

Dear Students and Teachers of Awareness,

Next week-end, November 8, 9, 10, Linda and I will be offering a special seminar in “Spatial Awareness” in New York City at The Feldenkrais Institute.

We are thrilled to bring these potent, new teachings to you.

For many this subject seems abstract. Below you will find a new writing describing our vision of the importance and value of this theme. We hope this will inspire you to attend the seminar if possible and, if not, that you can enjoy this article.

Special pricing is still available to you. We will do our best to support you in not letting finances stop you from attending.

Sending great wishes for your blossoming Life,

Russell and Linda

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The Liberating and Healing Effects of Spatial Awareness

Hearing the term “spatial awareness”, many think that it is somewhat esoteric, with little practical value. Because it is a central principle of “*The Embodied Life*” teachings, I want to write a brief piece about its liberating and healing effects.

In our (Linda and Russell Delman) collective 75 years of private Feldenkrais practice and almost 50 years as Feldenkrais trainers, we have seen how including this understanding in working with all people - those dealing with pain and dysfunction as well as all of us seeking a more harmonious life - has great, reliable, transformative effects.

Two senses of Space

We work with space from two main, overlapping points of view. First, there is the inner sense of **spaciousness** that is the opposite of feeling compressed, stressed, hurried and pressured. Secondly, there is the awareness of what we

call the “living space” around the physical body through which one moves. From this viewpoint, the outer space is inseparable from the physical body. As Moshe Feldenkrais expressed so poetically in describing the relationship between the inner and outer world: “*without light there would be no eyes, without eyes there would be no light*”.

Working with Spaciousness

When we feel at ease in ourselves and not overwhelmed by inner or outer demands, we naturally have a sense of spaciousness. From the largest point of view, we can say that spaciousness is a quality of Being. As children, this was natural to us. Often, when we are on vacation or simply having a “good” day, this quality is spontaneously experienced. This means that when we are not hijacked by unhelpful thoughts and feelings, not consumed by pain or worry, we naturally can return to this state. Spaciousness is connected to a sense of timelessness in that one feels “I have all the time I need” even when quite busy. How can we, in our busy lives, uncover this quality of Being?

If spaciousness is natural to feeling well, could we cultivate practices that can help us uncover this quality even when in a challenging state?

MIGHT this transform our inner experience?

CAN the neural networks of spaciousness be consciously cultivated?

IS it true that a sense of inner compression exacerbates all painful states whether physically, emotionally or relationally based?

WE answer, “YES” to all of these questions.

This inner sense can be cultivated as a familiar “home base” in three main ways:

First, there needs to be a way of bringing the experience of space within the tissues of the body so that we literally have freer blood flow, thus oxygenating all the cells more regularly. As we learn, through awareness and movement, to enter deeply into the “inner body”, the chronically compressed tissues can release. Through attention, movement and breathing, we literally can grow space within the body. This naturally influences the chemistry of the body including the neurotransmitters and hormones. In the second part of this paper, I will discuss how awareness of external space affects our embodied experience.

Second, it is essential to have ways of working directly with the thoughts and feelings – the stories we are repeating to ourselves often without questioning them.

The old Buddhist story of the “two arrows or darts” is helpful here. The essence of the story is this:

Pain is unavoidable in life.

Our bodies will sometimes have difficulty (no matter how well we eat or how many Feldenkrais lessons we do), our close relations will suffer, the world will disappoint, we all die, etc. This is the first arrow.

The second arrow consists of all the negative thoughts about the first arrow – “why did this happen to me”, “they should not have done that”, “I will never be happy”, “what is wrong with me or the world” etc. The effects of the second arrow(s) are much more painful than the first.

In The Embodied Life School, we work with powerful practices based in a method called Focusing. There are reliable ways of noticing the unhelpful thoughts, sensing their effects in the body and shifting to more life-giving ways of being. Rather than repression, we learn to listen to the message living in the feelings and allow them to transform naturally. We call this listening to the “wisdom body”.

Third, sitting meditation is the most direct way to grow awareness of the sensations, feelings and thoughts that comprise our experience of the moment. Learning to cultivate a curious, welcoming attitude toward even the unpleasant phenomena is incredibly liberating.

All three of these ways of working with awareness, help us to return to the natural “Spaciousness of Being”.

Awareness of External Space

Bringing awareness to the space outside the body influences movement in profound ways. We emphasize two main outer spaces:

The first we call the “personal space” which is approximately the territory at arms length around the body. Whereas many of us tend to shrink into our core when under pressure, filling out this “living envelope” around the physical body is much more effective for maximizing our capability and

growing a sense of confidence. As martial arts masters emphasize, inhabiting this space creates a potent field that not only affects our inner experience but also impacts the world. Some athletes have such a developed “personal space” that they can seemingly control the movements of their opponents. For example, watching some basketball or soccer players move through space, it is as if the defenders cannot enter the field around them.

The second, we call the “greater or larger space” which is as far as one can extend their awareness. When moving through the world, consciously including the spaces of the room in which we are living or the street and buildings in our environment can create an expanded sense of our bodies. Rather than feeling compressed or pressured by the outer world, we can learn to inhabit it with greater ease.

Growing this sense of space has surprising effects on our intentionality and ability to move toward goals. It is as if the future (the world of time) is also a space with which we can interact. This is a complex realization that needs much more “space and time” than this short writing.

In The Embodied Life work, we add awareness of space to many of our Feldenkrais movement lessons. This often influences the experience of pain, dysfunction and compression within the body. We also have developed vertical movements called “Standing Gestures” through which we can directly teach the most essential principles of embodiment. It is surprisingly easy to use parts of these Standing Gestures to immediately impact people’s embodied experience. Thirdly, there are movement practices that connect to the natural world of trees, the sky, and the earth that directly affect our experience.

In our view, it is important for awareness practitioners, whether teachers or those learning to live more embodied lives, to have short practices that can be replicated easily in daily life. When practitioners offer these to their clients, the effect of their sessions will be magnified. For example, helping people to access the sense of groundedness with a long, light spine through a brief awareness/movement experiment is potentiating. Similarly, there are breathing and centering practices that are almost always reliable for shifting one’s inner state. Having brief “go to” practices that can be done anywhere and anytime is extremely helpful.

We find that as one grows a living relationship to space, one can feel more and more at home in most life situations. When one feels supported by the earth as a living being, supported by the atmosphere that is part of us (without air there would be no lungs!), and allows oneself to: 1) fill out the spaces in our inner body, 2) claim the surrounding personal space and 3) live into the greater space, the experience of moving through life can be radically effected.

Far from abstract or esoteric, Spatial Awareness is a direct way of working with embodiment. These principles can be learned and practiced. Whether one is a teacher of movement or simply learning to live more gracefully in everyday life, this awareness is often a potent ally in the process. Truly, one cannot overstate the liberating and healing effects of spatial awareness.