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Raising your arm

In early December I went to Baltimore for a continuing education workshop on the Feldenkrais Method as applied to scoliosis. I was eagerly looking forward to what our trainer David Zemach-Bersin would have to say. And, also, I was worried.

Scoliosis, as you may know, is a condition that changes the shape of the ribs and spine. It turns and compresses them. Although, most commonly, scoliosis does not present a health hazard, I don't know any one who is happy to have it because of the way it makes you look. Wary of criticism, most people with scoliosis avoid calling attention to the shape of their torso.

What, then, was David going to do in a workshop? How could he demonstrate without bringing in someone and pointing his finger at an elevation here and a depression there? Would that be embarrassing? And even if he did that with one volunteer, what subsequently would the rest of us do? Would there be one volunteer for each of us? Probably not. So, I worried, would we members of the class end up feeling left out?

The day came, and what was the solution? It was masterful. David enlarged the definition of scoliosis to include everyone. He demonstrated: a person with scoliosis has a set of preferences. She bends at this level of the ribs to this side and turns at another level of the ribs to that side and the head compensates like *this*. And everybody has some. It is only a matter of degree.

Within that framework, we could move on to our first exploration in the world of preferences: how does one raise the arm. Lying on the floor, each of us pulled our own arm overhead, just as the young woman is doing *below*. Then the other arm. Was there a difference? Yes, there was. And then, continuing to lie on the floor, we proceeded through a set of moves, ingeniously sequenced, to clarify what further differences there were on each side. We found interesting comparisons in the shoulder blades, the ribs, the hips, and, most surprisingly to me, in the side-to-side movements of the jaw.



The process, as always in Feldenkrais, was to clarify and not correct.

Just the same, and this is the magic of the Method, at the end of the hour many of us felt ourselves taller and straighter.

In the days following the workshop I reflected on what we had shared, and an old question-and-answer arose in my mind. The question “How does one raise a child?” is answered “It takes a village.”

It seems to me the same. To raise an arm is not a solo performance. It takes a contribution from every part of the self.