

From Sensability-Balance, Posture and Coordination

Falling....or....The Fear, The Thrill, The Familiarization of Falling

By Alan S. Questel

I've always been fascinated by falling. Long before discovering the Feldenkrais Method I had dreams that I was falling. You've probably had them too. The ones where you suddenly wake up with a jolt, just before landing. Only now and then my dreams took a different course. Occasionally I would fall and land in my dreams. Sometimes gracefully floating downward, other times landing with a good thump, but always uninjured. In fact, not only was I okay, I also experienced a huge perceptual shift as well. The room I was in was the same room, only it now looked completely different. The side of the mountain I fell off of, now offered an alternative route to the top that I hadn't seen before.

Dr. Feldenkrais was also captivated by the idea of falling. In his first book "Body and Mature Behavior" he writes of the "instinctive reaction to falling" and relates it to "the body pattern of anxiety". Feldenkrais was also one of the first westerners to get a black belt in Judo and founded the Judo Club of France. In Judo, as well as other martial arts, falling is the subject of great interest, practice and is something to be developed.

Whether in our dreams, our feelings or in our actions, falling is representative of so much of who we are and what we do. Falling in love...falling down...falling out of favor...falling asleep...fear of falling...falling all over yourself. Falling can describe so many states that are central to our experience of ourselves that without it we couldn't be who we are.

As children we fall so often that it is impossible to keep count. Our early falling is the means to our learning to function upright, to be recognized as "human". Yet at some point we give up the joy and learning that falling affords us. Falling becomes more associated with failure than discovery. Over time our ability "to fall" atrophies and worse still, becomes something we fear and avoid.

In the myth of Icarus, Icarus flies from the tower where he is imprisoned, on wings made of wax and feathers. Forewarned by his father not to fly too high so the sun won't melt the wings, Icarus continues to soar higher and higher until his wings melt and he falls to his death. The Moral? Don't fly too high. Be moderate in your strivings. Listen to what your father tells you. I don't think so. It is really quite simple when you look at it from a Feldenkrais perspective(at least mine)....Icarus didn't know how to fall.

The Feldenkrais Method both directly and indirectly offers us the chance to explore the relationship between ourselves, the space around us and the ground beneath us. We can develop our relationship with gravity through new references and create new possibilities for action. Familiarizing ourselves with falling can enhance our self confidence, creativity, sense of safety and risk and provide us with more means to live with greater freedom.