

Moshe Feldenkrais on Biological Posture from a lecture 811106

“...The real essential part is that biologically correct-for all animals in the world-posture means being in a state of your nervous system, your muscles, your... all the senses, the skeleton, everything are so organized that you can undertake any necessary movement for survival. And that means for reproduction, and that means for maintenance, and that means for self-preservation, and that means action in movement-that means any act or any movement should be possible to undertake without preliminary rearrangement.

If you just think a minute on that, you will see that that's so obvious that you can't understand how people mucked about posture, and making sort of gymnastics and things like that, and missed the most important point-why other animals have good posture or bad posture?

Now watch yourself. If I only stand like that [*Moshe stands with legs wide apart and hands on hips*], then you say, "Oh, he's sure of himself." But I'm sure of myself only for any trouble that comes from the right or the left. Forward and backwards I'm as vulnerable as anything, but that's unimportant. The important thing is ... look, I just am in the jungle, and I see a pair of eyes that, actually, [*say*] ... "... am I there?" ... and they want to leap on me. I can't move away. I can't move away from that, unless I do a preliminary movement. Means raise my center of gravity to better posture so that I can go away, or actually attack the animal, or fight, or he is already on me and I have to fight; but if I stay like that [*feet wide apart*] and he jumps on me, I am finished before I have the time to do anything.

Therefore, animals that had bad posture like that always stood like that [*standing with legs apart, hands behind back*], actually, standing like soldiers. Therefore, soldiers are only good to be killed. What are they for? To kill and be killed, but they kill not by that standing; but if they stand like that surely ... they are a good, very good place to shoot at.

They can't go away. They can't fall. They can't do anything. They have to make a preliminary movement. It means a tenth of a second, a second, by whom their life is cut, finished. There are people who have normally good posture like that, [*and*] have not survived. And therefore, we find that this is a bad posture because it inhibits my movement forward and backwards and makes me precarious. But many people would do that because the security of right and left gives them a feeling of, "Ha, I am stable." But any fine fighter would only touch the inside of that foot, put it a little bit like that [*move the foot forward*] and they are finished. And this is *ashiwaza* [*a martial arts foot technique*]... It's the kind of thing that every Judo man, Samurai or anybody else who has ever dealt with protecting his life against others or attacking-in other words, the martial arts ... They can't think of everything. This is the kind of situation, which they find marvelous. Doesn't matter that the chap is a giant, they can throw him. If you're a baby, and you have a giant in front of you, it's easy to throw him by putting that one-foot in-between, beside that and just touching him. He will fall on his back and break his neck. So that's bad posture.

Now what is a good posture? A good posture is the one which [*we*] organize ourselves in such a way that we don't have to decide what to do in the moment that it's done. The nervous system is already organized in such a way that we can make the necessary movement, which will come. If it's wrong or right is a question of chance. The biology makes it... The survival of the species makes it a tiny little chance better than just chance that you will do the right thing. And the fact that you grew up to now gives you a good chance that your response would be the right one. It means it will be a little bit better than just pure chance.

And by the way, I had that very clearly ... you probably heard of Jacob Bronowski, who did the *Ascent of Man*, a film. You saw it in America, on all the televisions. And we saw it the world over. And Bronowski was a member of a place called Visiting Scientists near the Royal Society in London. And I, coming from France, I was also obviously a visiting scientist and so we lived there all through the war. He lived somewhere [*le/se*], but he used to come in the weekends to be there.

And, there I met actually quite a number of people from whom I learned more than I can tell because one of them, actually J. B. Bernal... is a unique encyclopedic, creative sort of person. Many of you may know J. D. Bernal. He was a professor of Crystallography at the Birkbeck, University of London.

But **Bronowski was there, and we met, I don't know for five, six years many times a week.** We ate together and that. And he knew that I was dealing with all sorts of funny things. And we had frequent discussions, and

he suggested that sort of thing that I am telling you now. **He said that out of the chance movement that animals do, if there was not an asymmetry in the chance movements, from biology, there wouldn't be a single species alive.** Huh? And what does it mean?

