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The purpose of the skeleton

“What is the purpose of the skeleton?”

Many years ago I was sitting on the floor with a group of colleagues, like myself, fairly new Feldenkrais Practitioners. Facing us, on a chair, was our senior colleague Jeff Haller. We were together for continuing education, and Jeff was the teacher. He had asked the question and now was waiting for a reply. Several suggestions were offered, but it was clear they weren't hitting the nail on the head.

After a while, Jeff answered his own question: “The purpose of the skeleton is to make the body light.”

There was a collective breath, and it all made sense. Our training and our experience so far could be focused through this single lens. If a human were like an amoeba, all tissue, no matter how muscular the person was, he, or she, could never stand up. There could never be enough strength to counteract gravity initially or energy to maintain the effort.

So, the bones are there to give something for the muscles to pull against and to give strength without having to spend energy.

Secondly, the bones give a way to efficiently transfer power. When you throw a baseball, you use, say, your right hand – and your right arm, back and legs, etc. But the real force comes from the earth, channeled through the feet and the whole body. If the force had to travel with only muscle as a pathway, it would take much more effort.

To share a quote from Moshe Feldenkrais:

"Any posture is acceptable in itself as long as it does not conflict with the law of nature, which is that the skeletal structure should counteract the pull of gravity, leaving the muscles free for movement."

With these truths steadily in front of us, in the Feldenkrais Method we work to develop in each person a clearer awareness and more optimal use of the skeleton. Many pains are relieved by this route, and much vitality regained.



Maureen McHugh has been teaching the Feldenkrais Method since 1990. She offers group classes through Arlington County Parks & Recreation and individual sessions in her office in the Landmark section of Alexandria.