

## **Move Better, Feel Better: Feldenkrais Awareness Summit 2020**

### **Alexander and Feldenkrais®: What's the difference?**

**May 7, 2020**

Cynthia Allen (00:00)

Hello everyone Feldenkrais® Awareness Summit, Move Better, Feel Better. I'm Cynthia Allen and I am very happy to have with us from Australia, David Hall.

David started out as an actor<sup>i</sup> and voice teacher and from there, he went to become practitioners in both fields of the Alexander technique and the Feldenkrais Method®. He's also a Feldenkrais® assistant trainer and he's part of the Bang Bang Salsa Dance School in Sydney, Australia. It's just such a great name. Welcome, welcome David.

David Hall (00:36)

Thank you very much.

Cynthia Allen (00:38)

So this whole Bang Bang salsa thing seems kind of interesting to me and I know it's not our topic but why don't you just tell it was an interesting thing.

David Hall (00:36)

I was doing a personal growth course and we needed to do a community project that involved at least 20 people and you know, I was already running movement classes and we're learning salsa, so I thought, I'll put some salsa classes on and this fabulous Brazilian man, 75 year old Brazilian man who became a mentor and had him as a teacher and I organized it like I've organized nothing before, I think

and we had 100 people turn up on the first night for a 10 week course and it was amazing.

I brought this beautiful PA and collecting all this music and we ran that school for 15 years and I began teaching beginners after about a year and then we had a Cuban man teaching Afro-Cuban.

It was a lot of fun.

The approach to movement in salsa is really different, it's really grounded in both flamenco but more so African religion, African dance and it's a way of communicating and with the divine. There's this thing called clave in salsa. It's this three beats in one bar, two in the other and for Cubans, clave is like Om is for the Hindus.

It's the universal vibration from which everything is born and the music is so infectious and dancing with someone, just the skill of partner dancing was

such a beautiful thing and to work with people who are challenged emotionally, who don't dance because Australia, we're not really a dancing culture, was a wonderful opportunity to touch people and to get them to feel the space between each other and how they move so it was really like one, long, extended ATM each class.

Cynthia Allen (2:50)

Yes and just so people will know, ATM stands for Awareness Through Movement®.

David Hall (2:56)

So yeah, so it has to be very lovely experience on all fronts and I learned some things about salsa that I didn't know, right there.

Cynthia Allen (03:04)

So thanks for sharing that with me.

David Hall (03:06)

Yeah, there's more on my website. There's an article, two articles about it.

Cynthia Allen (03:12)

So actually, we invited you here to talk about the Alexander technique, even though you're both an Alexander and Feldenkrais® practitioner. I know you're gonna put some of both in the mix but maybe you could get us started with your experience with Alexander?

David Hall (03:26)

Sure, it's an amazing thing, it's so subtle. Feldenkrais® is subtle, this is really subtle.

My first experience of it is a good case in point. I was studying yoga and an English Alexander teacher, who was also a yoga teacher, came and gave a lecture at this school. It was an iyengar yoga school and it was interesting but not that interesting but when the teachers who accompanied him walked round, started working with people, it was amazing. This teacher actually stood behind me, she placed her hands very lightly on my ribs and from the moment that she touched me, I had this different access to the sense of my body, to the sense of life in my body and I was a voice teacher at the time and immediately, my breathing changed, I relaxed more through my torso and there was just this continual process of everything beginning to open up inside me and she was just holding on to my ribs.

It was a really compelling experience. Then I sought out a local teacher and began to have lessons and after about a dozen lessons, I was just thinking, this is amazing. Exactly what I want to be doing and joined a training course and that

went on for three years and then at the end of that and I discovered Feldenkrais® halfway through, so I was halfway through that course, I was also going to Awareness Through Movement® workshops and anyway, that course finished and then the Feldenkrais® training began, so I did that directly after, a beautiful process.

Cynthia Allen (05:30)

Yeah, back to back, wow.

David Hall (05:33)

That's quite an initiation into the world of somatics.

Cynthia Allen (05:37)

So let's talk about this compelling work of the Alexander technique. I've had just a tiny little smattering of it, really small and I would agree, 1 in that tiny little smattering, the touch of the teacher was phenomenally subtle and very potent.

Like really, it's hard to understand why I was responding, considering how subtle her touch was. So there's something quite lovely in the work and maybe you can just start it with the beginnings of it.

David Hall (06:11)

The beginnings of the work or?

Cynthia Allen (06:13)

Yeah, the beginnings of the work. What was the context in which it arose?

David Hall (06:23)

Yeah, interesting thing. Just about the quality of touch, there's something I could add to that first although the way I explain it to people, the thing that's really emphasized a lot in Alexander training is the organization of your own body, in order to bring about changes through your hands.

So in the first year of Alexander training, we just work on ourselves and teachers work on us. In the second year, you work on yourself by placing your hand on someone else's body but you're still just tuning in to what your own experience is and sensing what it is you can feel through your hands.

In the third year, then you start to really pay attention to the students and assist them. But so much of the changes come about through this subtle re-organization of your own body.

