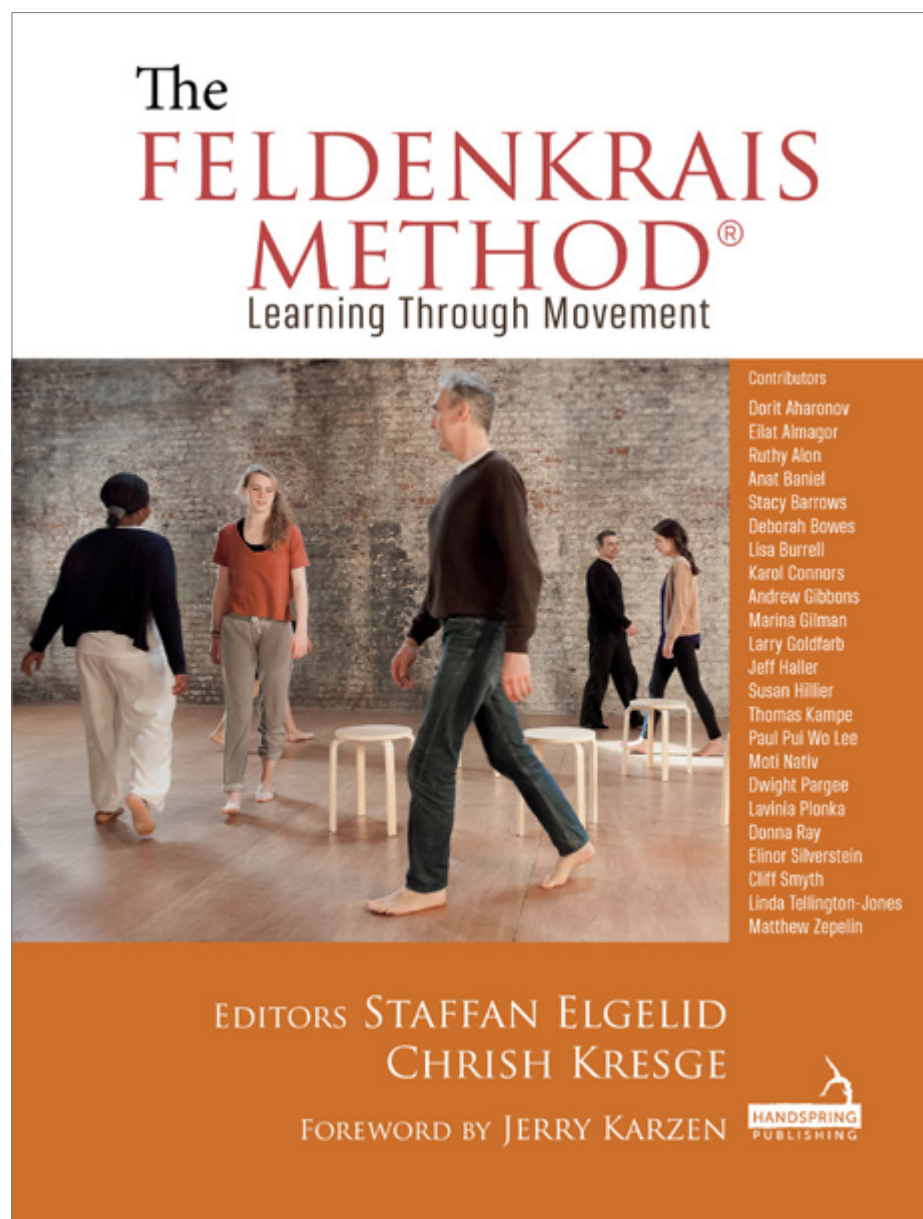


## BOOK REVIEW: THE FELDENKRAIS METHOD – LEARNING THROUGH MOVEMENT

*By Shona Lee*

Bringing together a compilation of wisdom, insights and understandings from an array of practitioners is where the value of our Journal lies. Somehow each individual article seems to be enhanced by appearing alongside the other articles, for a more complete picture; illustrating the adage (and Feldenkrais whole system philosophy) that, we are more than the sum of our parts.... To view the whole, contextualises detailed nuance.

