

Myriam Pfeffer, Matriarch

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It is with great affection that we remember Myriam Pfeffer who passed away on April 5, 2014, and whose presence still continues to inspire us. Myriam was one of the first Israeli practitioners trained by Moshe Feldenkrais in Tel Aviv. She was born in Lithuania in 1928; later she moved to Israel, but lived for a long time in Paris while keeping a strong connection with Tel Aviv. Through her passion and constant commitment, she molded many generations of Feldenkrais practitioners.

I first met Myriam in 1980 in the gym at Amherst. She had already taught for several years in Paris, but at Amherst she was on the floor with us all, fully taking in Moshe's new discoveries. Our friendship and professional ties began then and were to grow and strengthen in the years that followed. We worked together frequently both in Paris and in Italy, and this cooperation allowed me to observe her teaching, to learn from her, and to exchange ideas with her—in other words to feel close to her.

After Moshe's death in 1984, Myriam, along with the group of first European graduates to which I also belonged, participated actively in the meetings held both in Switzerland and in Paris. These meetings paved the way for the creation of the International Feldenkrais Federation and the EuroTAB (the European Training Accreditation Board, the body which, in cooperation with the other TABs, administers policies for accreditation of training programs, and certification of Trainers and Assistant Trainers). During those years, we



Myriam Pfeffer, age about 50

met often in her Paris apartment, where she lived most of the time, to discuss the Method's future and the building of an organization that would respect its principles. We were full of hope, ambition, and good humor. Myriam wanted to respect Moshe's legacy and by collaborating with the new generations of practitioners, she became in due time a pioneering mentor of the Feldenkrais community.

When Myriam began her first training program in Paris in 1985, she generously invited me to participate, thus allowing me to re-experience a large part of the original training program, and for this I was truly grateful. At that time there were almost no advanced trainings in Europe. Subsequently, she taught in many training programs in Italy, leaving an unforgettable imprint on her students. With Myriam one stopped "doing" movement and truly began to inhabit it.

Myriam always had a very orthodox approach to Moshe's teaching, and created her own personally unique style while maintaining the intellectual rigor and purity of the Method. She introduced his method in France and proceeded to present it in many different professional contexts, thus expanding its influence. Together with her daughter, Sabine, she organized and directed fifteen trainings and several important conferences where illustrious scientists dialogued with Feldenkrais practitioners. Some of the themes were "Learning, Brain, and Movement," "Longevity," and "The Emergence of Possibilities." She held workshops throughout Europe, in the United States, and in Italy, where she won over a sizeable public.

Myriam displayed great strength and evident fragility, both underpinned by a keen intelligence. Her very strong rationality, her refined humor, and her deep roots in Jewish culture made her particularly close and sensitive to Moshe's approach.

The Holocaust struck while she was still an adolescent and the miracle of her survival left her alone at the age of 16. Only one sister survived. Her encounter with her husband who was also a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps—and who unfortunately died prematurely—allowed her to form a new family with two children: Marc, who lives in Israel, and Sabine, who followed in her professional footsteps by collaborating with her mother in the Paris school and by constantly surrounding her with great love and devotion until the very end.

Myriam thus became a respected matriarch in the Method, while also becoming a grandmother and great-grandmother of fifteen children. She embodied the victory of life over destiny but I prefer to quote Moshe and simply refer to her life with this quote: "You may learn to make your life more as you wish it to be; your dreams could become more precise and, who knows, they may even come true." (Feldenkrais, 1981).¹ With determination, after the Second World War, Myriam focused on recuperating her health and identity and later while she was already a yoga teacher, she found in the Feldenkrais Method what she had not found elsewhere: respect and acceptance of one's own potential. She sought to transmit this attitude to thousands of persons in France and elsewhere, for these teachings had helped her to come back to life and to continue living in the present despite the unforgettable past. She conveyed a philosophy of movement enriched by her own personal experience, which she offered to her students peppered with inspiring metaphors and anecdotes from different cultures. Hers was a delicate, gentle, never overpowering voice, and her words were always carefully chosen and to the point.

Myriam was a profoundly intelligent person who immediately understood the dissonances in a person's life and proposed new perspectives and new approaches with which to overcome them. She could at times be hypercritical and intimidating for those who spoke blithely in superficial terms or displayed incompetence. But she also knew

how to be helpful and welcoming. Her Awareness Through Movement (ATM) lessons were calibrated with great art and with geometric precision: they guided the students to fully listen to themselves and offered gifts of hope and faith that they could care for themselves whether or not they had pain.

With the passing years, her physical shape and, almost in parallel, her style became more delicate but also more essential. She let go of everything redundant and, teaching in a thin voice, even occasionally closing her eyes, she still continued to see what the students before her were doing. In 2012 in Paris, while I was teaching in her last training program, she came to visit during the course and as we chatted she told me that despite her aging and the pain that accompanied the many fractures that she suffered over the years she felt that she was teaching much better than in the past. Unfortunately, she added, people did not realize this because they remembered her as the Myriam who had trained them in the past, whereas she had in reality continued to evolve and to progress.

These words should allow us to reflect on ourselves and on our process. We can truly express our gratitude for a method that allows us to grow in both professional and, above all, human terms as long as we are able to continue thinking. And we are grateful to Myriam who accompanied us on this path.

—Milan, June 2014

1 Moshe Feldenkrais, *The Elusive Obvious* (Capitola, CA: Meta Publications, 1981), p. 6.



Myriam Pfeffer, teaching