Should I give Alexander's story?

Cynthia Allen (07:34)

Absolutely.

David Hall (07:35)

Okay, well he was a really interesting guy. He was born in Tasmania in 1869 and that's an outpost of the British Empire, it's an island off the South of Australia.

It's really in a background and it's interesting in that it was 30 years prior to his birth, there was a major genocide in Tasmania.

Virtually the entire aboriginal population was wiped out and I think this has an influence.

There's that and the fact that there was a penal colony when it began, Australia. It really shapes the technique. Moshe had a genocide, that happened when he was 35 and it was after he was born but it was there before Alexander was born and the idea of the convict stain was something which many Australians sought to get away from.

Cynthia Allen (08:51)

The convict stain?

David Hall (08:53)

Yeah, this idea that you're a colonial or a convict in a lesser value than an Englishman. It's part of the racism of colonialism, really. But it's funny, up until the 1950s, people here in Australia still referred to England as the home country and that changed after that, with my generation, it all began to shift and particularly as the British Empire collapsed and the Americans sort of inherited or took over and then they became more influential. Australia's always been a client state.

Well, since it's been colonized by Europeans but the effect of the penal colony meant that people tried to hide that. So really, Alexander thought to himself, was trying to pass himself off as an English gentleman and his grandfather was transported to Australia and he was a participant in the Swing Riots, which were these agricultural rebellion.

Similar conditions to now, where people had land that they could work on, these small tracts of land and then all of a sudden, they privatized it and it just disinherited a lot of poor people and started doing workplace contracts and people revolted and a lot of them were transported.

That was in the 1830s, that was happening. Alexander's father was a blacksmith and they lived up in the North of Tasmania.

He was not the strongest person and he was lucky enough to have a very good teacher who took him under his wing, was hoping Alexander would become a teacher.

He was a very mercurial person, Alexander. Very thorough, very expressive person as well and deeply interested in Shakespeare and he decided not to become a teacher and to become an actor.

Not too much work for actors in Australia at the turn of the century but he used to give recitations of Shakespeare and poetry and bits of prose and did really quite well. But he had this problem with his voice.

His voice used to get so hoarse, he could barely speak and everything he tried didn't really work. Anyway, between the ages of about 21 to 25, he had the realization that maybe it's something that he was doing with his body that was causing the problem. So he set some mirrors up and he began to watch what he was doing and first, he couldn't notice anything but after a while, when he looked more closely, he began to notice that before he moved, he'd do this funny sequence activities.

He'd tighten the muscles at the back of his neck, he'd pull his head back and down, he'd take a gasping breath and if he was speaking, then he'd brace himself. And he tried to not do it and found that he couldn't. That the habit was far stronger than his willpower and he realized also that it wasn't just before he spoke that he was doing that but this same pattern of unnecessary movements would occur in varying degrees, no matter what he was doing and anyway, he taught himself to not do that and not only did his voice problem disappear but there was this general improvement in everything that he did and the change was so marked that people started coming up to him and say, what have you been doing, can you help me? And he looked at them and he noticed that they too, before they moved would squash themselves up in this particular way and they weren't aware of it. If he could help them become aware of that, then they too would experience this general improvement and an absence of some of those symptoms.

And he had the major discoveries, the major solutions between the ages of 21 and 25. He had teaching rooms when he was 27 in Melbourne and then, when he was teaching his techniques, a lot of people, when he'd do performances, they'd say wow, your voice is so amazing, can you help me? And so he must have really been doing something quite good and there's no footage of him speaking but there's a little bit of footage of him sitting and talking and teaching, which I have links to that, you can show people to look at his hands in particular. He went to England when he was 35, about 1904 and sought to make himself, he found a

man servant and nice accommodation and fine clothes because as he said, unless you appear to be the right sort, you couldn't get anything done there and he attracted leading actors of his day and many scientists and then his technique became known. Between the ages of, I think its 45 and 55, he went to America as well. Trained his first teachers in 1931, three year training course and died in 1955.

Cynthia Allen (14:43)

So he was definitely a predecessor for Feldenkrais® by quite a few years.

David Hall (14:50)

Yeah, Feldenkrais® met him when he was 45. He may already have read his books. Knowing Moshe, probably definitely and Alexander was 80. There's an interesting story about that in that Moshe goes to visit Alexander and he has an interview with him and he would've felt Alexander's hands and Moshe, I remember him saying in the Amherst training, Alexander had the most amazing hands in the world and so Alexander interviewed him and then he sent him off to another teacher named Walter Carrington who he had lessons with and that was 1949 and then Moshe brought "Body and Mature Behavior" along, showed it to Walter Carrington who showed it to Alexander and Alexander summoned him and said, what's all this?

You've taken my ideas and there's no reference to me in the book and Walter Carrington said it was the only time he saw Moshe nonplussed.

