



## **Unlocking Lockdown With Feldenkrais**

by Charlotte Seirberg

**"Life is not a stable process. Our ability to recover is our greatest quality."  
Moshe Feldenkrais**

As a movement teacher, the first lockdown felt like a prison sentence. I had an active teaching schedule, moving locations about 25 times weekly, meeting clients, interacting with classes and walking about 5km daily. It changed overnight. My world reduced to the size of my apartment. I traded walking for sitting, movement for meetings, personal interactions for a webcam and Zoom. My active life was suddenly passive and sedentary.

On a personal level, sluggishness crept in, and I noticed my breathing changed. It felt as if my naturally low blood pressure had become lower; this made me want to eat all the time, even when I knew I couldn't be hungry. From this experience, I realised the absolute importance of movement and how it affects my mental wellness.

So I started swimming in the outdoor pool to improve my front crawl. I practised Feldenkrais to fine-tune my swimming style, which I had previously avoided because it was difficult. This gave me an outdoor activity and a powerful incentive.

I purposely chose to swim in what I call the mindful lane, otherwise known as the slow(er) lane. My functional integration sessions face-to-face in London were paying off. I improved and changed my intention, from striving for speed to cultivating patience with a beginner's mind. This made the learning experience enjoyable and enhanced my overall swimming experience.

My take-away was that I found a need for bigger, more dynamic movements, and without Feldenkrais, I would have stayed in my comfort zone. Being outdoors, interacting with people and exchanging friendly gestures boosted my oxytocin levels.

**"What I'm after isn't flexible bodies but flexible brains. What I'm after is to restore each person to their human dignity." Moshe Feldenkrais**

Setting up a movement routine and sharing Feldenkrais with others was rewarding. I would teach and participate in my own Mindful Pilates classes, a slower-paced class combining the Feldenkrais and Pilates methods. This routine helped me create structure, incorporate movement into my day, attend to myself while attending to others.

Sharing my love of movement created a space for more human connections online and in the real world.

Outside I led weekly walking groups or individual sessions in the parks, liaising with the local council and a charity. The groups were diverse with Africans, Caribbeans, Asians, Europeans and British. I included Feldenkrais movements, and we walked through winter with equanimity, improving ourselves step-by-step. My fellow walkers connected me with people between 65-95-years old.

Integrating previous teaching habits with new brought challenges of its own. My new routine around the virtual world meant more sitting and admin hours, leading to more discomfort. I decided to ask other Feldenkrais trainers worldwide to help me spotlight my blind spots when sitting. A dialogue began. Gradually, I managed to sit for longer and with more ease, and a prolonged pain in my chest and arm almost diminished.

One of the bigger challenges has been navigating between the virtual and real spaces. I can feel myself clinging to the real world when I'm attending a Feldenkrais or another training on Zoom. The Zoom gallery mode makes me feel trapped as if I am inside a square on grid paper. To make this easier, I started introducing more movement, a variety of positions and breaks with the webcam off. It was liberating. It gave me the feeling I was in a Feldenkrais training in the real world, with more physical space around me. I felt like one of Dali's melting clocks draping over the sofa or floor.

In the summer I had the opportunity to teach a Feldenkrais taster class in adult education, and combining the online with face-to-face was appealing. The excitement quickly vanished as I was suspended between two worlds in a 'third space'. I was feeling displaced. Afterwards I noticed I was leaning more towards the online world than the real. From that experience I learned that teaching in the real world was not going to be the same as before the lockdown. I felt bereft. As time has passed and my resistance softened like it does after a Feldenkrais session, I found my attitude changing and I'm now warming to the idea of teaching some classes in dual mode.

**"Nothing is permanent about our behaviour patterns except our belief that they are so."  
Moshe Feldenkrais**

I now appreciate the things I'd found difficult. I've become more comfortable when sitting. Learning to use Zoom and the webcam have had its advantages too. I developed 12 online classes, stayed connected with others and I could continue to pay the bills.

Setting up walking groups for older adults was a new adventure, which helped me value the health benefits of being in open and green spaces. Swimming and walking outdoors became more comfortable and are now part of my wellbeing routine.

Consolidating and embodying learnings of the Feldenkrais method was now more possible. I could even invite experienced Feldenkrais trainers worldwide into my living room, so I could continue learning.

Lockdown was also like an urban retreat, time to reflect and rest. As I slowed down I noticed the attitude towards myself could be kinder to help ease the difficult.

Thanks to lockdown, Feldenkrais gave me access to transforming the difficult into more enjoyable experiences, while staying connected with others in the real and virtual worlds. The dialogues continue.

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***Charlotte Seirberg*** is a Feldenkrais practitioner, Mindfulness teacher and Pilates teacher with a BA in Social Anthropology and Economics. She teaches in adult education, for local charities for older adults, NHS, wellness in the workplace. She runs a private practice in Hackney and Liverpool Street.