

Isra– Breaking the myth

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Isra is a woman in her thirties, a psychologist in training who knows herself well and verbally expresses herself quickly and clearly. She runs her own marketing company.

The board of the Israeli guild considered hiring her as a consultant, Therefore I offered her an FI lesson as an example and as an experience that I thought would enable her to understand what we talk about in the Feldenkrais method.

When she came into my studio I asked her how she felt. She smiled widely and said that everything was wonderful, she had no problems.

She next told me that since she had founded her company three years ago she had no longer been physically active, and that her conscience was uneasy about her lack of activity. I asked her how she would feel if it were completely OK to do no physical fitness, and if no one would preach at her for her lack of activity. . Her reply was that this was an ideal and unimaginable situation.

The concept that there is a right thing to do, like Isra's belief that she should get more physical exercise, is widespread. Many people believe this idea, and they are relying on some external authority instead of listening to their own needs.

Also, Ika said that since the age of 13 she has experienced pain in her right leg. At that age, she was diagnosed with a benign blood tumor but received no suggested treatment; rather, she has been living with the pain.

I took the opportunity in this one lesson to engage in a dialogue with her in order to teach her more about herself. I love it when curiosity is built within the person I work with.

We started our lesson when she stood up. I asked Ika questions about her standing and about her preferences. For example, I requested that she check different possible distances between her feet. She knew that it was more comfortable for her to stand with a very wide distance between her feet. While

changing weight from the left to the right foot and back, she clearly felt more comfortable standing on her left leg, and conjectured that this was because of the old pain in her right leg. We also checked her turning of the head, which was easier to the left. When I say we checked, I mean that I instructed her to turn her head to look backwards and while she turned I put my hands lightly on her arms, her pelvis, and her shoulders to guide her. When she looked over her shoulder she tended to turn a great deal, and I asked her to reduce the effort. Then she proudly told me that she used to have a large range of motion and that she was flexible and free in her joints. It can be seen that in her wide range of turning.

I noticed that Isra couldn't feel the amount of effort she used, and that she had an image of herself as moving freely. Usually people come to me with a limited range of movement. How can I help her when her rotation is so big already?

Her next remark was that she felt exposed.

Feeling exposed may be the result of an unsafe situation that arises when you are tested or judged and where right and wrong are being evaluated. Asking her a question may have put her in a test situation, a situation that might reveal that she doesn't know the right answer. This is the reason that I stopped asking her questions. I intuitively didn't address this remark.

I asked her to sit down. Ika was surprised when I asked her to turn her head backwards while she was sitting on the bed. She discovered the same pattern as in standing. It was easier to turn her head to the left than to the right. I observed that it was true, and affirmed that her ability to perceive the difference was remarkable.

Her surprise marks the beginning of her curiosity; Ika saw the connection between turning her head in standing and sitting. In response to her awareness, I plan to show her more connections.

I asked her to lie on the table. She chose to lie on her left side, with her legs extended.

What do extended legs mean? This position means that she lies down and makes an effort to balance herself; she is probably uncomfortable and doesn't know it. This position means extension in her legs and lower back.

I resolve to show her different ways of lying on her side. I intend to encourage Ika to explore balance, support and comfort.

When I asked her to bend her knees, it felt more comfortable for her to lie like this. She said this was how she reclined at home, only she didn't think that this position was allowed in my studio.

It happens sometimes that a person feels constrained by the situation in the lesson. She has a preconceived idea of how she should behave an idea of right and wrong which may be the result of her education. In the Feldenkrais Method, I create conditions for her to experience without telling her what is right, so that she will rely on herself.

Later in the lesson Isra asked me if it was OK to fall asleep from time to time and we discussed it.

Here, again is the question of right and wrong. I understand her doubt and her need for reassurance that it is ok to be herself.

The question of sleep has several aspects. One aspect is that when a client falls asleep it is a sign of letting go and of deep relaxation. This relaxation (according to Chava Shelhav) means that the nervous system is open for learning. The learning is happening in the right side of the brain, which is nonverbal and inconsequential. When I talk to a client and get an answer it shows me that the person is half awake. Another opinion (Yochanan Ryverant) is that if I want the student to learn, to feel, to sense, s/he needs to be awake. However, I never wake anyone in FI or in ATM lesson. Falling asleep also means that the client needs the rest. It may signal something about the quality of their sleep.

We explored several positions of her legs, for example, bending in the knees and hip joints in different angles. I asked her to feel the differences between these positions. When she changed positions, there was movement in her hip joint, pelvis and lower back. I put my hands on her right hip joint and lower back, escorting her change of position. She realized that there was a connection between her legs changing position and the movement of the hip joints and lower back. "I never thought about it", she acknowledged.

Touching her makes it possible for her to observe.

Here I have another clue as to how curiosity is developed. She realized how the movement of her leg was connected to the movement of her pelvis. She never thought about her pelvis being involved in the image of herself and her legs. I decided to clarify this issue for her.

I let her compare putting the right leg in front and back of the left leg. My intention was to emphasize the involvement of the lower back and pelvis. She chose to put her right leg in front of the left. Since I started with turning the head in standing, I checked her ability to globally roll when lying on the side. She could roll easily.

At this moment I felt that her ability to roll is the result of her attempt to help me and not due to freedom of movement.

I decided to differentiate the movement by breaking it into small portions. I touched her right shoulder first, then her right hip joint. Then I added the movement of her right knee in the direction of her pelvis. Her reaction was to help me by doing a jumpy movement.

Is she trying to do the "right" thing by helping me? Does she know it? How shall I teach her not to do the "right" thing?