A new book, 'The Feldenkrais Method – learning through movement', published by Handspring Publishing this year, is crafted with a similar principle. Compromising 24 chapters/topics with contributions from 26+ accomplished practitioners of the Feldenkrais Method and 27 accompanying audio-visual movement lessons that are accessible via QR codes. Collated and edited by Staffan Elgelid and Chrish Kresge,



this publication offers accessible value in a nicely structured package.

It is the sequencing of this book that especially stands out. They have structured the content into three sections. Part one details fundamental terrain underpinning the Feldenkrais Method® (who was Moshe; this method being a learning system; how the brain learns; how practitioners are trained; definitions of Function, Differentiation, and Integration and where the Feldenkrais Method sits in the science vs spirituality categorisation). Part two offers examples of how the Method is being used in specific settings ranging from: performing arts, to sports, to children, to animals, to scholastic learning, stress, anxiety and trauma. Part three zooms in on Feldenkrais in the rehabilitation setting and we finish with a future vision (collective dreaming) of where Feldenkrais may be headed in a number of years. The alphabetical index at the back of the book allows you to quickly reference relevant topics.

So who is this book for? Clearly the aim of the publication is to open up an accessible understanding of the Feldenkrais Method to those with no prior (or minimal) experience of our work. The authors are

careful to begin at the beginning and clearly define concepts without getting bogged down in how many layers there are to how we work. Their priority of communicating in clear language doesn't strip away the signature style of each individual contributor and there will undoubtedly be some sections that resonate more deeply with the individual preferences of each reader; as per the nature of a smorgasbord. The book features case studies that explain our working rationale step by step in plain English.

But before more seasoned veterans assume that they've heard it all before, here's what I think you might enjoy:

There are personal, first-hand accounts / anecdotes from folks who spent a lot of time with Moshe in real life, which allow us glimpses of who he was and the context in which he lived. Definitions of Function, Differentiation and Integration based on their specific meanings from the physics / mathematics domain illuminated new insights for me. And who doesn't love being inspired by uplifting stories of profound change that are peppered throughout, encapsulating the deeper meaning of what it is we offer people. Actually, it's not only people – Chrish Kresge interviews Linda

Tellington-Jones on the work she does with animals and how Tellington TTouch evolved.

Perhaps the gold you might extract from this publication is a ripper quote that summarises the essence of the Feldenkrais Method in a succinct sentence or two. Some of my personal favourites:

*"Moshe was committed to creating new generations of healthy people whose physical and emotional state was not dictated by past traumas...Generations who could live viable and full lives with the ability to have free choice in every moment."* Chapter 1, p.9, Elinor Silverstein

*"....an important result of evolution is the ability to meet a situation never before encountered with a response not specifically learned but, rather, spontaneously produced, derived from all past learning and phylogeny"* Chapter 5, p.44, Lisa Burrell

*"...understanding intention-driven, perception-guided, self-organised orchestration of human motion.."* Chapter 4, p.33, Larry Goldfarb

Other gems I enjoyed were: clever layering of rollers for training musicians described by Andrew

Gibbons p.120-121. *“The Feldenkrais context offers an intelligent retreat from performance mode, where a musician can train the instrument that plays the instrument....passive assumptions about how the body works are replaced with active literacy”*. P.118. I valued the clear layout of factors for long-term learning that Susan Hillier laid out in Chapter 3, p. 27 – amount and quality of practice, level of meaning or relevance, salience (meaning the degree to which something stands out or grabs your attention) and specificity. Hearing Donna Ray recount deliberate reasoning in what side of the body she might start touching first when working in the terrain of trauma was also insightful (Chapter 12, p.102).

I feel somewhat patriotically proud, to report that the contributions to this book that came from our own Australian practitioner community from Susan Hillier and Karol Connors (can we also claim Anastasi Siotas as our own?), stand out as being scientifically sound, well-researched and articulated with clarity.

Have I sold this enough so that Handspring Publishing sells out their first print edition?! Whilst we kind of already know that the punchline of each mini essay is that the Feldenkrais Method is wonderful, it's what we learn through the process along the way rather than the end destination that's most fascinating right....?! I think Staffan Elgelid's analogy, in his preface for this book, of the Feldenkrais Method being a very BIG basket is apt; it certainly comes through in this offering.

