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What would Moshe Do? The Limitations of Certainty

by Gabrielle Pullen, GCFP

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In this month's spotlight on those who trained directly with Moshe Feldenkrais, I spoke with Russell Delman, whose interest in body/mind perspectives and human potential began in 1969 by pursuing a course of study including psychology, yoga and Zen. Now a trainer, he has taught more than forty professional training programs internationally.



(picture of Russell Delman. Used with permission.)

- systemic vs. linear thinking - the limitations of certainty - unified consciousness - - how the concrete provides insight into the abstract -

S: Take me back to your initial encounters with Moshe, what was it about meeting him that really made an impact in your psyche?

D: He really made me question almost everything – that was the primary influence. And a second thing grew out of that questioning: we were his first committed Western audience that was going to be with him for a number of years, and he was committed to teaching us how to think. We were sloppy in our thinking. We were these hippies from the mid-seventies and we were not well-developed thinkers. He was really rigorous in getting us to question 'cause and effect thinking,' linear thinking. He actually nicknamed someone in that training 'Mr. Cause-and-Effect,' because he always asked things like, 'If a knee has this problem, do you do that or this?' But Moshe was adamant in getting us to think systemically, and

systematically, in whole patterns. His rigor with that was profound. I can remember him just laying into me for asking about the relationship between reflexive movement and conscious movement. His response was, 'Well, do you know what a reflex is? What's the difference between a reflex and an instinct? Have you really thought about this from many points of view? I think you're just asking me this off the top of your head and I'm not interested.' It would be like that. And I was well educated, had been to a good college, but my thinking was so linear, and he gave me many opportunities to take it deeper.

S: Did he teach using the Socratic Method? Was his tactic to ask a question in answer to a question?

D: Sometimes. He kind of enjoyed putting people on the spot. He didn't shy away from

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making a public spectacle, almost humiliating people, but he would also come back with a compliment, later.

My favorite story about him was when I was giving him two lessons a day in Tel Aviv after his first stroke while he was recovering and just starting to work. It was July of '82, I think. We'd spend the day together. I'd give him a *Functional Integration*® lesson in the morning, and at night, and I'd watch him give the one lesson he did each day with this young girl who had a clot on her brain.

At that time, Israel was sending airplanes to bomb Lebanon. We could hear them flying overhead, and every hour he, his nurse and his brother, Baruch, would each put on their radio listening to three different reports. I remember saying to Moshe - I was a hippie, putting up a peace sign almost- "When will human beings stop killing each other?" He looked at me, playfully, and said, "Russell, you're so stupid. Would you take fever away from the organism?"

"What? No, that's part of healing!" I answered.

"Is it possible that these little skirmishes are needed so that we don't blow up the planet? Did you know that historically war has served to bring rights to different populations, and to spread genes around the planet? And, have you thought about

how it generates a form of population control?"

He went on and on with six or seven different ways of looking at it.

S: You mean he was construing war as a sort of global inflammation?

D: Yes! But, it was more about how I came to a conclusion, a sense of certainty very quickly: war is bad; peace is good, and stop thinking about it.

S: Cause and effect, black and white.

D: I remember walking home, being dumbfounded with the realization that I really don't think about things. I thought, "God, I was so sure I was right! How did I get lost in my certainty again?"

Then, in the next few days we would be at his place and the planes would be flying, the reports coming through on the radio and I said, "Moshe, isn't it great that there's a healing of the planet going on right now?"

He replied, "Russell, you're so stupid. What could be worse than the killing of innocent women and children?" He wanted us to be able to tolerate paradox.

S: It sort of ties into the principle that what we resist persists, doesn't it?

D: I got this first from him and

also through my Zen training. It's something I really try to convey to my students: the importance of being able to tolerate paradox, of getting big enough inside that there's an ability to tolerate different points of view that look contradictory.

S: This is a major issue for our times, isn't it?

