

Changing the World by Changing Oneself

The FELDENKRAIS®-Method beyond Introspection

Verena Krausneker

Every man has two worlds: a personal world of his own and the external world common to us all. - Moshé Feldenkrais, Awareness Through Movement, p. 49

I have always been an activist, shaped by the conviction that it makes sense to write letters to the editor. And that marching and being visible at manifestations means fulfilling ones personal responsibility. And that standing up for human rights is an obligation. In my life, strategies of political activism did not include introspection or meditation. After all, the term activism does feature the ‘active’. Actually, my entire working life is dedicated to this activism, essentially to an “improvement of the world”.

The aim of a man in life is his private affair, up to a point. One man dreams of happiness, another of wealth, a third of power, a fourth of knowledge or justice, and still others of equality. But we do not even begin to know the purpose of mankind as such.

- Moshé Feldenkrais, Awareness Through Movement, p. 49

Due to massive problems in my hands, back and shoulders while writing my PhD thesis (I am a sign language linguist), I indulged myself in a training program for Feldenkrais® Practitioners. As a politically thinking person I do know that the personal is political, but it took me more than 10 years before I could start to connect and merge this delicate, slow, non-invasive, intelligent method with my wish that every human should better the world and especially the society she lives in. And this should ne be achieved by being pretty or well mannered, but actively. Many people don’t even know that I am a Feldenkrais® Practitioner, because, frankly, I find other topics for dinner conversations more interesting. In my circle of friends, art, politics, literature, social engagement and clever discourse enjoy a lot of prestige. Matters of the body, health, etc. are not so central.

In order to change our mode of action we must change the image of ourselves that we carry within us. - Moshé Feldenkrais, Awareness Through Movement, p. 10

I did eventually start to feel an urge to unite my different identities and I have spent years thinking about this. What could an exceptionally intelligent method of somatic learning have to do with changing the world towards the better? So far, my thinking has evolved to a point where I can verbalise five realisations:

I. As a physical human being one takes up space in the world. Those who practice Feldenkrais® know where they are. The clearer one knows where one is, the less one steps – at least inadvertently – onto the toes of others. Literally and figuratively.

II. Those who practice Feldenkrais® constantly deal with their own limits. With the limits of what's possible and what one can sense. With the crossing of boundaries and what that can mean or make happen. The more I can use this awareness in my daily life, the more I will act as a mindful person – towards myself.

III. At first sight, the Feldenkrais® Method seems to lead directly to individualism, self-referentiality and maybe also egocentrism. One is always egotistically focused on oneself and takes oneself and what one senses for very important. I find that repulsive and for the longest time it really bugged me. But: Only if you treat yourself well you can treat others well. Only if you know what wellbeing feels like, only if you think it is really OK to strive for it, you permit the wellbeing of others. Only if you listen to yourself and take care of yourself (inside and outside)... you can be at peace with yourself and you can be there for others.

This shifting of the attention inward and outward creates abstractions and words that describe the shift in the position of his personal world relative to the outer world.

- Moshé Feldenkrais, Awareness Through Movement, p. 53

IV. To experience oneself in a Feldenkrais® lesson teaches us that everything can be changed. Most people describe astounding experiences on their quest for movability, excellence or freedom from pain. The Feldenkrais® Method allows humans to experience themselves as potent, self-determined and most of all: changeable. Only those who feel the unconditional confidence in the possibility of change will be motivated to actively take part in that change – of oneself or of the world.

V. The Feldenkrais® Method works exclusively through learning, change of habit and because one accepts responsibility for oneself and the state one is in. Current medical practice often places responsibility in the hands of experts, but by practicing Feldenkrais® one learns: It is I who can achieve change! By dedicating myself. By searching, by spending time, by observing, by learning to compare, by intentionally changing my behaviour. If those are not central bearings of political activism, I don't know what else is.

To my mind, the Feldenkrais® Method can teach us much more than we currently do with it, see in it and put in the foreground.

In those moments when awareness succeeds in being at one with feeling, senses, movement,

and thought, the carriage will speed along on the right road. Then man can make discoveries, invent, create, innovate, and "know." He grasps that his small world and the great world around are but one and that in this unity he is no longer alone.

- Moshé Feldenkrais, Awareness Through Movement, p. 54.

I would be very interested to know from you which areas of your life and your activism you have applied Feldenkrais® principles to.

How, in your experience, does your practice of the Feldenkrais® Method shape your dealings with the outside world?

***About the author

Verena Krausneker is a linguist at University of Vienna. 20 years ago, she co-founded the NGO *ZARA – Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus-Arbeit* (Civil Courage and Anti-Racism). For many years, she volunteered as a board member of the Austrian National Association of the Deaf and as an (again, unpaid) expert for the *World Federation of the Deaf*. Since 5 years, she volunteers in the NGO *Shalom Alaikum – Jewish Aid for Refugees*, where she is active daily.

She is also co-founder of and partner in *Feldenkrais Institut Wien*, www.feldenkraisinstitut.at

FOKUS

2020

