

Lecture: Self-image – Moshe Feldenkrais

We usually act according to our ability. That means no one decides or plans what he does and knows how it should feel, what it should be. He does what he does and, at the moment, feels what he does. In other words, everyone acts according to the image of himself that he created during his life. This image is different from person to person. “To roll on the side” or “to turn the head” — everyone does these differently, in his own personal way. Of course, no one has anything against this — the opposite. It should be that everyone will be himself as much as possible, but this self should be special, one of a kind, such that it allows a person to continue and develop continuously.

What does it mean to continue to develop? To develop in a direction . . . in which direction? If you give an example to someone that he needs to be like this or like that — then he forces himself to adjust to this frame and stops being himself. He must be like the other one teaches him or demands of him. This is the way that is used in the whole world; not only in exercise, but with everything. People are educated how they should be. Most people find that, to a certain degree, they are able to be what is demanded of them, but with most things, they are not able to be like what is demanded of them. Why? Because they have their individualism; but, this is repressed willfully or not willfully.

When a person wants to find himself so he is able to be in a position that he will feel: “I am really alive. This is what I feel. This is how I would like it to be and I am really like this. And, if I really am like this, then I love myself. I love my habits. I love my face. I love my behind. I love all of my actions as they are.”

Because you cannot obtain something else. Other legs — you can’t obtain. Another face — you cannot obtain. You are just able to make a person from what he has, and to give this the greatest possibility to grow. Just as a child — when it is small has characteristics that are not clear — grows, develops, and all of a sudden acquires strange characteristics. Those that are forced upon him are many more than those that he develops by himself. This is how an adult is able to continue to develop — under the condition that he takes away from himself all of the inhibitions from this development. These inhibitions are so prevalent that everywhere that I have gone to or lectured at until today, I have found an open ear the moment you give any possibility to let people come closer to this image that they are able to be what they want to be. In other words, to begin to love those parts that they find in themselves that are not okay — even with will — “if it is possible to do it, please I am ready for anything.”

How to do this? What does this mean to say? What actually needs to be done? If we look into what a person does while he is awake, it is possible to divide that which happens to him into four clear groups. One group is movements. He does movements with his body, with his eyes. His body does movements. He has sensations. This means he has six senses. With these senses, he feels. He hears. He sees. He smells. He tastes. He is able to touch things. He feels himself in space in some manner of the kinesthetic sense. He has feelings. He is able to be sad, happy, anxious, angry, jealous, and embarrassed. He is able to feel himself inferior; to feel himself superior over everyone, and he also has thoughts.

And so, four groups of action — if we try to check them, we always find they are connected one to the other. It is impossible to distinguish a movement that is not connected in some way to a sensation, or with feeling, or with thought — and the opposite. There is not feeling that is not connected with a particular movement of the body, with a position of the body. That means with movement, with some thought, and with sensation. However you take this, they will always be connected together.

Now, what happens to this person that I think everyone is able to become? It is difficult, but not as difficult as it seems if we deal with methods that are based on this information that I want to suggest to you. Under these conditions of these groups — to an ideal person, to a person who feels for himself that he lives and is satisfied . . . [incomplete sentence]. And, what he wants to do, he agrees with, even if he does not agree at once. That means to say that he must be the smartest man with the best senses, with the nicest body in the world, with the best body in the world. This is an impossible thing because there may be one person like this in a generation. What about the rest of the people?

The rest of the people need to live with what they have. And so, with what I have, this is possible to develop and to be connected in such a way that a person feels himself living a full life. When he feels like this, he does everything he does in the best way he is able to. This gives him complete satisfaction. In other words, he begins to live a full life. For this, it is important for all four of these groups to be connected one with the other at special levels for each action.

What are these special levels? Of course, each one needs to find this for himself. It is necessary to give him the possibility of distinguishing this. How to get to this? And so, the first thing that we see is that thinking is something new in humanity. It is not something that exists with other animals. It does not exist with monkeys. It does not exist with the most primitive people. They have something, but to compare it with the thinking of Einstein, Beethoven, Bertrand Russell, or to any one of us is like comparing the ability of a bear to learn to the ability of an average person. In other words, it is from another world. In feelings, people are completely confused. They are confused because the thinking disturbs. This new thinking in humanity disturbs the feeling. If you check yourself, you will see that most people do not allow themselves to feel what they are really feeling. The moment that they really begin to give into one feeling, they panic or become alarmed. They think, “I am not okay. I need to be like they taught me to be, like I must be.” By way of this, it turns out that they learn something that is an imitation, something that is necessary in our culture. Because, without this, we are not accepted into our culture. That means everyone adjusts, forces upon himself an outside form that is accepted by others — father, mother, the teacher, or the lover. Everyone makes, from himself, a caricature of himself, and in the end, feels that everything he does, does not satisfy him because he actually does not do what he feels. He does not feel any longer. He does not know how to distinguish.