D: Yes, and one of the reasons it's so hard for people is because it's a bodily experience. It's having enough breath and enough space to tolerate these kinds of opposites. For me, it's what makes it possible for me to be with people of very different political views and really not get cramped inside. It's an opening that allows me to want to understand how this alien point of view might be right also. Or, what is the true need and value that they're standing up for? It's not that they're stupid and I'm smart. It's that they've got a piece of the truth that I'm not valuing enough. It's a kind of an inner width that I'm very grateful for.

S: What you're describing would seem to be more than a way of thinking. It's an embodied experience of how to hold differences simultaneously. It's almost like a different way of being with paradox.

D: It is.

S: Are there other ways that Moshe affected, not just your thinking,

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(picture of Russell Delman. Used with permission.)

"Human Transformation requires the movement from fear to love as our basic operating principle. Presence is the door, Embodiment is the key..."

...The Limitations of Certainty

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Tomorrow, when you wake up in the morning, just try putting on your pants with your non-dominant leg, or brushing your teeth with your non-dominant hand.

but you're way of experiencing the process we call living?

D: Well, one way is by example. I observed how present he was with people when he was working, this reminded me of a Zen Master. Also, he allowed his first students to learn by working on him. When on the table, he was a very generous client, always taking in what he could learn and not criticizing.

S: People assume there needs to be some sort of physical impairment to benefit from *Functional Integration*. You seem to emphasize the change in the person's thinking and in their consciousness in addition to the physical change. Is there a larger dimension beyond fixing physical problems?

D: Yes, Moshe was really helping us change our ways of viewing life and of living in the world. We began to sense the possibility of living our dreams. I will forever be grateful for this. In addition, moving together, learning together, we began to realize that a significant facet of human consciousness is that human beings deeply influence each other in surprising ways.

It still happens in professional trainings today that often a trainer will give a single lesson in front of the group and big things will happen. Then the practitioners go back to their own private practice and things happen more incrementally.

If you look in the trainer's private practice, things usually happen more gradually as well. But if you look at the environment of the training, the attention of fifty people looking adds a lot to the experience of the person on the table. And that field actually makes for a very powerful effect. Very often, you give a lesson in a Training and not just the person on the table, but everyone there is a witness to the difference, making it somehow more tangible, more real, a more, 'Wow, look what happened!' experience.

S: You mean, it's like a field of consciousness that serves as if to amplify the experience for everyone present?

D: Yes, it is a powerful element. It's certainly not the only thing going on, but it's a factor that points to a unified field.

S: It's a great illustration of the fallacy of cause-and-effect thinking. How, if we can have that great an effect on each other, can we hope to reduce experience to something linear when in fact so much is going on behind the scenes?

D: Think of it this way: What are the habits that you have that seem to create the same response over and over again? Do you have a habit of talking to your child in a certain kind of voice? One that may, in fact, beg a certain kind of response? Or, do you find you have a habit of recreating the same kind of relationship? That even after you break up with someone, you

find someone else with similar traits? Do you find you have the same points of conflict with your spouse? What are the habits that you have that seem to create the same kind of response?

Look: here's how you can make a leap from the physical experience of how habit can, at times, confine us to certain outcomes, into the realm of the more abstract kinds of habits, like how we relate to others, or how we affect each other in that unified field of consciousness, or how we could learn to think in new, more systemic ways. Tomorrow, when you wake up in the morning, just try putting on your pants with your non-dominant leg, or brushing your teeth with your non-dominant hand. The stories I hear from people who try this are hilarious. It's an opportunity to see how habit can constrain us to a certain course without our awareness.

S: What keeps you coming back to the *Feldenkrais Method*®, in spite of all the other things you've studied; yoga, Zen, meditation, and transpersonal psychology, among other things?