He didn't know how to answer. And I read that and I think, he seems a bit precious about it or something but it's worth remembering that in the latter years of Alexander, or the previous six years,

Alexander had undergone a court case with the head of physical education in South Africa named Dr. Jokl who accused Alexander of being a quack, because it was becoming popular in South Africa and there was this long court case, took six

years and Alexander's work was exonerated and he was able to sue Dr. Jokl and in 1949, the year after that case was settled, they appealed and the appeal was thrown out but nevertheless, it would've been a stressful time for Alexander. He'd already had a stroke when he was 78, I think but had recovered from it, so he's probably pretty stressed or sensitive about someone taking his work or doing something with it.

Cynthia Allen (17:03)

That's very interesting, David. I think it is, of course important to remember, first of all, he'd invested a lot of his years in his work and he had this lawsuit but then you have Moshe, did to him look like, hadn't really, perhaps had not, he didn't have an understanding that Moshe already had a considerable amount of time put into developing his own thought and understanding, that that wasn't all new for him when he began his work with Alexander.

David Hall (17:36)

Yeah, I'm sure he would've read Alexander's books.

Cynthia Allen (17:43)

Yeah and he would have already produced--

David Hall (17:45)

Probably his own ideas, god, he's got so many other ways he's coming from and I think it's unfair to accuse Feldenkrais of just saying he stole the ideas. Alexander worked with this guy named Del Sade. I don't know much about the Del Sade but that has similarities but as with all of this work, it's not something you inherit.

You actually have to make it your own.

Cynthia Allen (18:09)

Well and we know that Feldenkrais® already at a young age was involved in movement from a very different perspective, so you might talk just a minute or so about that to give us a flavor of how these two men came with some things that were similar but also some pretty big differences.

David Hall (18:27)

Yeah, they're fundamental differences.

It's interesting, I think the weaknesses of the methods, because I think both men felt dissatisfied at the ends of their lives.

They hoped they had something that could change culture, which was the answer and they're both disappointed and with good reason because both of them, the work really sits firmly within that tradition of philosophical inquiry or shamanism where people try to make sense of their lives and improve the quality of their lives through paying attention to what's actually there, paying attention to themselves and that has to be an individual pursuit.

You can lead people some of the way but at some point, they have to be at the coalface on their own and they have to make the work their own and Feldenkrais used to say that people need as many lessons as they were old.

Alexander, they had to have read his four books and then they had to have 40 lessons, one every day, in the first month, in order to learn from him and it does actually take a lot and that's the value of the work. It's not something that you do that you can break down into a few principles and say, you just learn this and then everything's fine. It's a way of working, it's a way of being aware of yourself, relative to your environment and developing that.

Just continue to inquire to see how you can refine that process and they both came about it in different ways and it's interesting that the weaknesses in the legacy that they left, I think relate to their strengths in that Feldenkrais was strong. I mean, you know, a 15 year old turning up in this dangerous place, almost the prelude to a war zone where there are knife fights and things.

He's the one teaching the adults self-defense at 15! I mean, he's gotta be really confident and extremely strong and capable. Capable, a lot of things that just came easily to him. 25, writing a chapter to the book on the unconscious.

He's just clever and able to do things and that's something that he didn't have to think about.

Whilst his technique is focused on learning, it doesn't contain the steps that he went through capability and strength and so I find that many people doing Feldenkrais® can be a bit floppy in the way they're organized.

They get loose, they're really in tune and they can adapt themselves in different ways but they don't have this sense of strength that a fighter has and they don't have the capacity to do a lot of stuff, taught to live the sort of, I can't remember how Moshe used to phrase it, make a good account of themselves, that's it and Alexander, he's expressive and he'd light up a room when he walked into the room.

You look at the little video of him and his eyes flashing about, he's got this mercurial sense, he dressed smartly, and he was really expressive.

And he's big, crowning achievement for him was when he did a performance of "The Merchant of Venice" in London, I think it was, using his students as the rest of the cast and to prove that his system could help people control their nerves but for him, it was this turn as Shylock was his crowning glory and he received this long, standing ovation.

He thought it was for his acting but really, it was for the legacy of his work and the thing is, the work doesn't really address the steps that he went through to become that expressive and to seek out literature in the way that he did and in his writings, he's not the best writer.

It's so dense, the text, it's difficult to read but consequently, without that in his system, there's a tendency for many people learning Alexander technique to look a bit wooden, because they're learning a principle in how they carry themselves, or how they organize themselves to move and if they're not exploring self-expression very much, then it's easy for them to just look as if they're sitting at a garden party in Buckingham Palace or something, feeling awkward.

Cynthia Allen (23:29)

So for you, the contrasts are maybe that the Feldenkrais® practitioners tend to be a little more floppy or not organized for power and for Alexander teachers, perhaps, they tend to be a little bit more wooden.

David Hall (23:45)

I'm talking about the common perception, because it depends on, there's so much scope.

Everyone who trains in the methods, they all have this experience of, you can't just copy it, you have to make it your own.

So everyone brings their own handwriting to it, as Moshe says and there are many Feldenkrais® practitioners who do do all of this, all the cooler martial artists for a start, who are very strong and if you learn to move from the pelvis, you can be very strong but you actually have to work on that. You can't really characterize the techniques, or it's really hard to distinguish them.

