

Embodying Life: An Interview with Russell Delman

By **Cynthia Allen, GCFP**

Russell Delman provides fresh insight into how the *Feldenkrais Method*[®] can meet the needs of a changing world. In the 30 plus years since he began his study with Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, he has trained over 2500 *Feldenkrais*[®] Practitioners around the world and maintained a private practice in California. Along with his wife, Linda (also a *Feldenkrais* Trainer), Russell developed the *Feldenkrais*-India Project, teaching Mother Theresa's Sisters of Charity to work with brain-injured children. Russell's approach to his own life, steeped in Zen, Focusing and Gestalt Psychology, is ever present in his understanding of Dr. Feldenkrais.

CA: Russell, what is your description of the *Feldenkrais Method*?

RD: I don't care for general descriptions because they hide as much as they reveal. Yet, starting broadly, the *Feldenkrais Method* is a way of learning that uses awareness, sensation, and movement. There is emphasis on embodied learning, a learning happening through the whole person.

I find it fruitful to talk about the human needs the Method can address. The *Feldenkrais Method* is relevant for so many different people. This week I will be seeing a young child who has cerebral palsy who is learning to feed himself and to crawl. There is somebody else who has chronic pain in the back. I saw someone this morning dealing with an auto-immune difficulty that includes rheumatoid arthritis. I will have someone later this week from the San Francisco Symphony who began because of carpal tunnel difficulty and stayed because her

sound is improving as she moves with more lightness. Let me see... There are some other people who have had strokes, others who come with a sense of depression, anxiety or basic disconnection from life. I've had people who came because they heard that their golf might get better. The range is huge.



Russell assisting a student in Germany to sense the skeletal interconnections from foot to head.

CA: As a young man the body/mind/spirit connection drew you to Dr. Feldenkrais and his work. Yet, it appears that people mostly seek you for a “physical” concern. How is it that the mind/spirit aspects are opened up for the individual?

RD: I can describe it this way: people often bring their body to be fixed like a car to a service station. The body begins as an “it.”

Right from the start it can be revolutionary when I ask people to sense the living reality of what they are experiencing in the moment. Not just where it hurts but also... “What do you notice as you are sitting here right now?” “I’ve got this pain. I told you about that and that is what I am here for.” “Is there anything else?” “No that’s all.” I might say, “Feel where you’re touching the table, where you are sitting there on your bottom.” “Yeah, I can feel that.” “Does one side feel heavier than the other?” “Wow, I never noticed that. Yeah, this side is heavier.” And we continue from there expanding the experience of now. We might also include feelings, sounds and other aspects of the living moment.

Just in this simple beginning, what do we see? In that moment the inner life is coming alive. It’s not a mind or a body or a spirit but it’s a living unity that the person is entering. That’s the beginning of the *Feldenkrais Method*.

CA: And yet, it seems a leap to accept that simply this awareness makes a significant impact. Can you take us just a little bit further and talk about how awareness is integral to healing and health?

RD: Absolutely. Dr. Feldenkrais held that human consciousness was evolving, and awareness was a relatively new human capacity. We are still just infants in appreciating its potential. This is central to the paradigm shift that this work brings to humanity.

Awareness brings us towards the fresh vibrancy of life while impacting the brain and its functions. The human being is a functional reality. If we look, we see that most of us are separated from the immediacy of life because we are lost in repetitive thoughts and emotions. We think that mind is separate from body is separate from spirit. The *Feldenkrais Method* brings us back to a more complete experience of living.

CA: You also highlight emotions in your work.

RD: I do. Emotions originate as bodily phenomena. Imagine: you hear a strange sound at night, you are alone, you hold your breath so that you can hear better, your heart races preparing for action, alert tension permeates your limbs as you ready for battle or running - we then learn to call this combination of sensations "fear." Nature uses emotion to bring about action as in E-MOTION. The *Feldenkrais Method* can help bring balance to the emotional life and offers an approach to mental distress from a truly different and effective perspective. Moshe found that any emotional state was expressed in a bodily organization. Changing the body pattern can uproot the unsatisfying emotional habit.

CA: For many years, Russell, you've had some very popular Embodied Life™ audio CDs. You have brought the *Feldenkrais Method* to Zen monasteries and retreat centers such as Esalen and the Omega Institute. In those settings, you use both meditation and *Awareness Through Movement*® lessons? Why?

RD: Dr. Feldenkrais encouraged us to bring our own history and passions into our presentation of the work. My connection to Zen, meditation and spirituality is really important and not at all separate from my experience of the *Feldenkrais Method*. They live in me as a unity. When teaching *Awareness Through Movement*, some of that depth of my years of sitting practice comes forward as I encourage people to deepen in the reality of the moment. And the next. And the next.

When I am leading meditation, what comes through is that fleshiness of life so that the experience of meditation is embodied. Zen and the *Feldenkrais Method* are both based in the movement of attention. Zen monks find this approach really deepens their practice and helps them be more comfortable.

CA: How do you find the *Feldenkrais Method* relevant for people on a spiritual path?

RD: People are hungry to enter the “reality” of life, the direct experience of being present. So many of our chronic stress disorders are connected to a disconnection from life, a constant racing to nowhere. The *Feldenkrais Method* can help people to reconnect to the immediacy of the present moment and with the depth of being human.

I love when I can help people who are in pain or not able to do things that they want to do. Yet to be truly healthy and feel truly connected to life many of us need to move from simply feeling good to the larger questions.

I wish to nurture the full human experience so that we can care for the self and our neighbor and the world at large. This is a very important stage in evolution where we are learning to move beyond exclusive self-concern and care for our family/tribe etc. into universal care for all of life. I believe the *Feldenkrais Method* has a great deal to offer in this regard.

NOTE: To hear Russell and Cynthia talk about the *Feldenkrais Method* and more, visit <http://explore.ILCMA.com>.

Find out more about Russell’s work at www.russelldelman.com.