D: I love working with the place where the concrete experience of physical habit provides insight into other dimensions of how we live our lives. That's where I find the work most interesting. It's in using the moving experience to touch into the living situations, relationships, and work situations that I find the work the most fascinating. And, it's entirely doable for most people. ☺



(picture by Wendy Murdoch)

THE *FELDENKRAIS METHOD*[®] FOR EFFORTLESS RIDING

by Wendy Murdoch, GCFP

How many times have you gotten on your horse and thought, "I am so stiff!" Or, maybe you have noticed your horse is stiff, has trouble bending, or taking a particular canter lead. You have recognized that you are part of the problem, but what do you do about it? Wouldn't it be wonderful if there were a way to solve these problems without hours of stretching, or years and years of riding? There is. The *Feldenkrais Method* offers riders a unique way to solve riding problems through pain-free, gentle, small movements that teach you how to move in new ways, in just minutes.

How can the *Feldenkrais Method* work so quickly?

Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, the creator of the Method, was an engineer. After suffering a severe knee injury he rehabilitated himself and in the process developed the *Feldenkrais Method*. Dr.

Feldenkrais recognized several key factors, which serve as the basis of the *Feldenkrais Method*:

- (1.) You cannot think a thought without a movement,
- (2.) We act in accordance to our own self-image, and
- (3.) We can change our self-image, and therefore our human potential, with conscious awareness through movement.

Every time you think of taking an action, like getting out of your chair, your nervous system gets ready for you to stand up, before you ever acted upon your desire to stand. Whenever you ask your horse to turn, the thought of turning has caused a response in your body that may ask your horse to turn. A sensitive horse hears the 'getting ready' part before you ever consciously 'act' on the thought. That is why with some horses you have to be extremely careful of your thoughts so they don't act on them, like jumping too soon, or stopping at a fence because you held your breath!

That we act in accordance with our own self-image is expressed daily in our riding. If we say that we are stiff, or we can't jump that high, or our horse doesn't like crossing water, then that is what we project to our horse and how our horse will respond. It is as if our limiting belief system is transmitted to the horse, and the horse expresses it like a mirror. However, we can change our self-image through learning new possibilities of movement. Not only does this improve our physical potential, it also changes our self-image, and therefore allows our horse to perform new and different movements. The horse suddenly becomes confident because the rider is acting in a new and positive way.

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(Wendy functionally integrating a student. Photo by Lee Rouse.)



(Wendy working with a student. Photo by Lee Rouse)

...EFFORTLESS RIDING

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Here's a taste of a *Feldenkrais*® ATM lesson:

Sitting in your chair, turn to look at something behind you on your right. Only do what is easy. Mark the spot on the wall for how far around you can see to begin with.

Now take only your eyes to the right three times. Leave your nose straight ahead. Go slowly, notice if your eyes jump or pan like a video camera as you move your eyes. Do not force anything. Go slowly! Rest.

Next leave your eyes straight ahead (look at a picture on the wall or a tree) and take your nose (with your head) to the right three times. Going slowly, do not force the movement. Only do what is easy. Rest.

This time leave your head and eyes straight ahead and turn your chest to the right, three times. Again, go slowly, only what is easy and notice if other parts of you want to follow. Rest.

Now look to your right as you did in the first step. How much further can you look?

By taking the time to differentiate your eyes, head and chest you discover that you can look much further with less effort. That's [the] *Feldenkrais [Method]*! Imagine how that will help you look for your turns on a hunter course, or a ten meter circle in the dressage arena, and perhaps more importantly, how this will make it easier for your horse to do what you want. ☺

Wendy Murdoch is an International Riding Instructor/Clinician and a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitionersm based in Virginia. She is the author of Simplify Your Riding, 50 Five Minute Fixes to Improve Your Riding and the three DVD series Ride Like A Natural. For more information go to www.murdochmethod.com or contact Wendy at wendy@wendymurdoch.com.

