



## INTERVIEW: DAVID HALL PART 2

*David Hall is a Sydney based Feldenkrais and Alexander teacher. In the first part of this interview (in Vic News July 2009) he talked about his work, particularly his Awareness Through Salsa workshop. The interview continues: phoning Moshe (!), the difference between Feldenkrais and Alexander, recording lessons, and more. RAH*

**Ralph:** I'd like to ask you how you got started with all this. How did you get started doing Feldenkrais? How did you get started doing Alexander?

**David:** Well I was doing Iyengar Yoga with a teacher named Martyn Jackson at the time. An Alexander teacher came to the school and gave a lecture. She worked on everyone there and a light switched on. She placed her hands on my ribs... and from the moment she touched me, I had a different sense of my breathing .. a different sense of my body. She managed to communicate a way of sensing inside myself that I had never felt before. It was compelling. So I sought out a teacher and had lessons. I was enthralled. A few months later a training course started and I had to join.

Soon after discovering the Alexander Technique I came across Feldenkrais, in a voice textbook. (Freeing the Natural Voice) It was a just a small quote from Feldenkrais. Nothing really special but at the time it seemed absolutely spot on.

So I bought his book, Awareness Through Movement. There is an exercise in the very beginning where you lie on the floor with your arm above your head and you reach in that direction about 30 times. I already knew how to relax, and I did it really carefully. I put the arm back down by my side and it felt... so fundamentally different. It felt as if the side I'd worked on had no psychological problems and it was once again just absolutely compelling and, anyway, I rang him up. I found him in Israel and spoke to him on the phone.

**R:** Oh! Moshe Feldenkrais!/? Really?

**D:** Yeah. I was excited, I think just as much by being able to track him down as by speaking with him. But he was rather subdued- then again it was 1983 or '84, he was probably not well at that stage. He was touched that I'd rung, that I was from Australia. He said a teacher would probably come out soon from America and sure enough, it was Frank Wildman. Frank came and then I started, I went to his workshop, wrote down all the movements he did and started using it in my voice classes. I did that for a long time. Just working at it myself.

The [Sydney] training started, just after my Alexander training finished, and once again I had to do it. So they followed closely one after the other. When I was training as an Alexander teacher, I was doing Feldenkrais workshops through that whole time. Throughout the Feldenkrais training I was integrating the Alexander work... the two fed into each other.

**R:** Do you think there was any conflict/confusion in learning both at once?

**D:** Well, not for me. I like to explore things, to just go into something and be interested and curious. I find they really complement each other. Their thinking is different, in terms of giving a purely... In giving a lesson that is purely Alexander Technique, or purely the Feldenkrais Method. Well, ok, they're different. And I could do that [purely one or the other] but of course I don't. I do what interests me or what suits the person I'm working with.

**R:** Yes.

**D:** And you know, questions come up as a result of something that happens in a lesson or something that I am exploring and I pursue that, and that's how its always been. I have some idea and I'll pursue it. Working on myself is a way of being. I'm just interested in sensing. It's like a form of meditation.

**R:** Let me ask this: every time I run a Feldenkrais course, someone will

always ask me – what's the Alexander technique? And when I speak to Alexander teachers they say that, sometime along the way, their students will always ask - what is the Feldenkrais Method? And the students ask, well, what's the difference between the two? And, inevitably, the next question is - which one's better?

**D:** Ha-ha!

**R:** So, what would you say to those questions?

**D:** Well, it's an annoying question. It's annoying... and if people aren't interested, I couldn't be bothered talking to them. I think there are different horses for different courses. And if you interact with the whole person, it doesn't really matter what you do, you are capable of being able to touch them in the deepest most profound possible way. The differences between Alexander and Feldenkrais work is very difficult to articulate because there is so much scope for individual expression in the practice of each technique. So, I may say, this is what the Feldenkrais method is, and this is what the Alexander technique is but then you will easily find practitioners who say, well, I do it this way. So, be that as it may, I would say that the Alexander Technique is a non-doing technique in that you have a concept of what good use is. Good use of the self. It relates to an experience of balance or poise in whatever you are doing. What you're getting a person to do is to sense what gets in the way of that... and to become more aware of a possibility of movement in any direction at any given moment. The Alexander Technique can be applied whilst you are doing something else. Whereas I would say the Feldenkrais method is a doing technique. There is not really a concept of good use (although there is a concept of good organization) and you're using movement experiences to give the person an experience of moving well. The sum-total of all the



experiences you give them will improve the awareness and control they have of themselves. So they find, as an Alexander Teacher might say, stillness in activity. However, I think the reason people do either technique is because they want to live better. Some people come because they have pain, but the thing that makes them stay for more lessons goes beyond that.

**R:** yes.

**D:** They want to feel good in themselves. They want to be able to love and be loved. And to be able to stand still and just pay attention to what's going on - To be able to receive what's happening and live in the best way possible.

Both Alexander and Feldenkrais work ask a person to pay attention and both techniques lead to an experience of stillness. From my perspective, stillness is important because the disruptive tensions that people carry within their body are not just tensions, they are frozen movements. These frozen movements are an expression of our thoughts and feelings thinking us... We have layer upon layer of these automatic

responses... and they make us too busy to really think clearly. I'm sure in our evolved future people will think that humans in this age suffered from a kind of mental Parkinsonism that kept us doing the idiotic things that we do.

Anyway, I feel that if we pay attention to our sensory experience in our subtle way we can distract ourselves from the unnecessary habits of the moment. You find yourself in this place of stillness where you can actually just sense.