People ask me what the difference is. It's an impossible question, because for everything I say, oh that's the Alexander technique, this is the Feldenkrais Method®, there'd be a practitioner who would say the opposite, based on their experience. But they do have something that's quite unique. They do have these jewels in them that are similar.

Like Moshe's idea of observing yourself without correction.

Just pure genius and you combine that with his statement about

"Find your true weakness "and surrender to it.", absolutely ingenious statement and as a way of working to allow yourself to discover more and more and Alexander's idea that, he called it faulty sensory appreciation but the idea that your sense of feeling is based on your experience.

So what feels right is really what feels familiar, not necessarily what is right.

So you can't do what's right if your idea is right is wrong.

So he had this fundamental idea of needing to stop and that was one of the interesting things about his process, in that when he was working out what was going on with his voice problem, he had these mirrors set up.

He'd have set up one in the corner and another one at an angle, so that he could look straight ahead and he could see a profile and so he could tell if he was tightening up and scrunching himself up and he did that for a long time but of course, he would continue exploring in other rooms of the house and after a while, he got bored using the mirrors and he kept on going on with his exploration, trying to find out what he was doing that was causing problems.

Then one day, he comes back to using the mirrors and discovers, to his horror, that when it feels like he's doing one thing, when he looks in the mirror, he's doing the opposite.

He tries a number of experiments and sure enough, he realizes that he can't be sure what he's doing, he's got no idea, actually, what's going on in his body.

And this lead to this idea of inhibition, where he decides to not do the things he knows are obviously going to be interfering with his voice. So don't tighten his neck, don't take a gasping breath. Just keep yourself still.

So what he would do is, he would go to speak and then he would, if he saw himself tightening in his neck, he'd just stop and let that go and he'd keep his neck relaxed and then he'd go to sleep again.

If he tightened up again or if he noticed tension somewhere else, then he'd stop and not speak again. And he just kept on doing that and the more he did it, he began to get a sense of what he was looking for, based on the areas of his body he was feeling tightening up all the time.

So, he didn't know how to change it he knew if he could stop himself doing those things, he'd solve his voice problem.

So he set them up as a series of what he called directions, the four primary directions and they were a description of a well-organized body and they are, I'll say the names,

"Let my neck be free, in order that my head "may go forward and up in such a way my back "can lengthen and widen, in order that my knees "may go forward and away."

So what he means, the head on my neck be free, you're sensing the whole body, you sense each of these directions relative to the whole body and so the neck is free, in order that and everything happens so that the other can happen.

So your neck is free in order that your head may go forward and up.

So you consider, your head sits on top of the skull, here directly below the ears, if you put your hands near the mastoid process. I think inside there, you've got these two little grooves and there's two little bumps from the skull that sit in there and there just is this ticking. The center of gravity of the skull is actually forward, at the point where it's supported so the head by itself will just fall forward but there's this tiny movement of the skull on top of the neck that's controlled or mediated by these tiny little muscles that go from the skull to the first two vertebrae.

Third most sensitive muscle group in the body, after the eye and the tongue.

And when the head falls forward, the muscles in the back are stretched, it sends a signal just into the brain stem and then a signal comes back saying tighten up, it goes okay, pulls the head this way and then the ones in the front are stretched.

They send a signal into the brainstem and then the head comes forward and you know, it's a feedback loop about that big and I can't remember how fast the nerve signals are traveling in that thing but it's not something you can do consciously it's something that you just have to allow to happen.

So this head forward and up is not up that way, it's just forward and up that way. It's this delicate balance of the skull on top of the spine and that freedom in the neck and the freedom of the head on top of the spine happens in order that the whole back lengthen and widen.

When I'm thinking of the back lengthening and widening, I'm thinking of the whole torso.

When I'm thinking of the length, I'm thinking the legs, I'm thinking of the width, I'm thinking of the arms they're like the expression of width and the back is long

and wide in order the knees may go forward and away and if the knees are gonna bend anywhere, they're gonna bend forward. We're not like giraffes where our knees bend backward and away is away from the center.

So what he would do is, he would just think these directions without doing them and that's the essential thing about the Alexander technique, it's a non-doing technique.

Where Feldenkrais is more a doing technique, do things in all sorts of different ways and explore it in different perspectives you make discoveries and refine the body image.

In Alexander technique, what you're doing is you're starting with your sense of balance and looking for it and you're looking for what's interfering with it.

So you just let yourself be where you are.

It's observation without correction, just like Moshe and you think through these directions, you scan your attention through your body, looking for anything that's interfering and if you've noticed the tension, you let it go. If you can't, you just move on with the next direction, you keep sweeping your attention through the whole body and then you go to move.

And it's one thing to sit there and to spread your attention and to find this point of stillness.

When you go to move, it becomes more complicated, of course, particularly depending on what you're doing and so what he would do is, he would stand in front of the mirrors and think through these directions and then he would go to speak and if he felt any tension that would interfere with his directions, he'd stop speaking and let it go. And at first, he'd notice it when he was already speaking and then he'd notice it just before he started to speak or at the moment of speaking.