You can purchase a copy of this book from - <https://terrарosa.com.au/product/books/sports-movement-therapy/the-feldenkrais-method/>

See advert on page 46 for a 10% discount code.

Reviewed by Shona Lee (SEAUS1 Melbourne 2018) – [www.movingintune.com](http://www.movingintune.com)

Shona practices in Sydney and loves how widely applicable the principles of Feldenkrais are across such varied domains. ■





## ACKNOWLEDGING COUNTRY

By Kylie Cook

*Kylie Cook (SEAUS3) an environmental activist with a love of good organic food. She used to run an Organic Wholefoods*

*Business, however 3.30 am starts weren't exactly a 'sustainable' lifestyle! So she did a year of yoga teacher training whilst selling the business and is currently in the third year of Feldenkrais Practitioner Training and feels incredibly thankful and happy to have the resources and opportunity to delve deeply into the method.*

When I read the theme for this issue I felt immediately called to write something that honoured the abiding connection to Country the many language groups of the original custodians of Country have. How could I provide a space for each of us who don't have direct connection, find words that express respect and gratitude with awareness?

Our family was poor and lived in a caravan for 4 years on a block of land, with no power. Across the road in similar circumstances there was a group of people also living in caravans, however our standing in town was higher than these other folks because we were white. It

was very clear to my 10yo self the difference the colour of a person's skin made. At school I wrote a story about an elder walking back to his Country to die. I had some understanding then of what Country meant, perhaps because I grew up in the era of Mabo and Noonkanbah and began to question my connection to this land in the obvious light of dispossession. In my early 20s I was in the UK and I was surprised to have this deep cellular feeling of being home, despite me being 6th generation Australian. I had an embodied experience of how intrinsic to being that place is. To live now, when there is a groundswell of black, white, new and old migrants, forging a third world where we can walk together brings tears to my eyes.....A long time coming.

Welcome to Country is like inviting someone into your home - for your guests to know the boundaries and rules of being in your space. Only Aboriginal elders conduct a **Welcome to Country**. (*Hello, I am so glad you have come for a visit, leave your shoes at the door and please close the door behind you - the cat gets out otherwise. Or when I remind the sulphur crested Cockatoos that visit that I don't appreciate my window frames being bitten.*)

**An Acknowledgment of Country** is for the guest to pay respect to the home and people you are visiting. (*Wow, it is so good to visit you in your home, I really appreciate your dinner offer, I have heard from everyone how delicious your cooking is and sure thing, I will make sure I keep the door closed - can't have this beauty getting out.... Or the cockatoos, thank me with their displays of plumage and their raucous greetings and hilarious antics*)



## ACKNOWLEDGING COUNTRY *By Kylie Cook*

Before you begin reading the article perhaps take a moment to pause and sense your connection to the Country you are on. You may know who the custodial people are where you live or you might like to take a moment to look it up. There is even a downloadable App - Welcome to Country - which will tell you whose country you are on.

I was incredibly fortunate to be at a workshop where Angela Ashley Chiew gave an embodied Acknowledgment of Country, Angela generously gave me her notes for the following Acknowledgment.

I have taken the liberty of updating it for this year's NAIDOC week to make it relevant.



I have also utilised the following page with a few modifications for context.

<https://www.naidoc.org.au/news/2021-naidoc-week-theme-announced-heal-country>

Take a moment to arrive into the space you are in.

I invite you to close your eyes periodically if it feels safe to do so. Tune in and sense yourself, your body; become aware of your breathing, notice what arises for you as you read and connect back to the ground.

Feel the contact you are making with your seat, with the floor. We are all connected to the GROUND; that ground extends in all directions around us and beyond. Visualise that ground extending out from you as you read this connecting all of us on this country.

So much of the work we do in the Feldenkrais method we practice is about CONNECTION - within ourselves, with others, with our environment...

For our nation's first people's, their sense of self, their self-image is intrinsically linked to environment, to COUNTRY.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

I write this during NAIDOC week; and I'd like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout the different parts of Australia that each of us are living/ working from. I speak to you from the





lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. I acknowledge our First Nation People's ongoing connection to land, sea and community. I pay respect to their elders past, present and emerging. I extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the country. Here in Australia we're fortunate enough to have one of the richest and oldest continuing cultures in the world. What a privilege and something to proud of and celebrate.

