1. Criteria for Correctness

*What we need is not the will to believe, but the wish to find out.*  
—William Wordsworth

I am often asked the question, "How should I move? What is the correct way to run, walk, or sit?"

Finding correct movement is tricky. While optimal body mechanics exist, it is unhelpful to impose them on your skeleton. The reason is that you are not a disembodied skeleton but a constellation of emotional, psychological, and somatic histories. How, then, do you make sense of correct movement?

I would like to offer a new criteria for correct movement. Instead of striving for optimal mechanics, which may or may not feel logical to you, think of the **optimal amount of effort**. Ask yourself: Do I sense effort as I move?

**WHAT IS EFFORT?**

We all know the feeling of fluid ease compared to the strain of effort. Effort is wasted movement. The efficiency of your movement is conditioned by the solutions you devise in your confrontation with gravity. The question is, are these solutions wasteful or economical?

Economical movement is when the whole muscle contraction is translated into moving the bones. It feels fluid, coordinated, and effortless. It's like being in "flow." On the other hand, wasted movement is not translated into movement. It happens when the muscle contraction is unnecessary but you do it anyway because you can't help it. It's a habit.

Sensing effort is not a process of correcting for "bad mechanics" but an invitation to explore what kind of movement brings you into a sense of flow and ease. In using your awareness to explore options, you will converge on the "proper" movement both as a human skeleton and as a person with a unique personal history.

The trick is to get out of your own way by giving up on any idea you have of correctness and beginning to listen to what you actually feel.

2. Striving for Perfect Posture

*Genius, in truth, is nothing more than the faculty of perceiving in an un habitual way.*  
—William James

We're all striving for better posture. We all feel somehow flawed if we slouch, slump, round, curl, fold, collapse, lean, tilt, or teeter. If our shoulders aren't back, chest up, rear end tucked, and stomach flat there must be something wrong. Try, in fact, to walk around like that, with your shoulders back, tummy held in, rear end tucked and chest up. Can you even move?

**Posture As An Upright Position**

Posture is a funny word. In our culture it's a loaded word. Usually we think of posture as a position, and usually that position is vertical. On top of that, we believe, as a society, that vertical is good, strong, worthy, upstanding, upright. The more vertical, the better.

So we say someone has good posture when they are in an upright position. *But the way someone maintains that position might be very painful.* In the Feldenkrais Method, we look at *how it is one achieves a particular position*, not whether that position is right or wrong.

For example, if someone is ramrod straight and suffering extreme pain to maintain it, that's not well-distributed effort. How can that be a good thing?
You can see where this is going: if you define posture as *the way in which we maintain a particular position*, then a strictly vertical position can have very bad posture, and an awkward, slouchy position can have very good posture. In fact, a slouch can be beautiful if the muscle tone is well-distributed and supporting all the bones.

If, however, you define posture strictly as a vertical position, then a person with abnormally formed bones who could not attain a vertical position would have very bad posture no matter how well they distributed effort through the musculoskeletal system.

**Posture As a Component of Action**

Moshe Feldenkrais also likens posture to a pause between two actions, or a *component of action*. As human beings, we're never fixed in space, we're constantly shifting and adjusting between one stable state and another. Try thinking of posture as that moment in which you organize yourself to shift from one stable state to the next---without discomfort.

**Shifting States Requires Sensitivity**

Ideally, we want to develop the sensitivity to shift from one stable zone to another without adverse effects of being destabilized. We want to be able to "right" ourselves again, and to do that requires sensitivity to where you are in space.

Think of shifting between two stable states for a moment. The premier example of this is shifting from crawling to walking. As babies we sacrificed one kind of stability for another, all without aches and pains!

But as babies we did this through learning. As adults, many of us lose that capacity to shift between stable states---to get something out of the back of the car and stand up again without strain, to pick up a child without pulling something, to ride a bike as long as we want without an aching back, or to walk through a museum without discomfort.

In the Feldenkrais Method, we're waking up our innate capacity to learn how to lose our balance and find it again. (In fact, as a practitioner, the big question for me is not how to we maintain perfect posture, but how do we do when our sense of stability is compromised? How do we go about shifting from one kind of stability to the next, whether it's righting oneself after picking up the groceries or moving to a new city?)

**Feldenkrais's Definition of Posture**

Ultimately, Moshe Feldenkrais defines posture as *a position from which we can move in any direction without preparation*. In fact, he throws out the word "posture" altogether and uses the word "acture"!

*So try thinking of acture the next time you want to pull your shoulders back or hoist your chest up. How will you safely, effortlessly, fluidly move out of that position into the next direction you want to go in that moment, that day, in life?*
3. Adopting vs. Adapting

*I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it.* —Pablo Picasso

Adaptability is a wise human skill

The capacity to adapt to the external environment is a wise human skill. Adaptations can be, for example, the organization of muscle tone, breathing patterns, vocal pitch, facial expressions, etc. Here's a question: How fast do you adapt? For example, if you had to swerve out of the way of a car, what would happen to your muscle tone? Breathing? Can you respond so as to insure optimal survival?

How well do you adapt?

Now, what if, instead of momentarily adapting to the car swerving, you *adopted* your response to that car as your "new normal"? Can you see the problems that would create? This is an example of a common response to trauma: the nervous system continues to respond to a situation where a momentary adaptation to the environment would have been more optimal. You can see that adaptability has to do with responsiveness. Ever watch a cat whip its head around at the slightest noise when it seemed asleep? *There is no inhibition to responsiveness in its nervous system.*

Why don't we adapt better?

We are habitual creatures with thousands of inhibited impulses. This is necessary for living in society, but it is helpful to have access to spontaneity and responsiveness when we need it. It is a rare person who has access to a full range of potential responses. Most people will respond in their age-old habitual way and unconsciously inhibit new or novel responses. In fact, many people inhibit their full range of responses by contorting their breathing, movement, and expression to *look like* they are adapting. But they're not. They're relying on the internal organization they adopted to survive because it's what they *know.* That unconscious inhibition of our full range of responses takes energy and tension to maintain. In the end, looking like we're adapting, but really not, takes a tremendous toll on our health.

Everything gets stuck as we age

Unfortunately, most of us live a life in which adaptability is on an ever-increasing downward slope. As we age, we get "stuck in our habits" or "stuck in a rut." Everything gets stuck! Quite literally. And we wonder why we get sick and stressed.

Adopting too fixed a pattern is dangerous

Therefore, if we limit our capacity to respond to novel environments too much, we limit optimal living and, indeed, our very health and survival. Current brain research is catching up to the anecdotal data that shows the brain needs novelty and constant learning to keep us "young", i.e., responsive. Therefore, our ability to adapt to novelty without becoming fixed becomes critical.

How do you become more adaptable?

How do you train yourself to be more responsive? One way is to slowly and safely introduce novelty into the nervous system through the Feldenkrais Method. If there is too much too fast, the nervous
system will feel threatened and shut down. Introducing novelty through learning new movement skills is the most effective and safe way to increase adaptability. In particular, it is through movement that we can monitor tension and rigidity so we can learn to adapt to new situations without the pain and stress.