Then just before he'd start to speak, then he realized it was actually when he thought about speaking that he could feel the sensations going to those parts of the body that were gonna trigger. When he was able to inhibit that, as he said, to stop that and to maintain this freedom of balance, then he was able to speak without problem.

Cynthia Allen (32:48)

That's really quite a remarkable amount of self-practice, right?

David Hall (32:52)

Yeah.

Cynthia Allen (32:53)

We're talking about hours and hours and hours.

David Hall (32:56)

Hours and hours and hours and it's four years, actually six years before he had teaching rooms, before that was what he was doing but four years in particular, about 10 years for the whole process and of course, like Moshe, he refined his technique over the years for the rest of his life.

And after a while, I can't remember when it was, he found that he could use his hands, at first he wasn't using his hands but after a while, he realized he could use his hands to place them on somebody's body to help them become more aware of what they're doing and to give them this sense of where they're going and then there's this beautiful thing in Alexander technique, lengthening and widening, where you sort of think yourself free.

It's the most amazing thing to learn.

Cynthia Allen (33:53)

Can you lead us--

David Hall (33:54)

Yeah, I'll lead you through it.

I'll relate the story, this lesson I had with an American teacher.

Actually, it was the first person to be qualified by Alexander and that was because she had to go back to Nebraska, where she lived, Marjorie Barstow.

Amazing woman, I saw her, she came out here to Australia in '93, I think and saw the Alexander teachers, was going doing work with them. She'd evolved a different way of teaching.

There's quite a few different styles of teaching the Alexander technique as well, based on the people who came after him but she had this style where she worked in groups and she would work for people, slowly, not for a long time.

Anyway, she had this incredible direction, we call it and that's capacity when you place your hands on someone's body and you give this sense of length and width, you help them become aware of what they're doing and to stop what they're doing to keep themselves soft and at the same time, give this sense of length through the body and width.

And so I asked this question, I said, "How do you get this really strong direction? "What is it you have to do?" and she chuckled, she's very laid back. Midwestern horse rancher

I think, I can't remember what the farm was about and she got out of the chair and she got out of the chair and she walked over behind me and she just placed her hands loosely on the back of my neck and it was just amazing.

Right from my head, my neck and my spine just sort of went oomph. It was like I was disemboweled, it was just everything inside me just sort of dropped out.

And it was about 10 or 15 seconds, that happened, everything just let go and then she just lifted me out of the chair. It was like nothing to get out of the chair but it was this sense of everything dropping away and that's a sense of where she was.

When she was over here for that tour, she'd say, "I'm going to bed now" and she'd go and lie down and she'd do this process Alexander had. It was the only exercise he used, called the whispered Ah. Actually, that's one of the other things that's different about the Alexander technique to Feldenkrais, is he thought that

exercise was always going to be a problem because people's sense of their body was going to be a problem.

The pattern of misuse, he used to call it would be there when the person does the exercise. If they do strengthening exercise, you'd just strengthen up that pattern of misuse and as such, he didn't really like exercise but he did this one thing called a whispered Ah and he described it as a process that you use to observe the way you're using your body and that is, just observe your breathing, just allowing to be as it is, then you slowly open your jaw, you think of something funny and smile.

So you get this sense of opening, right through to your ears, smiling ear to ear and then you breathe out with a (takes audible breath) and then you let your breath go.

And the breath is free and he maintained that doing that, you could discover everything because this area through here, through the mouth and nose.

He doesn't spell it out like Moshe did, there's not as much detail but the actual practice of it is brilliant and it's this idea of being able to lengthen and widen, it's fabulous.

Where you just think of your body and you just get this sense, without doing anything, that's the key, you can't do this until you learn think of yourself lengthening.

All of these small things that you shouldn't repress a yawn, that means you're relaxing, if you do that. So yawn freely, please.

Cynthia Allen (38:19)

People couldn't see me right then but I did, I was thinking about the lengthening and the whole of it, just thinking about it and it did bring up an automatic yawn reflex, which I didn't want you to think I was bored with you.

David Hall (38:34)

No, no, no, it's all right. Everything starts to open up from the inside and you get this lengthening. So when I'm working on something, I use a low Feldenkrais®

table, rather than the high Alexander table and let's say I'm doing a Feldenkrais® session.

Well, actually, every session's just a David session anyway rather but let's say I'm pushing through someone's leg, I'm holding their leg, under the knee, let's say. I have the width of their leg, the width of the knee and the width of the connection into the pelvis and the sense of that whole side, right up to the head and in the stirrup of my thumb and first finger, I have the foot and I feel a width of the angle, a width of the knee, the width of the pelvis with the way the spine joins into the skull. Width of the shoulder blade and whole shoulder girdle and then I push so gently though.

Now where I feel resistance, let's say I feel it in someone's hip. What I'll do is, I'll just start to actually soften in my hip. And when I'm softening my hip, I feel all my shoulders softening.

