



The Potent Self: A Guide to Spontaneity

Moshé Feldenkrais

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This monumental, foundational book fully explains the theory behind the author's revolutionary techniques for improving the functions of the human motor system.

The Potent Self: A Guide to Spontaneity Details

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May says

the preface and introduction alone have already made me look at things differently. just like that the other day i jumped in the ice cold river and later had my first dive in 15 years.

Melanie says

The body and the mind are not separate. After becoming an athlete late in life and gaining heightened awareness of my body, I found myself nodding my head at every other page. It's not just about athleticism, however--not at all. Feldenkrais delves into how and why the body learns, how the mind makes connections based on experience. Now I see why all dancers and bodywork people I know always mention him. Reading this book has been extremely enlightening.

Caleb Winebrenner says

Moshe Feldenkrais wrote this book during the time that he was delivering the lectures later published as Body and Mature Behavior. In many ways, this book picks up where he left off in the lectures. Additionally, this book has the added benefit of not having been published until much later. Having read all of Dr. Feldenkrais's books, I am of the distinct opinion that this book presents many of his early ideas in a much more readable and less technical form than his very early writings. Feldenkrais believed that everyone, not only scientists, should have access to the knowledge in his works. While his earliest books, both those on Judo and the aforementioned Body and Mature Behavior were meant for a specialized audience, The Potent Self is his first attempt to bring his books to a wider readership.

It is in this book that he makes most clear his opinions on the limitless ability for people to adapt and change. He says over and over again, in no uncertain terms, that the human nervous system is fluid, and if we wish to we can improve our function. He pays special attention to the role of the head of the pelvis and how we orient and direct ourselves in space.

It is also worth noting that in its original form, this book existed before Feldenkrais had written Awareness through Movement or published the case study around Nora (Body Awareness as Healing Therapy). Therefore, while this is an excellent book Dr. Feldenkrais's theories, it does not clearly demonstrate any particular exercise or set of techniques. Though he describes some techniques in later chapters, in general that is not the point of the book. Like Body and Mature Behavior, this book is one of his "studies" of the human person (while, as I said, being meant for the lay reader).

I think the most insightful remark in the book is when he says that posture is a misleading term. As a replacement, he coined the word acture, because in every sense of the body there is the potency for action. The more aligned our bodies are for the graceful actions we wish to make, then the healthier and more integrated we are. By his logic then, by improving our function and integration, we are able to act with greater creativity, spontaneity, inside, and compassion.

The book ends on a profoundly hopeful note. The chapter “A little philosophy” and the conclusion, “Is there a way out?” reveal a great deal about Feldenkrais’s beliefs about humanity, and his ardent desire for our flourishing. I often recommend this book not only to people who are interested in his works, but additionally to people who are simply interested in how to be better human beings in body and mind. Should you find yourself asking questions around movement, creativity, or awareness, or even yoga or dance, then this book is worth your reading time.

Alea says

As enlightening, and stunning, as this book is, I'll have to read it at least 6 more times to fully grasp all of Moshe's ideas. There are ideas that resonate with me now, and the ones that didn't I suspect will come in time, hopefully as I go through the Feldenkrais training. I look forward to that next time, as I'll read with a different mind-set and a new perspective.

Benjamin Law says

The book is brilliant. The connection between the way that people control their own bodies and the anxiety and neuroses of the mind is spectacular and tangible. I think everyone should read this book - it's mind blowing.
