This paper was presented at the *Mansbach-Feldenkrais Project* on December 2, 2023, Westfalen, Germany.

A Perfect Pair of Lessons for Mastering Rolling

Rolling is a milestone in the sensory-motor development of every newborn, which teaches our body how to balance in response to the force of gravity and enables us to sit, stand, and walk.

As adults, we usually do not roll on the floor anymore, but we do not lose the faculty to do so.

Revisiting those initial moments of our sensory-motor development has incommensurable value for our posture and the integration of the skeletal schema and its movements. The effect on the nervous system activates the brain's capacity for plasticity.

The Feldenkrais Method includes various lessons where rolling is a central theme, and two are noticeable – they mirror and complement each other.

Lesson AY 122, *Rolling Right and Left,* and Lesson AY 313, *Rolling at the Rate of Stretching and Bending*, replicate primitive reflexes, which we can observe in newborns. The lessons show how rolling is facilitated by rocking the body and flexing and extending arms and legs.

Lesson AY 313 starts with flexion and extension of fetal movements in a dynamism that arcs and straightens the back of the body. The Moro Reflex movements come after.

This reflex is an involuntary protective motor response against sudden loss of support and disruption of body balance. As soon as this happens, arms and legs extend away from the body and to the sides, then drawn together as if in an embrace. The movements slightly roll the body.

Lesson AY 122 repeats those movements, but not at the beginning. The lesson starts by replicating another primitive reflex, the Asymmetric Tonic Neck Reflex (ATNR), and the movements of the Moro Reflex come after.

In the ATNR, like in Lesson AY 122, when the face turns to one side, the arm and leg of the same side straighten, and those of the other side flex. The flexed leg slightly pushes the floor which assists the body in rolling.

In the newborn, these movements help in rolling by crossing the midline, which is vital for controlling coordination and balance, and benefits the communication between the two brain hemispheres.

The crossing of the midline we find it also at the end of Lesson AY 313 when the instructions are to drag along the floor an arm – above the head – and the leg from the same side to the other side of the

body. In the lesson, the crossing marks the rotational axis, and the turn of the head toward the side of the extended arm reactivates eye-hand contact, as in the reflex.

It is noticeable that the first primitive reflex to emerge *in utero* is the Moro Reflex, which appears between nine to twelve weeks after conception. The ATNR emerges *in utero* later, at around eighteen weeks. Whereas Lesson AY 313 follows the sequence of reflexes as it appears in our sensory-motor development, Lesson AY 122 reverses the order.

We should bear in mind that according to Moshe Feldenkrais, a movement is mastered when you can do it backward. Starting from the end of a movement and finalizing it at what is usually the beginning proves that the movement has been learned and acquired. Feldenkrais calls this process "reversibility." In the present case, the reversal is in the sequence of the sensory-motor development.

In essence, the pair of lessons aim to master balance through integrated body movements and to facilitate a sensorial recollection of primary motor experiences. Our body recalls those initial moments when, as infants, we begin learning how to manage gravity and balance. The information is imprinted into our nervous system. The idea is to assimilate and adjust those original patterns – when involuntary reflexes became voluntary movements – to the

present configuration of the body. The ultimate objective is to expose nonconscious schemas of action and, eventually – after disciplined and awareness practice – to revivify cerebral maps, neuronal connections, body movements, and self-image.