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(Wendy and horse. Photo by Lee Rouse)



(picture by Mary O'Brien)

A Dance of Awareness

(Practitioners Mary Lou Tromanhauser and Julie Francis explore the dance that is the *Feldenkrais Method*®)

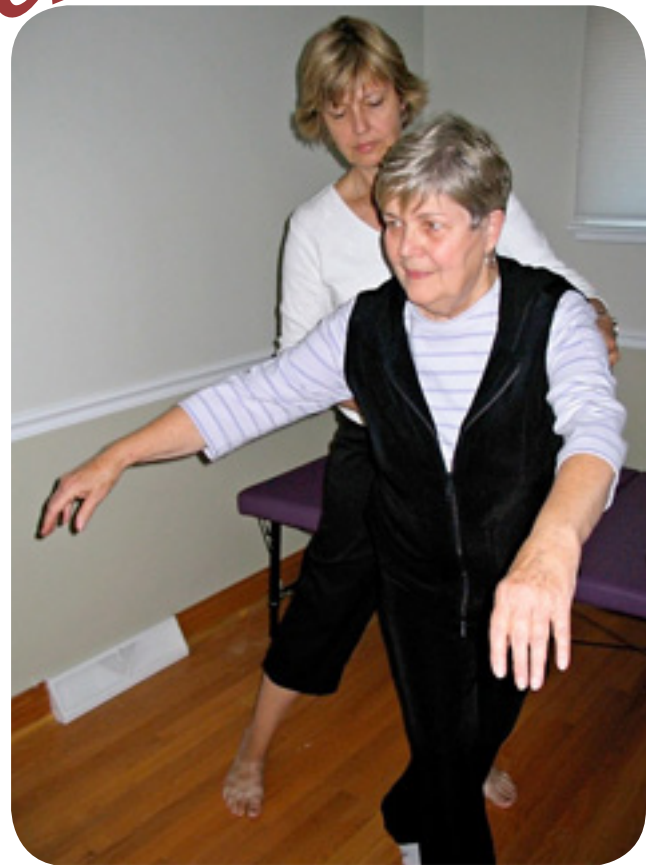
I lie comfortably on a low table. Using her hands, Julie guides my right leg through a gentle reality check asking with each subsequent movement one more piece – hip, pelvis, vertebra – to participate. Free of the need to activate on my own, my nervous system relearns the possibility of easy motion. Julie and I continue our exploration searching for the place where movement originates freely, absent of the Parkinsonian tremors, seeking the quiet within.

Parkinson's exacted a physical and an emotional toll. As a lifelong dancer, fluid movement was not only a way of life but at the core of my very self-image. Without dance who was I? I struggled with the demands of the disease, and eventually turned to friend, mentor and *Feldenkrais*® teacher, Julie Francis, for both moral and physical support. Together we entered into a pas de deux that would lead us both on a remarkable journey of self-discovery and personal transformation.

Julie Francis came to the *Feldenkrais Method* because her daughter has Cerebral Palsy. "Like Mary Lou, I had struggled with the emotional discomfort of wanting "perfection" where it wasn't likely," she noted. "The *Feldenkrais Method* taught me to instead hold perfection not as a goal but as a potential that informs individual exploration."

Julie set out to help me reach that state of acceptance from which anything is possible. She saw me as a dancer even when I felt I wasn't. "Dance is Mary Lou's essence," Julie adds. "I encouraged her to move for movement's sake, to revel in fluidity within a small range of motion, and to become her own choreographer using her limitations as creative opportunities."

I had flirted with the *Feldenkrais Method* for years, curious about its focus on movement as part of the healing process. Little did I know how profoundly it would impact my life. I first went to Julie for *Feldenkrais* lessons for pain I was experiencing in my right hip. I wanted her to "fix" me. When she couldn't, I became angry. But she didn't give up on me. Instead, she suggested I enroll in a *Feldenkrais* training so I could learn for myself how to explore my own possibility for healing. It was an aggravation and a gift. I thought of myself as open minded



(Julie working with Mary Lou. Photo by Edward Tromanhauser.)

but now realize I blocked some learning because I saw things as all black or white, good or bad.