**R:** Well, alright. That's pretty neat... So.... I'm curious about recording- do you record your classes?

**D:** Yes, I do.

**R:** How do you do that?

**D:** well, I am very interested in recording. Just because of Alexander Yanai - I think that is such a brilliant resource, and the process Feldenkrais used to do that. So, I record my ATMs and then I'll... for instance, the last set of CDs I did, I worked on those lessons for a long time making recordings of them, trying them out with people then improving them, till I got them to the point where they felt perfect.

**R:** So you worked out a script.

**D:** Yes, I wrote them. But in my regular work, I tend to make up my ATM lessons on the spot. I won't go in there prepared. I tend to just go into the class and work with whatever is there. I've got something I am interested in usually, but I listen to what people are interested in, and I will just incorporate that into the lesson, and I love doing that. And if something happens in the lesson that I wouldn't have expected or if I realise something then that becomes the theme I will follow. At the moment, a current theme I am interested in is actually paying attention to the brain and the nervous system.

**R:** How do you do that?

**D:** Well, you just ... tune in!... and you may be sensing it, or you may be implying it, but you're bringing your attention to where it is. If you consider the sensations that you feel through your body - they all travel along the peripheral nervous system into the central nervous system and the response comes back the same way. It's an interesting thing to trace. You're sensing all movement relative to the



central nervous system. It has a really interesting effect.

Usually I have some theme that I am exploring and the lesson gets wrapped around the theme, rather than just doing a lesson. So there will be an introduction. At the moment I often start in standing. I will just have some sort of concept and I will introduce that and then draw that into a lesson based on what I see and sense. And I'll make up...

**R:** So, you are inventing ATMs? Or are you drawing on the vast canon of ATMs that is out there?

**D:** Well, I have been through a lot of Alexander Yanai stuff, but I just tend to make them up. Well, I feel I am making them up, but probably I'm sure we may find that Feldenkrais may have done it before. Ha-ha. I mean, you know, there's a variety of structures you use in ATM and they can be useful... as a map for the exploration of a new idea.

I also work with emotional experience in lessons. Noticing what you feel and how you respond - How you embody your orientation to self and world. Of course, you don't try to change, you just observe and it's incorporated into the movements of the lesson. It's about being more adept at articulating nuances of feeling and recognizing your habits of thought and feeling by their absence.

**R:** Let's come back to recording...I'm working out my way of doing it and I know a lot of other Feldenkrais teachers are working things out with their recording. So, you record the classes, and you've talked about the actual commercial production and the recordings that you do.

**D:** Well, I made one, 8 CD set. And I really went to town on the production of them, so there is absolute silence between when I speak and...you know... it's all lovely. But that took a long time and actually to produce the CDs, you know to produce 1000 sets of them cost a fair bit of money to do that so with the next sets I am doing it is just going to be electronic.

**R:** tell us, for the record, what's the name of that 8 CD set?

**D:** oh, thank you, The Heavenly Gait and other Earthly Pleasures. That's really focussed around walking as the thing where you can sense differences through the lessons. So, the new ones I am doing as MP3s and I'm doing lots of them. There is a series of 21 that I am working on that relate to the qualities of the chakras- it's called The Movements of Love and another series called If Your Spine was a Cat, Where Would You Like to be Rubbed?

**R:** Ha-ha, good.

**D:** and ah, anyway, there are lots of CDs I'm making... and I will tend to just sit and write.

**R:** So you write out a script and then record that?

**D:** Yep. Out of lessons I have already worked with, or a concept that I want to explore and then I just work with that and develop it. Often that will come from something I have just done in a live ATM.

**R:** what device do you use?

**D:** I have a beautiful device; it's an EDIROL R-09. It records in broadcast quality 24-bit sound. And it's got really good condenser microphones. But, I mean I record my lessons with that so it gives me good quality sound, but of course you still need a good room, and the room I use has got lots of noise. I tend to go into a studio if I am going to record. It's in a silent environment. I do it on my computer so I can edit it. I used Cubase for my last set.

**R:** so, in your actual classes you've got this EDIROL?

**D:** yeah, it's just a hand held device, or it sits on a stand.

**R:** do you have a clip on microphone or something?

**D:** no, I just use condenser microphones because I'm not doing this in order to turn it directly into CDs...

**R:** So... do you have any favourite books, or favourite journals. So you can say to fellow practitioners- here's something good to read?

**D:** oh well...lately, I think Love's Hidden Symmetry by Bert Hellinger is an extraordinary book that contains a lot of wisdom. It speaks about a matrix that we all carry with us - family relationships, through different generations - that is reflected in our bodies and the way we organise ourselves relative to other people. It's a remarkable book.

**R:** Thank you. I am always interested in what people are reading.

**D:** And I really enjoyed Norman Doidge's book The Brain that Changes Itself.

**R:** Yeah, I liked that.

**D:** And there is an Alexander teacher named Peter Grunwald who's written a book called Eyebody, and that's got a pretty interesting concept as well. He taught himself to see unassisted after having glasses since he was three. He can read fine print now, and he did it by relaxing the whole apparatus of his visual experience - focussing on peripheral vision. Seeing through the brain rather than the eyes. It's an interesting idea.

**You can obtain David's CD set, The Heavenly Gait and Other Earthly Pleasures through his website [www.bodylogic.net.au](http://www.bodylogic.net.au).**

**Peter Grunwald will be running an Eyebody workshop near Melbourne, September 20-26. Information from the School for FM Alexander Studies, phone 03 9486 5900 or [www.alexanderschool.edu.au](http://www.alexanderschool.edu.au)**

**NOTE: in a future issue I hope to present more information on the recording of classes. If you have anything to offer on this topic, please contact me. RAH.**