

Dancing With Awareness: An Interview with Rich Goldsand, GCFP

By Nicole Manus*

NM: How would you describe the *Feldenkrais Method*® to a dancer in a single sentence?

RG: The *Feldenkrais Method* helps dancers to coordinate their movements so that they are moving in a more efficient and less painful way.

NM: This is a class that is offered through the dance department but you have students who come from many different disciplines across the university. Who takes *Feldenkrais*® classes and why?

RG: Moshe Feldenkrais, the developer of the Method, was an engineer and a physicist and where he wanted to spend his time and energy was in helping people to mature in such a way that they came ever closer to their human potential. That is what the Method strives toward and we use movement to do it. The work is as applicable to an engineer as it is to a dancer or to a student in interdisciplinary studies. How each one uses the information or integrates it is dependent upon their background, their experiences and their genes.

NM: What happens in a typical class?

RG: There are two ways that you are able to learn the Method. One is a group lesson and that is called *Awareness Through Movement*®. The other means is a tailor-made lesson called *Functional Integration*®. What we do on Monday nights, here at ASU is *Awareness Through Movement*. Typically we start out lying on the floor on our backs, scanning how we sense ourselves on the floor. In the course of the class, we will generally move progressively through two lessons – each one lasting approximately an hour. During the lessons we come back occasionally to scanning and resting and feeling ourselves against the floor and taking note of what changed. What parts of ourselves do we feel differently compared to where we started?

NM: Hmmmm.....*Awareness Through Movement*....I understand how and why the general population could afford to increase awareness of individual movement patterns and behaviors but it seems to me that dancers would be more aware than most of this aspect of themselves. What then is the benefit for a dancer?

RG: In my experience, a lot of dancers are unaware of their movement but they're very flexible. They equate flexibility with awareness but these are two very different things. Awareness, in this context, is sensing how you contract certain muscles, when you contract them and how you can coordinate those contractions with other contractions to help you accomplish whatever the task is at hand. A lot of dancers have a lot of pain – their lower back, their knees, their hips – that comes not so much from the fact that their knees or hips or backs are bad, but that those parts of themselves are contributing more to the specific function or task at hand than is necessary. When other parts of the body are integrated and used more fully, then the knees, hips, etc. are relieved – they don't have to bear so much of the load. At this point the pain either goes away or is significantly lessened. It's almost too simple!

NM: I've heard you say that this class is both the easiest and the hardest thing that a student will ever do. What do you mean by that?

RG: It's the hardest thing you'll ever do because it requires genuine inquiry into yourself. For a lot of people, that can be a very difficult, scary place to go. It can also be a magnificently wonderful place to go.

It's easy because you're doing "easy movement" but then it's difficult because you find out about yourself and some of what you find out is less than what you expected it to be.

NM: When you speak to ‘finding out about yourself’ are you talking purely in terms of movement or is there more to it than that?

RG: The basis of the Method is that there are four different parts of ourselves: feeling (emotional), acting, sensing, and thinking. Everything we can know about ourselves can be encompassed in those dimensions. There isn’t anything that cannot be expressed in these terms. Moshe Feldenkrais wondered how he could best help individuals increase their human potential – or even come to know their human potential. From a scientific standpoint, movement seemed to be the dimension that he could most easily replicate. You can analyze and repeat a particular movement over and over and over and make subtle changes and adjustments to that movement in a very precise way. It’s very difficult, perhaps impossible even, to do the same thing with emotions, for example.

Movement is the catalyst for us. We use movement to better understand the other dimensions of ourselves. So my answer to your question as to whether the work is just about movement would have to be no. But it is the work through movement that helps us to gain a clearer view of our own selves. We discover our blind spots and our biases.

NM: You’ve said that the movement explorations are structured around “easy” movement. Does this mean that the work is accessible to anyone?

RG: Absolutely anyone....people in wheelchairs (my daughter is in a wheelchair and loves the work), competitive athletes, as well as people who are just interested in their own perception of themselves and getting a more accurate sense of who they are... and what that means to them.



NM: As a semester course that meets just once a week for two hours, how far into the work can a person expect to get and can they accomplish much in only 15 classes?

RG: Well, we all start like an onion. We peel off what we can peel off. We start where we start and we can’t do more than that no matter what we do or how much time we have. During the 15 weeks there are some very challenging lessons and some less challenging ones. Neither are meant to be more or less valuable. What is challenging for person A might be very easy for person C. But another lesson that person C explored with ease might cause person A to really struggle. You might find that you struggle immensely with earlier lessons, those that we would consider more simple and yet the more ‘advanced’ lessons somehow make sense

to you. The path is different for each individual and it is not necessarily just a matter of progression. You might have to come back to the so-called ‘simple’ lessons again and again before your body makes sense of them – even if you have integrated more complex information in other lessons. The amount learned is dependent largely on how closely or how intimately you can listen to your own movement. The quieter you can become, the more clearly you can ‘hear’ your movement, the more accurately you can move toward

your intention.

Moshe had a saying that “first you have to know what you are doing before you can do what you want.”

Another famous quote of Moshe Feldenkrais is this: “I’m not after flexible bodies. I’m after flexible minds and restoring people to their human dignity.” What he meant by that was that in doing the work and coming to understand your whole self better through your movement patterns, you are then able to make choices in your intentions, your movements, your emotions. That process of choice brings you to a place where you are more genuine. You don’t move or act in a particular way because someone else said that it was the right way. Rather, you are moving in a way that is genuine to yourself – that honors where you come from.

It is my experience that during the semester, you start to get a glimpse into a place where your thought and your action are separate enough that you have creative control. Understand that there is a moment in time between the thought of an action and the action itself. That moment, that space, is where creativity lives. For dancers, I think that, because of formal training (even with the best of intentions), you are taken away from that space. The *Feldenkrais Method* helps you to find it again.

Richard S. Goldsand was trained in Marin County, California. Rich lectures and teaches at hospitals and colleges in Arizona. He was first introduced to the **Feldenkrais Method** in 1988 through his oldest daughter who was receiving lessons for her own movement difficulties. Rich has worked with a range of clients, from infants to Olympic athletes. He has co-organized the Delman-Questal Associates 1997 **Feldenkrais** Training Program that took place in the greater Phoenix area, along with maintaining his own private practice.

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