When even the training didn't cure my hip pain, I chose surgery. Determined to dance again, I reached out to Julie for help. The road to recovery was paved with bumps. When I received a diagnosis of Parkinson's, I hit bottom.

"I know how difficult it is to see dreams crumble," Julie shared. "We all want the big, the grand. But it's focusing on the small that opens the door to possibility, even elegance."

That lesson has made all the difference for me. I'm no longer concerned with trying to be the dancer I was. Instead, I stay focused on becoming the dancer I am. I've realized that my essence is the joy of movement. Recognizing that, I am now more alive to the larger dance we call life. I no longer think of myself as needing to be fixed but instead dance with possibility. I dance. You dance. We dance!💃🕺

Julie Francis maintains a practice in Glen Ellyn, IL. She can be reached at 630-858-MOVE.

Mary Lou Tromanhauser practices in Westchester, IL. She can be reached at 708-562-0744.

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Making SPACE for the Unfamiliar

by Maureen McHugh, GCFP



(picture of Maureen McHugh)

Margie has been coming to private sessions in my office for several weeks to get help with neck and shoulder pain. During this most recent session we had begun with some movements of rolling and reaching, and now she was lying on her back, resting. I noticed that her breath was easy, her neck and shoulders were relaxed, her hands were at ease and her low back was comfortable with her legs outstretched. All this was a big change.

Sitting next to her I said, "Margie, I'd like to tell you a story." She nodded yes, and I continued. "Last night after dinner I was amusing myself like this." I stood and extended my arms sideways to shoulder height and turned the palms up. "I was holding a ball in my left hand, it's about five inches wide, and I was trying to roll it across my shoulders to arrive in the other hand." Margie gave me an encouraging smile; she knows that I like juggling and related things. I continued: "At first I was having fun. It's a new trick, so I kept dropping the ball. I was cheerfully picking it up and beginning again. But then something changed, and I started to get frustrated."

"Fortunately, I was in a quiet space inwardly, so I was present to the beginning of frustration. A picture came into my head of a slide, like at a playground. I felt, 'Oh no! Here I go, sliding downward into a negative state.' Another something inside me SO MUCH did not want to take that downward slide."

I paused in talking to Margie as I remembered the next moment. An unusual inner experience had occurred, and I felt unsure how to share it. For a moment we just looked at each other. She seemed to be understanding me and encouraging me, so I continued. "Margie," I said, "What came next is hard to describe. I just stood still, and there was an inner pause. I felt that I got wider inside, and there was silence everywhere. In that silence a voice that felt like me spoke. It was feeling fear and confusion and said, 'I don't know what to do.' The silence lasted a few more moments, and then a second voice spoke. This one

didn't feel like me, and it spoke with authority. It said: 'What you are looking for is an unfamiliar sensation.' "

Margie's eyes squinted a little and she said, "That's an interesting message! But what does it mean?" I said, "It means I think I can succeed at rolling the ball across my shoulders by using the repertoire of sensations I already know. But that won't work. The trick needs sensations I do not yet know. In other words, there is a sequence of sensations that corresponds to the ball rolling across shoulders, and I am not yet familiar with that sequence."

Now Margie's eyes were wide open and she was giving me a big smile. She said, "That's what's going on with me, isn't it? I feel so good right now. This is what I hoped to get by coming here. And now, if I understand you correctly, it will help me to sustain this good feeling if I recognize that -- in relation to my usual sense of self -- these are unfamiliar sensations. The familiar leads me back into trouble. The way out of pain is through what feels, in the beginning at least, unfamiliar."

She paused and then asked, "Are we on the same page?"

