

The Feldenkrais Method® and Its Application to Riding

Tuesday, September 09, 2008

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Do you know that working with Feldenkrais® can make you a better rider?

As a human and rider, we move the whole day. We are unaware of a lot of our movement and we do not think when we move. We are busy with what we have to do and not with how we are going to do the movement. When you are aware of the how of a movement you can experience an easier, more supple way to move. This seems a lot like Centered Riding :>))



This is the idea behind the Feldenkrais Method. The Feldenkrais Method was originated by Dr Moshé Feldenkrais (1904-1984), a Ukrainian-born Jewish physicist and judo practitioner who moved to Israel and eventually became an Israeli. Dr. Feldenkrais presented a view that good health means functioning well---working well, having satisfying relationships with emotional maturity, able to access a full range of responses to any situation ("Awareness Through Movement®"). He asserted that his method of body/mind exploration leads to improved functioning (health) through individuals becoming more aware and finding improved use; this focus on exploration and awareness is typified by his statement "What I am after is more flexible minds, not just more flexible bodies". Mabel Ellsworth Todd, the woman who worked with Sally Swift, is cited as one of the persons who influenced Dr. Moshé Feldenkrais.

The basis of movement is skeleton anatomy. The muscles are second and are for control. Balance is action. Movement is always the whole movement of horse and rider. Do you know where the movement of your body stops during horse riding? Is your body moving with the horse? Better riding starts with awareness. Good teaching does also. As an instructor, specifically a Centered Riding instructor, watch where the movement of the skeleton stops; then you see where the force stops. The force is moving through the skeleton. The skeleton is the railroad track, the muscles are the train. When the railroad track is working, the muscles are doing their work right.

There are 4 parts in the journey of working with the Feldenkrais Method:

1. **Awareness:** if you know how you move, you can change (for example: do you know where your seatbones are?)
2. **Differentiate:** This means you make the movement smaller. When you start to become aware of the movement, you notice the difference (for example: are your seatbones pointed to the ears, the tail or the back of the horse?)
3. **Choice:** If you can differentiate, you have a choice. You can make the choice to change. You can do your movement the old way or the new way.
4. **Freedom:** The first three principles give freedom. If you know how you learn, you can learn everything.

How can the Feldenkrais Method help you as a rider?



Working with Feldenkrais helps you to discover how to use your bones in support of the body instead of using your muscles. Feldenkrais teaches you to get a better balance, a better feeling and the experience of more freedom in your body. This means your horse can move better. Communication between horse and rider is affected by how the rider sits and moves. The Feldenkrais Method can also be very helpful when you have pain in the body, back pain, limitations of an old injury or limitations you didn't know you had. Movement improves with the four parts of the journey as written above. (Photo: The rider's hand is placed on her back

for awareness)

Using this method on and off the horse helps you to have more relaxed shoulders, softer hands, hip

joints (and other joints) that can move. You will develop awareness of how a neutral pelvis feels, how soft knees and ankles feel. Breathing will be easier. You become more aware in the use of your eyes. The Feldenkrais Method gives choices in movement, awareness and balance which are both very important parts of horse riding.

Here is a simple / easy exercise to do based upon the Feldenkrais Method. The most common position for Feldenkrais lessons is lying on the floor. This exercise is on a chair, however, because it relates to riding. (making turns)

Be aware that you move very slowly, this brings awareness that you need to get a higher quality of movement.

Sit on a chair (not leaning back) and look to the right side over your shoulder. Look to the farthest point (most distal point) you can see. Be aware of the way how you are doing this, what your habit is. Where is your weight in your seatbones? What are your eyes doing? Are you pushing on the ground with one or another foot? Is the movement going freely or does the movement stop somewhere in the body? You will notice this only when you move slowly. Go back to your basic seat. (This is the test move).

Turn your head to the left and shoulders to the right side and look to the left.

Next: Turn your head to the left side, your shoulders to the left side and look to the right side, then: turn your shoulders to the right side, head left and look to the right side,

Next: turn your shoulders to the right side, head left and look to the left side.

Next turn your head, shoulders to the left and look to the left side.

At least turn right again, and let the movement go through the body. Is there a change in the movement? Where is the weight in your seatbones? Do your legs move with the turn? Do you feel the diagonal better? Can you look farther then the first time? If not repeat every movement again and be aware to move slowly.

There are a lot of different movements in The Feldenkrais Method - somewhere around 1000. If you want to know more about Feldenkrais lessons, go to a certified Feldenkrais® practitioner for a lesson. Even if it's without a horse, your body will learn.



Photos: In the first photo, the rider sits crooked in the saddle. In the second photo, the rider sits straight after the exercises.