We have done this many times in movement. You have seen how many disturbances there are in the mind. And, in feeling, it is incomparably worse. It is so bad because

there is no place that this is touched upon — not in the school, not at home. Nobody thinks of this. Nobody is interested in this. Who is interested in this? The moment the person is disturbed in this manner, that his feelings are so against his personality, he cannot adjust to life. What he does, does not interest him. He begins to do something. He does it for two minutes, and then asks,

“This is not interesting. What is interesting about this? I will never achieve it, no matter what. Let’s leave it alone. I will take something else.”

In the end, he goes to the cinema. Only those who fall into the hands of a psychiatrist who is worth anything (and ones like that, ones who are worth going to, are one in a thousand) take some of this mud away, allowing the person to return more or less to this framework that is forced upon him just like on everyone else. This we call, “healing.” If it succeeds, it is complete healing. In other words, they take a person who did not find himself, is not able to agree to things that were forced upon him, and that he forced on himself — they organize him so he is able to accept what is forced on him so he won’t be much different from the miserable forms that walk in the world around him. He then is called a healthy person — in other words, an average person, miserable like all of us.

Look closely and it simply hurts. When you think for a minute of what we are doing, how we live, how in every generation we ruin half of humanity, how between one peace and the next peace we live with those fears, with disturbances. What happens to children? If we talk sincerely about it, something needed to be done a long time ago. This thing, this generalization that I give, begins to be something very general that many people understand and begin to talk about in different ways and with different approaches to arrive at the same conclusions. These are things that everyone can agree with. It is acceptable. It is nice, but so what do we do?

First of all, we said that we live with an image that we created for ourselves. This image we claim is not what we really would like to be. If I will take each one of us and ask him, “Do you agree with yourself, with how you are? [Do] you agree and love all of your actions? You agree? You think that you act to the best of your ability, to the best of your pleasure, to allow yourself to live life?”

You will see that not one in a thousand is able to answer sincerely that most of the actions in his life, in the actions of his body, in the sensations — that means all of his sensations, his feeling and thoughts — that in all of this he says,

“This is the best I would be able to do. If I was able to live again, I would do exactly the same thing as I have lived.”

You will not find one in a thousand that will agree to this. But, not one of us knows what to do. And, of course, the large things are always simple. They are so simple that it is hard to see them. We will start from something very simple — the self-image.

There is an image, a movement image, a sensory image, a feeling and thought image. For all of these fields, in a full way, it is a work for life. But, to our luck, we are built in such a manner that actually it is unnecessary to do this because there are these four groups. It turns out that if, in one of these groups, a person finds himself, finds for himself in any manner, those places that were forced on him, places which are not the expression of himself and are not what he wants to be — if in one of these parts he succeeds in

discovering what he really is, to distinguish what he wants — then the thought and the rest of the things help him to make a generalization. It turns out that in every situation he has development. To the degree that this development grows and grows in one of these areas, it allows him to move himself in this direction that he wants for himself. This is very important because, by way of this, the person actually feels that he has grown, that he develops, and that he is not being healed.

There is not a problem of healing here. Healing means to say, to return to a situation that was okay. The psychiatrist that works on a person never brings him back to the position he was in before. He tries to help get rid of those ideas and those things that during development were rejected in some way, held back, or intended in the wrong direction. This usually happens when the person must give up on his feelings without knowing how to agree to it. If he has feelings, he must suppress them, change them without him feeling them or agreeing to the change. Then, the diminishing of the person, the going inward so as not to protect the feeling that hurts him . . . [incomplete sentence]. It makes it such that he slowly goes into himself, changes his own way to that which is demanded, without ever agreeing with it himself. This is the most difficult thing.

We see these disturbances in the body, in the muscles. Most people feel, “With me, my legs are not okay.” “With me, my eyes are not okay.” “With me, my stomach [digestion] is not okay.” “With me, my breathing is not okay.” “With me, my sexual organs are not okay.” “I feel my mouth is not okay.” “I do not speak as I would like to.” “I do not look like I would like to.” “I do not move or perform as I would like to.” “How people relate to me is not how I would like.” This we do, first of all, with the body. Because, from one area, we can learn about the other. It is possible to correct this image.

The moment we see these disturbances in the body image and distinguish them, there is no need to do anything to do it better. The natural tendency of all living creatures is to go in the direction that helps them, which makes them better. The whole world claims that man is an animal and if he does not govern his spirit, customs and ways of life are forced upon him, ones that enable him to be social, cultural, living in a community as a contributing unit and not someone that disturbs. You need laws. You need religion or another way to force upon him the control of the animal that is within him, the beast that is within him.¹ If this were not true, tell me how it is in so many different religions? From the religions of the early Greeks, that any symbolic image is God . . . [incomplete sentence]. If idol worshipers, Buddhists, Taoist, Moslems, Jews, Turks, Catholics, Protestants — with all of them — [incomplete sentence]. In all of these religions, despite this, there is progress of humanity in relation to what the savage blood-sucking man, animalistic beasts that we say they are. There is a tendency like this, with all people; despite everything, despite the difficulties. Despite what there is, there is a tendency that is social because a single person is not able to live. That means that biologically it is not correct to say that man is an animal.

