

Please feel free to copy this article for your own use or for a friend, as long as the article remains complete and includes my name as author. All other rights reserved. If you have any comments on these articles, please let me know — knowledge feeds on conversation. Thank you.

An Encounter with Moshe

Scott Clark
© Copyright 2006

What is the Feldenkrais Method for? Most of the descriptions of the Method put movement at the top of the list: move with ease, move more comfortably, and so on. That was certainly what I was looking for when I first began to study Feldenkrais, and it was subsequently very easy for me to interpret everything presented during my Feldenkrais training as being aimed at improving movement. We constantly talked about movement, explored movement, and even imagined movement — if movement wasn't the important part, what was? What else was important?

I hadn't been a Feldenkrais Practitioner very long when Conrad rang me: "My friend Elisabeth says you fix backs. Can you fix mine?" I tried to tell him that I didn't 'fix' anything, but that I might be able to help him learn to move in a way that let his back be more comfortable. "Yes, yes," he said, not particularly impressed by these niceties, "can I see you today?"

An hour later he walked into my room and sat down on the low, padded table. "What is it you do, anyway? Elisabeth only said that you fixed backs." "Well, it's called the Feldenkrais Method," I began, and took a breath before the inevitable explanation of the foreign name — but before I could continue, he exclaimed "Oh, I knew old Feldenkrais!"

At that time, and for many years to follow, I almost never found people who had even heard of the Method, yet here was someone who had an acquaintance with the man himself. That was more than I could claim! I listened to Conrad's story with a mixture of emotions.

"Actually, I didn't meet him myself, but I spoke to him on the phone a few times. You see, a niece of mine had a stroke. She was quite young, in her mid thirties. She lost most of the use of both arms and both legs. When the doctors said that nothing more could be done for her, that her condition couldn't be expected to improve, someone in the family suggested Feldenkrais; I don't remember now how they knew about him. But it seemed like our best hope, in fact our only hope; so several of us put some money together, and we sent her off to Tel Aviv. I believe she stayed in Feldenkrais's house. He worked with her for two or three months, and then she came back home."

When the people who had taught me spoke of Moshe Feldenkrais, it was in the tone of voice one might use to speak of a saint; the stories that they told were uniformly miraculous. So when I asked how much this woman's condition had improved, I was completely unready for Conrad's response.

"No, there really wasn't much change at all. She was still confined to a wheelchair; perhaps a little improvement in one arm." He paused a moment. "But when she came back, she had a will to live, which she didn't have when she went to him."

Conrad and I soon began to speak about what he had actually come for — his back. I listened, and asked, and did the things I knew to do, but a question had opened in my mind, like Pandora's box: what is the Feldenkrais Method really *for*? What *was* Moshe aiming at?