The theme for NAIDOC this year is – Heal Country! – which calls for all of us to continue to seek greater protections for our lands, our waters, our sacred sites and our cultural heritage from exploitation, desecration, and destruction.

Country is more than a place and inherent to the identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, it also sustains their lives in every aspect - spiritually, physically, emotionally, socially, and culturally.

NAIDOC 2021 invites the nation to embrace First Nations' cultural knowledge and understanding of Country as part of Australia's national heritage and equally respect the culture and values of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders as they do the cultures and values of all Australians.

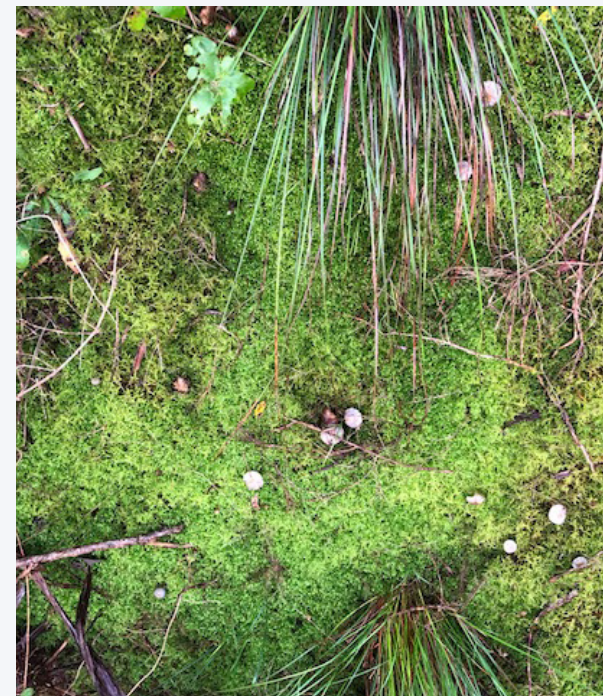
For generations we have been calling for stronger measures to recognise, protect, and maintain all aspects of culture and heritage. Healing Country means resolving many of the outstanding injustices which impact on the lives of First Nations people. It is about hearing and actioning the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which are the culmination of generations of consultation and discussions among their nations on a range of issues and grievances.

After 250 years, the children and our future generations deserve better. We cannot afford to let pass the very real opportunity that now presents itself for reform based on a fundamental change in the relationship Australia has with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Heal Country, heal our nation.

I invite you think about what action/s you could take. Whether that's finding out more about the traditional custodians of the land you live and work on; or Acknowledging Country at the beginning of your workshops or classes if you don't already. This is something we can all contribute to.

There are many ways to acknowledge country and I attended a short workshop during 2021 NAIDOC



Week with Rhys and Emma -the link follows. It was very Feldenkrais - fun, exploring gently, without judgement, with curiosity and that the intention was everything around creating Acknowledgement of Country that works for you and your workshops, lessons, work places.

<https://events.humanitix.com/acknowledgethis>

Using their template, my Acknowledgment of Country for this article starts something like this:

### **Self introduction**

*Wominjeka (Woi-wurrung word for Welcome) I am Kylie, I am very Anglo as far back as my aunt can find down the family line. I was born on the lands of the Kurna people, 7 of my forbears on my mother's side were convicts sent out on ships to this land, on my father's side I am third generation British/ Irish. I have followed in my forebearers footsteps in having criminal convictions - of which I am proud- for protecting Yuin and Monaro Country and the tall trees of this land.*

### **Acknowledge the people who gather and why we meet**

*As I write this, I hope that some or all of you feel that it is possible to do an acknowledgment at the beginning of your workshop or lessons. That you will feel comfortable to make it authentic to you; something you'd feel is possible to say if you don't already. That it doesn't need to be learnt by rote - it can change and embrace your interests or current events. That your intention is what is important. To only do an Acknowledgment if you feel comfortable. That as Feldenkrais Practitioners we are very aware of the importance of ground and that perhaps we*