¹ Hebrew has two different ways to say, “animal.” They have slightly different meanings. It is almost impossible to make the subtle distinction in English.

The evidence is that in all tribes, in the places farthest away from culture, there is culture and progress from generation to generation, [progress] in a social direction, in the direction of communal life, in the direction of helping one another, without it being necessary to suppress this original part within us. There is no need to do this. If you do not disturb the person, he turns into what he is. Man is basically good, and not as it is written, also by us, that man is bad. He is bad from his youth. There are some expressions like this in all languages. The evidence is that each person, when you help him find himself, becomes more comfortable with himself and more comfortable with others. Each time you help someone who is disturbed, when he becomes more of himself, he becomes better to himself and to others.

From time to time, I will try to give you the possibility to see that this real image of ours, even with good will, is distorted from sickness. From the ignorance of all of humanity, something is done that disturbs the person from really becoming a person.

We will take the simplest thing. We will begin with movements of the body. It is not only once that we have said that in the brain, in the cortex, is the homunculus. That means that if you check the action of the body, of the muscles and find which cells activate them, a small man is formed. But, this man does not have the shape of a man. Anyone who does not know that you are talking about a man would not recognize a man. It does not have the form of a man. It has something topologically similar to a man. It has four limbs, something larger in the middle, but very thin. It means it has four limbs, a head, and a body, or rather, something like this. Even with the head, the lips are larger than the entire head. In the hands, the thumb is larger than the whole hand, larger than the foot. So, someone who does not know that we are dealing with a body sees a movement of man that is distorted, that is not a man. In other words, with every one of us, if you take his movement, what he feels in his body when he moves — you see that his mouth is important, more important than his behind. Why?

Because already at birth, from the first moment, he knows the breast of his mother, the nipple, with his mouth. He eats. The first years he primarily uses his mouth to find the reality of the world. Already, like this, it distorts the whole issue. And the legs? Imagine to yourself a Chinese girl. From the first moment that she is born, they put a shoe like this on her foot so she is unable to walk. With us, we also do something not so far from this, not so much better than this. But, we have a better understanding so that the feet will be normal, not forced into a shoe that changes the bones such that they are not like they need to be. You see, like this, everything is done. And so, in this image of the body, this body image is so distorted, so much not the person. In the feet — there is no movement. There are two movements — to straighten and to bend. There is no movement of the toes one without the other.

The hand, by itself is awkward or clumsy with whoever has not learned to play an instrument or to write. You can see how his hand is. A person cannot move each finger separately. He does not know how to make movements of expression. It is like an instrument, like the hand of a monkey. But, of course, he is able to bang nails in well, or

use a hammer, or a rake. I am talking about a person who never learned to read or write at all. With him, the image of the body is different in the head. Also, the thumb is different in the head. Clearly, if you take this homunculus of a person who from childhood is taught to dance with the feet, to walk on a rope, to juggle like the Japanese do, to do all sorts of work with the feet — if you check this homunculus you will see that the feet have a much greater importance than the thumb. If this person did not learn to read and write, but rather to use his feet, it turns out that since he uses his feet, he finds that parts of the thumb, parts of his hands, are frozen and difficult. He will not feel himself alive because this part of his personality does not serve him. He did not learn how to use it. It is suppressed. It is resting in some place without movement. The same thing we feel with our feet. The same thing we feel in all of those places of the homunculus — that it is really different from what we want to be and what we are able to be.

So, you see, from the way of communal life, from the initial education, it already is necessary that there will be this distortion, that there will be a disturbance. Without knowledge and understanding of the structure and the ability, it is possible to work for generations and people will not find that what they are actually doing disturbs them from growing and living. If we continue further, you see that in the area of feelings, the trouble is even greater than in the body. There is nothing that does not disturb him from developing in a way that is possible and personal. It is forbidden to laugh. It is forbidden to make noise. It is forbidden to do anything that I want. It is forbidden to get dirty. It is forbidden to express hate toward somebody or to really want something, to eat with the appetite of an animal. Be polite. Eat so it is as if you do not care. Eat whatever they give you — *dreck*.² You cannot stand it, but you must eat because it is put on the plate. You must finish it because there are people starving for bread. Therefore, it is forbidden for you to throw out this piece of bread. You will find that there is not the feeling that a child is allowed to develop in such a way that he is able to distinguish by himself that he should not throw something out, or that he should eat what he wants or is able to digest and enjoy. Such that there are people whose the digestion is disturbed their whole life. They always eat what they do not want until some health food person says to them, “If you stop doing what your mother said, that you must finish. Eat a little bit less. Pay attention. Enjoy the chewing.” What was impossible, what was forbidden to do before — it was forbidden to enjoy the food because that is being like an animal. Be polite. If you begin to do something in the way that is necessary for you, you begin to heal even from rheumatism.

First of all, we will begin to correct this body image. We will try to start in this way so you can distinguish what it is.
[End of the lecture]

² *Dreck* is Yiddish for shit.