

Movement and Emotions

by Buffy Ownes, GCFP

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Recently, a student approached me at the end of class and asked if experiencing strong emotions while doing Awareness Through Movement® lessons was normal. My answer: “Yes.” Emotions don’t surface all of the time, but it does happen, and the intensity of the experience can vary.

When I first started reading Moshe Feldenkrais’ books nearly 20 years ago, I was completely obsessed with the mind-body connections—specifically how I could shift my emotional base and perspectives by working with my body. I consumed his writings along with those of Ida Rolf, Alexander Lowen, and books like Emotional Anatomy.

There is no tissue that is not “body” and no response that is not “mind.”

--Deane Juhan

At the time, I was really interested in how different patterns of organization play a role in establishing a ‘baseline’ of emotional experience. For instance, one’s tendency to be sad or depressed, angry, happy, elated, open to the world, or



closed off. Then, how would this emotional predisposition inform how we interact with others and how others, in turn, interact with us.

How you are organized isn't the-be-all-end-all, but it is certainly a glorious piece of this wonderful, dynamic, experience called life.

Movement and Touch

We come into this world as moving beings, being touched. Hopefully, we can leave the same way. Whatever our experiences in this life, movement, and touch are almost always involved in some way. Each time we move and each time we are touched, the emotions related to that moment can be stored in our mind and in our bodily tissues. Sometimes these somatic memories are shifted by another experience, but sometimes they can become embodied and influence how we interact with the world around us. This is true for both pleasure and happiness, as well as stress and fear.

In my personal experience, I have noticed two distinct ways that moving and receiving touch with the Feldenkrais Method® has impacted my emotional life – both globally and acutely. It is important to note that in order for me (for any of us) to notice these emotional shifts, we need to be AWARE. Aware of how we move, of our habits of sensing, thinking, feeling and emoting. Awareness is a key. And awareness is a key element of the Feldenkrais Method.

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Now back to my personal experiences...

First: The Global Shift

If we operate under the belief that our thoughts and emotions are grounded in our physical body—the endocrine and immune system, the nervous system, the soft tissue, etc.—then changing our physical self (a.k.a. the body) can change the way we experience our thoughts and emotions. As we experiment with both our patterns of attention and movement, we not only improve our ability to move, but also the way we think and feel. For me, this dramatically transformed my experience of life on a day-to-day basis.

Don't get me wrong, I did a lot of movement, meditation, and mindfulness-based practices before I really began exploring the Feldenkrais Method. But once I started doing Awareness Through Movement lessons on a regular basis, things changed drastically!

Previously, I had experienced a sort of low-grade depression. Nothing major, but a global feeling of heaviness combined with bouts of overwhelm and frustration. To me, this didn't seem like depression—it was simply how I knew life. Although the experience of subtle depression did change a lot over the years before I started exploring movement through the lens of the Feldenkrais Method, (probably

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because I had maintained a pretty strong meditation and yoga practice) I still didn't realize how much better, how much lighter, I could feel.

I believe that one of the main causes of this change is the delicious Feldenkrais quality of moving without an external ideal of a perfect posture, without right or wrong, and with the invitation to find a sense of elegance and ease through my own sensation. All of this combined with re-exploring some of the most basic forms of functional movement created an opportunity for me to adjust my own organization without force and with a compassionate softness that reverberated throughout the rest of my life.

Second: Acute Moments of Intensity

This moment caught me completely off guard!

Most of the reading I had done around emotions and the body and most of the experiences I had were based on the ideas of certain emotions having a fairly universal expression. For example, how smiling or imitating a smile can improve your mood or the physical responses of fear or anger: emotional expressions you are likely familiar with.

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What I hadn't given much thought to was how a traumatic event might leave its own impression. For me, it surfaced through exploring movement with my right ankle.

I had been doing a very simple Awareness Through Movement lesson of how to take my forefoot away from the floor—with my toes, pressing through my heel, from the forefoot itself, and other variations. A few minutes into the movement exploration, I started to have intense discomfort in my ankle combined with a very strong urge to cry (to wholeheartedly sob actually). So, I stopped and rested. Then, I came back to the movement again. Then I stopped. This went on for a while.

I returned to variations of this lesson over several days, with other lessons woven into my exploration that both supported the movement of my ankle while not directly engaging it. My intention was to continue to improve and explore this pattern in a way that also felt safe (i.e. not perpetually triggering that intense emotion).

Eventually, I flashed back to the first time that I sprained my right ankle. It was during a T-Ball game. I had just had an argument with my mother about which pants to wear. Likely, it was more of a stubborn six-year-old temper tantrum than an argument per se. Then BAMB! Out on the field, angry that I didn't get my way

and probably still crying when I ran for a ball, I twisted my ankle in a gopher hole. Carried off the field. Iced. Bandaged. Then out of the game for awhile as my ankle healed.

It was that simple. Nothing too tragic, just an emotional life experience.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Buffy Owens, GCFP, CHC, the founder of Conscious Movements, is a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner(cm) and Certified Health Coach with over 20 years of experience in the mind-body fields. She specializes in helping people with chronic pain learn how to suffer less and enjoy more of life. She's also admittedly addicted to the art of learning, the joys of movement, the wonders of mindfulness & meditation, and the powers of the almighty menu. You can find out more about Buffy and what she offers at <https://consciousmovements.com>