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What happens -- when you knock a spoon off the counter? It's a question of dexterity.

When you knock a spoon off the counter, does it fall to the floor or do you catch it in midair?



This can be rephrased: do you find yourself dexterous? Nikolai Bernstein (1896–1966), a Soviet neurophysiologist, used the word dexterity to describe the highest level of physical skill. He said that to be strong or well trained is all well and good, but the highest level of physical prowess is shown when one responds skillfully to an unpredictable situation. Then everything is called into question – in one unavoidable and unrepeatable moment.

In relation to such a moment, another interesting question arises: “Within the body, who is in charge?”

It is easy to think that the muscles are the boss. You can see them and feel them; they are so palpable. But, in truth, they are not in charge.

They are foot soldiers and take orders from something more central. Feldenkrais, writing in the 1950's, referred to this central agent as the CNS, the Central Nervous System. Today we might use other words, such as the body-mind. And tomorrow other words. Because we really don't know.

But we do know that whoever is in charge is trainable. Each of us has had the experience of acting more and less skillfully. But HOW does one train – let's use Feldenkrais' phrase – the Central Nervous System? It is certainly doesn't need bigger muscles to pick up a falling spoon.

What it needs is greater awareness. It needs awareness of myriad kinesthetic details, such as:

- * The information that alerts you that the spoon is falling
- * Where to direct your eyes
- * Where to place your arm
- * How to turn your chest
- * How to bend your knees
- * How to not drop what you have in your other hand

This is the type of thing we do in Feldenkrais lessons, both private and individual. We train ourselves to be more richly aware of the self in movement. Then we find that all kinds of movements are executed more skillfully, and, in our best moments, dexterously.