I said, "Yes, we are!" ☺

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The Donkey Cart

by Pamela Beets, GCFP & Lisa Crispin, workshop participant



(Chester with his driver. Photo provided by P. Beets)

Over the past fifteen years I have been giving *Functional Integration*® lessons to equestrians mounted, either privately or in workshops. Riders have a variety of concerns: posture, connection with their horses, balance, honing the cues to specific movements such as a canter pirouette. It is always interesting, challenging and fun teaching riders different ways to be aware of themselves and their horses. This was one of the more unusual *Functional Integration* requests I've had at a riding workshop.

I knew this would be a sitting lesson. Not your normal sitting lesson on the table or chair - it was in a donkey cart- with a very dignified donkey. In this lesson, Lisa wanted her mini-donkey, the admirable Chester to learn to move forward as he pulled his cart at the trot on verbal command. (He worked off verbal command at the walk and halt.) Lisa thought perhaps there was something she was doing with her body or hands that prevented him from trotting. He also would not maintain the trot, needing to be cued repeatedly. She could ask him to trot with a gentle tap of the driving whip. Chester didn't seem to mind the whip much but for Lisa, even the softest cue with the whip was too much whip for gentle Chester.

Lisa is an accomplished driver, winning competitions with her skill in driving through obstacles and weight

pulls. She is also a beautiful rider. I have watched her drive and ridden in the donkey cart with her while she drove. She has such an extraordinary connection with her donkeys and understands their subtlest expressions and needs.

I've done some horse driving in single and double hitch, and a bit of donkey driving at this farm, so I knew this lesson would be creative. But I was

I know in working with mounted riders that tiny changes affect the horse and its performance significantly.

a bit uncertain since driving is not as easy as it looks. The translation of intention through six to ten feet or more of rein from the driver's hands to the mouth of the horse, or in this case, donkey, has to be exact. The driver has to rate speed, direction, anticipate changes and cue at the right time to allow the donkey time to coordinate the cues and respond. Or, quite literally, you can have a wreck.

I really couldn't imagine what would encourage Chester to trot on verbal command. In the best *Feldenkrais*® tradition of exploration and curiosity I walked out into the field wondering what in the world I was going to do.

I know in working with mounted riders that tiny changes affect the horse and its performance significantly. The most attentive of riders are often surprised at how little changes so much for the horse. There were so many more variables to consider in adding a complex harness and cart to the equation. The cart has its own weight and balance, it is hooked through harness and shafts, which have weight and the shafts restrict movement such as bending in a turn.

The harness itself is heavy and comprised of many pieces that hook together: to the donkey, to the cart and then connecting to the driver. During the lesson the infinitesimal changes in Lisa's balance, hand rotation, and back softness all had significant reverberations for Chester.

We worked with several concepts: balance in Lisa's hands, feet and sitting placement in the cart. Position:

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including elevation and rotation of Lisa's hands and wrists, feet placement, where Lisa held the whip on the handle, where she sat on the seat and how far forward or back. We added the concept of softness in her body while keeping her posture correct for driving. We also included the idea of Lisa's "internal space," the space inside of her ribcage and inside of the pelvis, so those areas had definition and connection to her arms and hands and were part of her use and awareness in driving. The idea of internal space could be part of the cues for Chester, in that directing this space would slightly change her balance, which Chester could interpret as a cue to turn or stop or go forward.

Here I am standing in a field talking about the subtleties of movement and experimenting with them and wondering how a donkey is going to conceptualize or respond to this with eager forward movement at a verbal command. While Lisa and I were still trying to figure this out, Chester got it and started happily trotting off. Chester understood what we were looking for almost before we did and showed this by trotting. Lisa and I were both a bit surprised; we expected this to be much more difficult than it was.

The original idea was to give Lisa a sitting lesson in the donkey cart. The experience unfolded to be so much bigger than that. I read a quote from Allison Glock-Cooper about the power of love, "What matters is the connection to one soul to another, the elemental magic that convinces you that you matter." The moment when the lesson transformed from merely the mechanics of driving to Lisa and Chester's acknowledgement of each

other humbled and inspired me. There is deep and beautiful bond between Lisa and Chester: Lisa's desire to improve her driving is based entirely on appreciating him as an intelligent being, a friend. Though the driving whip is used in the most conscientious and gentle manner, less is more. The quality of communication matters. Lisa is mindful of Chester's self-awareness and sentience - he matters.