*can embrace the wider aspects of what ground/Country can mean to all of us.*

### **Perhaps bringing in significant cultural aspects about where you are or a topic that is relevant at the moment.**

*I now live and work on the custodial lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, my home is near the women's business birthing site where William Barack, known as the last chief of the Yarra Yarra tribe, was born. He made the long walk into Melbourne a number of times, past where my house now is, advocating for his people and his right to see his hospitalised child. I think of this resolute, dignified man, walking the many miles to speak with people whose minds and hearts were closed very often. Of the great many steady footsteps his feet made, each landing on the ground; that these steps still echo. That I walk the paths of people who walked here and were a part of this country for hundreds of generations before me. I find it very humbling.*

### **Paying respect**

*I acknowledge the past elders and current elders and am heartened by the many young people who continue to maintain a connection to Country and their living culture. Who help us walk in this third*

*world - where black, migrant and those, who like me, have been born here but whose forbears have strong attachment to other lands, can walk this land together. We can all follow the wisdom of the ancestors to guide us so we can heal Country and ourselves as a nation.*

*I also acknowledge that our good fortune to be here comes at the ongoing dispossession of the traditional custodians and that this causes ongoing harm.*

Of course an Acknowledgment doesn't need to be so wordy or long. It depends on the context, circumstances, your preferences. For my regular yoga sessions I have a movement based practice where after inviting folks to sense their connection through the base of their body to ground, to notice the sounds around them and their breath, I then invite the placement of hands on the ground or body as I acknowledge the peoples upon whose land we practice. I might mention something topical, as we raise our arms to the sky. I acknowledge my teachers and the origins of yoga and then as our hands meet at our hearts I acknowledge all those who are present for taking their time to connect their hearts, bodies and minds. It takes a couple of minutes and is more ritualised. It works well for me in the context of a yoga session.



As a youngster I loved the song *Solid Rock* by Goanna and since then always resonated with the idea that in Australia we live on sacred ground. This idea coloured my world view and led to those convictions! It has helped me overcome the limited history I was taught at school.

I feel fortunate that we live in this time where we get to make these steps at redressing the limited thinking of our past. That we have opportunities to learn about the oldest continuing culture in the world; what Country means. How we can listen and apply this learning; that we can begin to embody the sacred lands we live on. That we get to step into this space and co-create a future that has respect at its core. That we all benefit from a greater understanding, that this ongoing ancient culture is our mutual history and that these steps we take, the language we might incorporate into our Acknowledgment helps to keep this culture alive. I encourage you to look up some of the many Acknowledgments on YouTube. Learn a few words from the language groups where you live (also on YouTube.)

I have recently reached out to a local Aboriginal organisation to offer ATM to elders. I will learn how to make my sessions culturally appropriate. I am excited to have the opportunity to not only make a contribution to wellbeing but also learn to from those who have much to offer - if I make the time to listen.

What steps might you take to bring more awareness, more understanding, more connection, to Country?

Ngoon Godjin (thank you in Woi Wurrung). ■



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For this offer Madeleine can be contacted directly [info@marvellousmovement.com](mailto:info@marvellousmovement.com) or on 0407646000 to order & pay with direct bank deposit in Australia or Paypal overseas.

**\*She would appreciate if you would let your clients/students know of this offer\***



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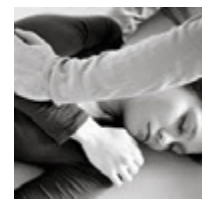


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# The FELDENKRAIS METHOD® Learning Through Movement



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**Staffan Elgelid and Chrish Kresge, from the Introduction**





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# NEXT ISSUE

## NEXT YEAR'S THEME: IMAGE IN ACTION

If we act 'in accordance with our Self-Image', let's expand our collective understanding of Image – what it means, where it forms, how it develops and how we utilize Image in our work.

What is the image of our work from an outside perspective and how might this be portrayed more vividly? How possibilities begin with an image that differs from what is familiar; and what is familiar can understandably be mistaken for fact....

Images that were especially impactful, memorable and made the world of difference for you in ATM or the practice of FI. How you use imagery in your practice. What happens when someone's image of themselves is drastically altered. And how to instill the image of individual agency through our work.

You are invited to submit your contributions by May 31st 2022.

Email contributions, comments, feedback and suggestions to [nationalnewsletter@feldenkrais.org.au](mailto:nationalnewsletter@feldenkrais.org.au)

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