



THE WELLNESS SALON

Musings on wellness from Donna Simmons, Feldenkrais® practitioner

No. 5 July 1, 2014

Solstice

“I'm not after flexible bodies. I'm after *flexible minds* and restoring people to their human dignity.”

– Moshe Feldenkrais

Summer is upon us; the sun is high in the sky. Did you note the occasion of the summer solstice? According to my dictionary, the word “solstice” is Old French, 13th century, derived from the Latin *solstitium* = *sol* (sun) + *sistere* (stop), the point at which the sun stands still. Our connection to the procession of the sun and the moon, the passing of the seasons and the rhythm of the earth, was once stronger than it is today. Indeed, to note that the sun “stands still” on a particular day of the year requires the dual qualities of being a careful observer and having abundant patience, qualities which our forbearers apparently possessed. Do we? In our quest to be present in a world of machines and ever-present time demands, have we lost the skills required to see the world around us? Perhaps, but it is never too late to regain them, and a good place to begin sharpening our observational powers is with our own marvelous machine, our own *corpus corporis*.

Here is a brief movement exploration that may help you in your ability to observe small yet significant changes in your physical organization. With time and repetition you may find that your ability to sense the state of your being and, as a consequence, the ebb and flow within you becomes an easy and rich practice, useful in many different situations.

Start in standing with your feet apart. Imagine that the bottoms of your feet have been inked and you are standing on a piece of rice paper. Or imagine that you are standing in packed sand on a beach near the water's edge. Using your mind's eye, trace the outline of where your feet make contact with the floor. Take the time to compare left and right, front and back; don't worry about anatomical accuracy. Just notice. Then, again in your mind's eye, come up higher to your pelvic basin, your hip bones and your lower back. Imagine the pelvic basin¹ as a large bowl containing water. Ask yourself in which direction would the water fall? To the front, the back, the sides, or would it remain quietly filling the bowl? Remember to breathe gently as you do this scan. Come higher in your mind's eye and observe the attitude of your torso. Are you making an effort to stay standing? Are you leaning a bit forward or back? Is there any movement in your ribs associated with breathing? Does your spine feel compressed and tight? Are your shoulders level or is one higher than the other? Are you making an effort to stand up straight, pulling your shoulders back in a military pose, or are you relaxed and easy on your feet? And finally what can you notice about your neck and head? Where are your eyes focused? Can you easily turn your head a little bit in one direction and then in the other? As you turn your head do you sense a shifting of the pressure under your feet? Consciously breathe in and, after a slight pause, exhale. Use the idea of giving your weight to your bones, letting your pelvis hang or rest on your femora, or thigh bones. See if you are able to gently bring your chest up slightly while lengthening your spine and neck, creating space for your ribs and your breath. Continue breathing slowly, with intention, and after a few moments return to noticing the weight under your feet; has it changed in any way? Is it easier to stand?

¹ The term “pelvic basin” is a bit redundant; the word “pelvis” is 17th century Latin for “basin” (old Latin *peluis*), possibly derived from the Greek *πέλεκ* meaning “helmet”.

THE WELLNESS SALON

Often the simple act of paying attention to our organization² is enough to bring about small yet useful changes. Learning how to observe without judgment can lead to a richer experience in life and a more efficient and pleasurable organization. You can practice this scan in many different environments; while standing in line at the grocery store, queuing at the movie theatre or the post office, while pausing on a hike or simply standing quietly in your kitchen waiting for the water to boil. Be creative in your exploration, hone the skill of paying attention to what you are doing as you try different options. Enjoy yourself as you explore your body with your *flexible* mind.

Happy Summer. Namaste, Donna

² I am using this word in a particular way here, relating to spatial relationship of the neuro- and musculoskeletal systems.