I let go under my arm and then, sensing that softness in my hip, I push through the leg again and feel what's different and so I keep on sensing what's happening in their body and I make a change in my own body I to bring about a change in them. That's really what you're doing in Alexander, it's a really good thing.

Cynthia Allen (40:21)

Sounds like a great thing. I think I could use several things out of that, just to play with this next few weeks, to improve my own Feldenkrais® practice, for sure.

David Hall (40:35)

Maybe it's good to give you a sense of the directing and inhibition process to give you an experience.

Cynthia Allen (40:43)

That'd be lovely.

David Hall (40:44)

Yeah, so I'll describe the process of directing out loud, so I'll give the directions, as Alexander would say and maybe we'll bring a movement into it, lifting the arm up or something to test and we'll lift up either arm, you can pick either arm.

So in fact, why don't we begin by just, lift your arm up and just get a sense of how it is, so we have something to compare it to. Try that a couple of times, to get a sense of what it is. Maybe try the other arm too, to feel the difference. Okay, so now I'm sitting here, I'm sitting on the floor now.

Perhaps you're sitting on a chair.

Cynthia Allen (41:38)

I'm on a chair.

David Hall (41:39)

Yeah, so just sense now the overall organization of your body, what's going on where you are, What you feel, sense of the space around you as well and you how you're oriented to it. So I'm sensing my body and I think and my neck is tight.

So I think, let my neck be free and the moment I think of that, I think across sacrum, the inside of the sacrum and that starts to widen and I feel my knees relax. So I think, let my neck be free, in order that my head may go forward and up and I now sense down the back of my spine, across the back of the shoulders in such a way my back can lengthen and widen where I feel something complicated across the front of the pelvis but I can't even articulate it but I just sense that in order that my knees may go forward and away.

So I'm not actually trying to make my knees go forward and away or to do anything. All I'm doing is actually just scanning through the whole of my body, relative to each direction and looking for anything that's there. If something let's go where I look at it good. If it doesn't let go, doesn't matter.

I just get a sense of where it is and then move on to the next direction.

So, let my neck be free and I think around my ears. Such a way my head can go forward and up and think across from the back of your ears, across the back of my skull and then at the front of the neck, up the base of the nose and then the top of the nose as well, you might think is the hard palette, as the top of the skull in the front. So think, let my neck be free. Now I'm tightening in my underarms in order that my head may go forward and up and whilst I'm tuning into that little bit of delicate balance in my head and neck, I can't resist tightening up in my legs, my thighs at the front.

So my thighs have just softened and now I'm widening across the base, to my neck in the front.

So let my neck be free in order that my head may go forward and up, such when my back can lengthen and widen, in order that my knees may go forward and away.

Think of the width of my knees, the width of the ball of my foot and the width of my ankles and the shoulders. Sense my breathing, sense of the whole field of sensation.

Let my neck be free. I'm tightening in my eyes, so let my eyes relax.

Such a way my head may go forward and up and in my tongue and throat, right down into the front of the body and just sense the whole, visceral cavity from the nose and the mouth and throat, down into the lungs and I think of my back lengthening and widening through the whole ribcage and belly and into the pelvis.

I think of the sides of the sacrum, sacroiliac joints. Feel the inside of the thighs, to the pelvis and knees and from the sitting bones, up to the sacroiliac joints and the sense from the sitting bones through to the back of the knee and the hips.

Let my neck be free, in order that my head may go forward and up and I can see, I'm lifting myself up now and it's like there's a hole in my back as I'm lifting my chest, so I just think, in order that my back can lengthen and widen and just sit there, with the sense, the roundness of the back. The roundness of my pelvis.

So just sense how that feels now, the feeling of space within you.

And notice the organization of that shoulder and arm that you're gonna work with and so I'm gonna keep saying the directions and I want you to lift your arm up and

the moment you sense any interference with those directions, any tensing in the neck or even the shoulder and in fact, to make it easy, to speed the process up, could we do so if you notice any tension at all, when you go to lift your arm.

Could be just in here or a tensing in the arm, stop and just let that go completely.

So we want that experience, as if you've been doing this for a long time, of there being absolutely no sense of effort whatsoever.

So in your own time, go to lift up your hand.

If you feel any tension, stop and let it go.

And so rather than lifting it up and feeling the tension and trying to relax the tension, the moment you sense the tension, let it go. We wanna find that experience of being able to lift it up from the beginning, in absolute freedom.

So you think, let my neck be free.

That's the whole spine. In order that my head may go forward and up.

Back and the front of the hip, through the cranial skull and spine and the visceral skull, upper and lower jaws and the whole gut.

The head goes forward and up in such way that the back can lengthen and widen.

The front and back of the underarms. The moment that you're lifting your arm up, you know, still, you're not paying close enough attention.

So I want no sense of effort whatsoever, so if you feel any tension at all, don't lift your arm, okay?