It means that when an animal does something without knowing, just because he gets up and does it. For instance, like, have you seen sometimes buffaloes stampede? Thousands of them- extraordinary-in one direction ... After whom? After one old buffalo who knows where to go? He doesn't know either. He just runs and the whole lot goes after him. Huh? And a school of fish or a flock of birds ... have you seen? You get a flock of birds. They are so beautifully ... there is one bird at the front. The one in the front makes a turn ...tums back, the whole bloody flock tums back. And the school of fish does the same thing. And all animals... zebra running, or any social sort of animal in big herds ... that's the kind of thing ... or the elephants ... anything ... ants, bees ... Anything you know in the world. They do that sort of thing.

Now how come? What for? How does it come, the same sort of thing? There is a question of survival and this Bronowski told me that when they move like that... For instance, there's a drought. There's a drought and the herd is ... all animals in that place have no water to drink. Everything that they're used to, the rivers, the lakes are finished. No water. They get up and run. They will run maybe ten thousand miles through the desert to find water. How do they know that they will come there and find water? Many of them will die on the way. But it is the thing, which will continue that species-they will find water. So, how come that they picked a direction, not knowing anything about it? And the chances that they will get water are more than pure chance, otherwise, there wouldn't be ... By chance, they would either all be extinguished or alive.

But the fact is that there is a species of zebras everywhere and ever since we know. There are zebras, and they survive. And there are buffaloes, and they survive even though we killed so many of them, but all these animals, and we too... And **Bronowski made it so clear to me. He showed me, actually, in some mathematical ideas of probabilities. He convinced me that if you go out in the morning and you see that a great number of people have taken their raincoat, bet your life that it would rain. Or they didn't know but if a large number of people go with their raincoats in their hand, you bet your life that that day will rain. In other words, that we have, every one of us, a kind of full knowledge where the survival is for us. For every animal has that. And this sort of survival is built into the posture.**

And, that's why animals, when they run ... What do you mean, where do they run? When do they run in a different direction only two degrees away from that direction? And yet they run and find water, and they survive. And the same thing is good for all species in the world. In other words, that survival factor depends on a minute thing, that you have a better chance of surviving than the superior.

And for that, the posture must be such that you need no preliminary arrangement to do the kind of thing that you would do when the herd runs. When a buffalo herd runs, if one buffalo wanted to stop or move a little bit more to the right or go take another breath, it wouldn't be there, and it will never reproduce. Therefore, no buffalo that doesn't run with a buffalo, is good. And Darwin knows it, too. It's a survival factor. Therefore, no buffalo... doesn't matter how tired he is, he will fall and be covered up by anything, by the others, but he will not tum back. He will not lie down, so long as there is life in him. He won't do it. Heh.

And, the same thing with the rats that go over from Europe to Norway through the sea, to the ocean... There are millions of them. Those, the first to go, can swim, but the other ones to arrive from behind go on top of them and push them into the water. And those underneath swim and fight just to get some sort of breath of air. And if ... there are millions of them, there's a layer of dead rats floating, so that the rats on top can walk, and they go over from Europe to Norway. They go over hundreds of miles of ocean like that ... but there are some who survive, actually not the quickest ones, the quickest ones die. The quickest ones are the ones on which the others, the late ones...

But there is something in life like that too. If you look at our wars, it's the same sort of thing. When we have a war, you take the youngest, the strongest, the best, and they go to war. It's they that are killed, but the old ones, they what you would think decrepit ones and the prisoners of war, they reproduce the new generation, the new generation. Not those that are killed...

Not the young ones ... Not the strong ones ... In other words, the survival value is for intelligence, for survival quality. It's not what you think. And then, you find that the young ones are killed, the ones who think, believe that strength, and poppapapa, and the metal is worth something, they are killed, but those who've stayed behind and

organized the thing, that they should be able to have the things with which to kill others and be killed, those survive. And they produce the new generation. In other words, the old ones, who stay at home, and that you think that they are not so nice, they should have volunteered, go to the war, but they don't. If they produce the new generation, that's your father and mine because he remained alive. Heh

And those who, actually, the strong ones, like the rats, are the ones on which other people go over. In other words, those who survive are actually the prisoners of war. They have more children than any of the young soldiers that were killed, believe it or not. And actually, have done something for the community of the world becoming one. Because French prisoners of war making children to German "Gretchens" remain somehow attached to the Germans and the Germans to the French. And those two wouldn't feel like doing ... They would have to decide twice whether they fight for Germany or for France, and they would find it so difficult that they will probably go to Switzerland, not to fight neither here nor there, and they would survive because they had a greater survival value, just because their intelligence is not idiotic.