For me the question in working with horse and rider or driver and donkey is, who is the lesson really for? This work is so unknowable in many



(Lisa and Chester working with Pamela. Photo provided by P. Beets)

respects. As teachers or practitioners, we don't know an individual's inner self and inner experience of a lesson. What it means for them at the most transcendent level is unknowable to us. I trust that each individual knows and understands his or her own needs in response to *Functional Integration* or *Awareness Through Movement*®. Intelligence, sentience, two nervous systems communicating--we talk so much about this, and wonder what it really means. But Chester and Lisa know.

Lisa Crispin, Workshop Student:

Working with Pam transformed my dressage skills with horses, so I had no doubt she could help me with the donkeys. It was exciting for me to apply what we had just felt in the *Awareness Through Movement* exercises to driving. This was a remarkably enlightening experience.

Chester responded right away as Pam made adjustments on my shoulders and hands, and I tried to apply what we had practiced in the lesson that morning. I had a habit of clenching the ends of the lines between my knees so they wouldn't trail down and get caught in the cart wheels. Pam suggested that I knot the lines so I could keep my knees open and parallel. She had me sit tall and look between Chester's ears, just like I would while riding a horse. I relaxed my knees and elbows, and felt the weight of my feet on the cart.

One of the most surprising moments was seeing how pointing my knees in the direction of the turn helped with turning, especially pivots – Chester was spinning the cart around like a reining horse! The things Pam told me to do made lots of sense once I did them but I hadn't thought of them on my own.

Pam worked on my arms, hands, shoulders and head, and suggested things to try. Then I experimented for a few minutes as Pam observed and gave me more ideas. Sometimes I'd try something to get Chester trotting, and he'd halt. This was interesting! I'd ask myself, "What did I do there that will be useful when I really do want

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...The Donkey Cart

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to halt?" Other times he would sail right into a trot and stay there, without me having to use a whip aid. I was so excited by the dramatic results.

A few days later, I tried the same experiments with Ernest, a champion obstacle-driving donkey whom we refer to as "the good donkey." He's a few years older than Chester, a steady worker. My new body position and energy took him to a new level, responding to the lightest of aids. Areas where he struggled before, such as the "reinback," improved. (The reinback is a complex set of movements in which the donkey halts then takes a step back to rest and remain ready for the next cue. Backing up with a cart is a difficult maneuver for the donkey). Chester has also improved with each session since my clinic with Pam.

When I hitched both Ernest and Chester to their arena drag and worked the dressage arena (our favorite job at Infinity Farms), I paid attention to my posture, kept my shoulders and chest squared at their ears, thought about pointing my body in the direction of turns, thought about my breathing and energy. I wasn't really expecting much – after all, there was no weight from shafts that might tell them what I was doing, no aids other than the lines, my voice and the whip. However, I saw a difference right away. They kept together better, moved straighter, and turned more responsively. When we drag the arena, we often have to make very tight turns, where the donkeys step sideways to turn the drag in the new direction. I feel a bit awkward facing the new direction myself in these turns, since I'm also trying to keep them moving forward, but it does keep them turning better. I can tell that

Ernest "gets it" more than Chester, but we're all learning.

One thing I have always valued about the *Feldenkrais Method* and working with Pam is that the lessons always stay with me. I might forget exactly what Pam said or did, but the feeling remains and I can repeat my successes. I'm having a ball continuing to experiment and improve, whether I'm driving the donkeys solo or as a team, with a cart or ground driving. I'm sure the donkeys are enjoying themselves more too! 🐾

Pamela Beets, a lifelong horse lover, has been riding and training horses since age nine and has been practicing since 1991, specializing working with riders and horses of all disciplines. She currently resides in Colorado.

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