Just go to lift your arm, so think, let my neck be free and in your own time, you can go to lift you arm but if you feel any tension, don't do it and then when you let your arm go again, really tune in, let that area be free and then, go to lift it again and if you feel that same spot tighten, just stop again, let it go or maybe you'll notice somewhere else and let that area go too and stop. So you're spreading your attention through the whole body.

Let my neck be free, in order that my head may go forward and up, such when my back can lengthen and widen, in order that my knees may go forward and away. So when you have this sense lifting the arm, there's this sense of the whole body's

still gonna be lengthening and widening and of course, the more subtlety with which you initiate this movement, the closer you become to that experience of being able to feel the pattern of misuse or disorganization and you're thinking, in the image of your body and you learn to inhibit that. So try not moving it at all, just go into movement.

Usually, sometimes it takes a while to get that sort of sensitivity, that sort of stillness to feel moment that subtle.

So that you're breathing can be completely uninterrupted.

Completely soft and with no interruption as you move.

Seeing let my neck be free, in order that my head may go forward and up and as soon as you feel any tension, don't keep going and letting it go. Stop and let it drop completely.

Let your arm come back down. Don't lift it up there and hold it there, trying to relax it. We're only working with the very beginning, how you initiate the movement.

Now we're trying to get to that point, the image of movement and to inhibit the old image and find a new way of moving. One that allows your neck to be free, the width of your neck, softness of your throat and tongue. Soft, clear, open space in the throat. Your trachea permanently opens.

Think of then the space in your neck. A clear channel, right down into your lungs and the spine of the back, all the way down to the sacrum. The neck right up to the base of the skull, level with the bottom of the nose. Front of the neck is the back wall of the throat. So let my neck be free in order that my head may go forward and up.

Five to seven kilograms, delicately balanced on these fine points, in the field of gravity and it's that delicate balance, it's that arc between the two, the still point between falling forward and coming back.

That's the thing that gives this sense of length through the spine. So your neck is free, your head's able to go forward and up. Your back is long and wide, in order

that your knees may go forward and away and here's the trap that we tend to tighten and brace ourselves to think.

So it's learning to spread your attention through the whole body, through the hands, through the feet and the thighs, the underarms, the neck and look for those places that we're bracing ourselves unnecessarily and just be left with this absolute stillness of movement and then go to lift your arm again. It's easier. And just as a matter of interest, try actually lifting your arm up now and just notice the difference in quality.

Do it a few times to get a sense of that whole side and the sense of connection, through to the inner experience of your body. And then maybe try the other arm, just to feel the difference.

So that's direction and my take on direction and the inhibition. Feldenkrais® worked about through doing tiny movements and I remember on the Amherst training, in the audio section, before the video comes on, there's a lesson that he calls "Feldenkrais® for the 21st Century" where you're lying on your side and you're imagining yourself lying on the other side and doing a movement.

I think there may be another but it's a really challenging thing to think of, so you end up not moving much and he described that as an expression of inhibition but it's really the fundamental thing in the Alexander technique.

These directions and inhibition and the idea of non-doing and the practice of teaching it is different to Feldenkrais®.

The interesting thing is that the Alexander training is twice as long as the Feldenkrais® training and there's a one to five teacher-student ratio and you have a lesson every day. I did my Feldenkrais® training 30 years ago but I was dissatisfied with, where it finished is where I thought it should begin working with Functional Integration®. It was great, an amazing process the training, I really loved it but we had one FI a turn, so two a year.

It's ridiculous, the structure of it, the format of it is crazy. So I'm sure that's going to continue to evolve.

But there's a lot of hands-on work in the Alexander training and most of it is geared to this idea of non-doing and just sensing this stillness and of course, it's

part of the challenge of all of the work, Feldenkrais's work too. He has this idea, he wants people to not behave in a compulsive manner, to be able to make choices that are based on their actual abilities, what they want and Alexander's, his third book was "Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual". So Alexander's idea was that humankind has developed unevenly.

We've developed our mind more than our bodies at the moment and we need to develop more awareness of our bodies, so we can catch up and bring about a balance in that.

So his idea was this idea of consciously control but how can you control something you've got so little awareness of? I mean, the idea of having conscious control is ridiculous. So much of our actions are unconscious. Same thing with compulsive behavior.

How the hell can you stop yourself behaving compulsively when you can't tell what the triggers are?

You don't even know what they are. Our whole conception of the human experience is so flawed and we're only scratching the surface. Buddhism's been going for two and a half thousand years.

Sorry, that was me tapping on the table, impatiently.

(both laughing) Two and a half thousand years of history and there's this aspect of Buddhist practice called shamatha, which is meditative quiescence, it sort of translates roughly as but it's a process where

you learn to make yourself, actually what you're learning to do is to take yourself to a state of consciousness that's equivalent to deep, dreamless sleep but whilst you're lucid and they've delineated nine stages to get to that and you get to it by just learning to sit or lie or whatever position you choose and focus your attention on one object.

The first stage, you have your attention on your breath or the space of the mind, or whatever and your attention's going away all the time and you have to bring it back.