I decided to show her variations in order to teach her not to help.

While I was rolling her, I asked her: **1.** to help me **2.** to resist. Then she performed the movement without me. I described the movement out loud in words. After a short while she allowed me to do the movement for her without her participation. She reported that it was a “weird” sensation.

I think when she said “weird” she meant new sensation. What is new to her? I want to find out. Later she told me that the idea of moving without pain or without effort is very new to her.

While Isra was on her left side, I lifted her right ankle and foot so as to show her that it moved with the pelvis and hip joint. I also moved her shoulder in different directions while touching her along the spine to demonstrate the

connection between the movements of the shoulder and the spine. Here I let her sense, I didn't say anything.

My idea was to make a connection between the function of turning her head and the use of the spine, the movement of the pelvis, leg and shoulder.

Shortly after that she started to move by herself.

To me, this was a sign that she needed a change [adjustment] of position.

I asked her to lie on her back. She asked me what I had been doing before. I chose to talk with her again and explain.

I use her questions to draw her attention to herself, to the possible differences in sensation between her two sides, to her asymmetries. These are examples of awareness.

This is an opportunity for me to suggest that awareness is a tool for life. Awareness is taught by posing questions, especially for clients with curiosity; it opens up a new field of interest in themselves.

I will go on to explore the function of standing, leaning on her feet. We noticed her standing at the beginning of the lesson, now I will address it while she is lying on her back.

Isra is lying on her back now. I compressed through each of her feet to simulate standing on one foot. After a few compressions, I asked her to help me by shortening and elongating first one leg, then the other, and then the two legs alternately. She noticed the role of the pelvis in bearing weight on each foot, and said it reminded her of walking. She also said she noticed the twisting of her spine.

When she mentioned walking, I said that it was a good idea and that soon we would check the same function in standing. I didn't understand her use of the word "twisting" here, but I decided not to ask her to clarify her meaning. I assumed she meant that she felt her spine as force went through it.

Isra rolled to lie on her right side now. I initiated the global movement of rolling her whole trunk back and forth and then differentiating the trunk. This time I

pointed these options out by asking her to pay attention to her upper and lower back in separate rolling and in the entire movement.

I helped her feel her spine by touching the vertebrae gently, one by one. Ika commented that it was quite an experience to feel her spine without pain.

I also exposed her to the possibility of different ways to move: big and small, slow and fast.

As the lesson was about to end I let her roll on her back. There were some surprises in store for both of us.

She commented that she felt straight and the sensation was comfortable; she also said that she had no idea that such straightness was possible. She said that it was nice to stretch out and lie quietly on her back, to breath deeply and feel full contact with the mattress. She asked me if it was indeed possible that after such short and small movements the change could be so prominent.

She couldn't believe her own sensations and she needed verification from me that it was really happening. I think letting go of the constant effort enabled her to feel all that change. The next step was to verify her sensations and check them in sitting and standing; in other words, to integrate her movements.

When she sat on the table, she was again surprised at how straight her back felt. She told me that keeping her back and shoulders straight had been a constant effort. Now she felt that being straight and upright was easy and natural. When she turned her head backwards left and right in sitting, she moved only her head. This came as another surprise to her. She used to overdo the movement using her entire back, hands, and pelvis with a lot of effort. When I asked her to turn her entire body, she did so with a smaller range of movement than at the beginning of the lesson.

The idea of a definitive range was pleasant to her; Isra's realization that turning may be small and easy was the reason for her wide smile. I assume that the experience of movement without effort, movement with support, gave her a sense of quality that she now looked for in sitting. I also think the effect of small movements was a new sensation to her and she enjoyed that.

The next step toward integration involved standing on both feet. Isra leaned more on her right leg. Though it wasn't her habitual way of standing, it had become possible and comfortable. She looked backwards to both sides, and discovered the limits and the ease of her movements.

When she was ready to leave my studio, she said that our lesson was a huge and unexpected experience for her, a total change in the basis of her thinking and the axiom by which she, and many others, live their lives. While saying this she shifted her weight back and forth to her right leg; I noticed her movements and told her so. She smiled at me and observed that in Feldenkrais we are **breaking myths** on many levels and changing basic conventions.

I kept silent, deciding to let her go and be with herself. I offered to talk with her later in the week to explore more possibilities for our marketing project.

This one lesson revealed so many directions to explore further. I stayed with the idea of giving her a small taste and some small beginnings, noticing that it doesn't often happen that a student realizes so many issues in one session. Her lesson was a combination of FI with a verbal dialogue between us. She was impressed by the small amount of movements, by finding connections among body parts in the movements, and with sensing herself. She was able to listen and communicate her sensations, be curious, and find new options for comfort. She was happy to learn that there isn't any right and wrong, and that everything turns into a question with possible answers that she herself will find. We also addressed the concept of effort, which may influence other areas of her life.

I explored the function of rotation by breaking it into small movements, connecting and integrating it again in different postures at the end of the lesson. Isra was able to move less with less effort and be pleased with the results. This happens when she uses more of herself and senses herself more clearly.

Isra's parting sentence is a summary of what I myself have already experienced, but her exact phrasing, "breaking of myths," is brilliant in my opinion. When clients come in with an acute or disturbing problem, they want a solution or instant relief. They have an expectation and a measure to know how was it.

This lesson had no specific target to achieve. It was a purely educational situation that led into exploration. I hope for more teaching experiences of this kind. I hope that people will come to learn not only because they hurt. I hope they will be open to their sensations and let change happen. A person who is attentive to himself will be sensitive to others.

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