Stage two, you've got a little bit more control but your thoughts are like a river, rushing through a gorge, you can't really stop it.

By the time you get to stage four, you start to feel a bit of progress and there's some change in your life. By the time you get to stage six, you're probably doing three, four hour meditations, two or three times a day to get to this and you also start to, if there's any deep stuff that's in the surface, that starts to come up now. I know one guy who locked himself away on Kangaroo Island and did this for three months, by himself and new to the process but took to it like a duck to water and then had a psychotic episode.

It's that depth of unconscious stuff that starts to come up. By stage seven, you're through that, your home. By stage nine, you're able to sit and focus on an object for 24 hours, without wavering. Most people don't experience the process of shamatha in a lifetime and just have a pliable, stable mind that enables you to focus on things.

Cynthia Allen (01:00:24)

Those are examples of something that's really and truly a lifetime practice, what most people would see as an extreme and definitely, both Alexander and Feldenkrais® practices could be taken to that kind of level.

David Hall (01:00:43)

Absolutely, I mean that's the thing. I think when we're teaching people, it's that we're teaching people how to work on themselves and you have to do a lot of it to make any real difference and training is just scratching the surface--

Cynthia Allen (01:01:02)

And of course comes down to what people want to do with their lives and how they wanna live their lives. For people who come to us as students and clients, where do they wanna put their attention and their energy and what are you happy with knowing about yourself and how you interact in the world?

These are all things that matter, right?

Not everybody's gonna lock themselves away and in fact, in today's learning environment, we see that it's the idea of the level of lifetime mastery in something is, with an apprentice or not with apprentice but you know, really the hermitage kind of approach is pretty rare, so.

David Hall (01:01:46)

Well yeah, absolutely. The thing with that is that we need to do a lot of it, in order to do it and Alexander technique is something that's really useful for Feldenkrais® practitioners to experience, because a good Feldenkrais® person has that same capacity to, you have your hands on someone's neck say, they're lying on the table, you can feel what's going on in their whole body.

And the people that I share lessons with, I have that experience of taking me deeply into myself. And even the process itself, Feldenkrais® can take you to that same spot but it's a different way of working at it and in the same way that I recommend that Alexander teachers explore Feldenkrais®, because it opens your mind to so many things that it's great but for

Feldenkrais® teachers, I recommend having an Alexander lesson and find the teacher with the most experience you can.

Generally, for that experience of direction, I spoke about with Marj Barstow, I've had a few experience with them, another one named Peggy Williams, this woman in England and Walter Carrington the guy Feldenkrais® had lessons with, just amazing and I've had lessons with Gabby and Ruthy and they're all experienced. It's a different sort of fit.

Cynthia Allen (01:03:32)

You're talking about Ruthy Alon and--

David Hall (01:03:37)

Gabby Yaron.

Cynthia Allen (01:03:38)

Yes, thank you. Which are senior Feldenkrais® trainers. I have to say that experience that you just lead me in, I think that was remarkable, really.

I really like it and I could feel definite ways of different change and awarenesses and there's the level of you just keep coming back, basically to the same thing, with a slight little variation but not much and it was just like a nice, it was continual re-invitation to stay and be and stay and be and stay and be. I love it, David, thank you.

David Hall (01:04:19)

It's my pleasure.

David Hall (01:04:25)

Yeah, go on.

Cynthia Allen (01:04:26)

Yeah, 'cause I'm gonna start pulling us to a close here. So David is offering a bonus, a series of lessons that you can sign up, if you just look below the video here and I think it's five lessons, isn't it, David?

David Hall (01:04:43)

One I did for a podcast on surfing called "Sitting on Water". So it's about sitting on a surfboard in the water and being balanced but four of them, there are free lessons.

Cynthia Allen (01:04:57)

Okay, we're gonna call those David lessons, because they are an amalgamation of everything that he's studied and dedicated himself to, I'm sure.

David Hall (01:05:07)

And if you go further down the list, there's about 20 lessons on there and I'm about to put another 20 on, which is more what I'm doing at the moment and the ones I'd done in the box set are more like standard lessons, apart from the one called "The Golden Suit", which is about touch, using touch in ATM.

The ones below that, so "The Hands on the Wall" series or "Sliding in the Suit", a bit more global in their focus.

Cynthia Allen (01:05:35)

Okay, so anyway, the sign up for this is actually for the five free lessons, so just go down and sign up for that, then you'll be able to find out more about David and David, thank you so much for joining us.

We are pleased to have you here.

Gave us a very enlightening presentation. I learned quite a bit, actually about Alexander the man, as well as some differences between the two approaches and so thank you all for being here at the Move Better, Feel Better which doesn't sound like a non-doing practice but you could definitely move better and feel better from non-doing and the Alexander way. I've no doubt about it, so thanks for tuning in and we'll talk with you very, very soon.

David Hall (01:06:23)

Thank you very much, bye bye.

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<sup>i i</sup> "Feldenkrais," "Feldenkrais Method," "Functional Integration," and "Awareness Through Movement" are certification marks of the "Feldenkrais Guild of North America."

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