

Is the Feldenkrais Method Becoming a Religion?

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1. Introduction

1.1 Brainstorming: Is the FM ¹a religion? If not, is there any risk of it becoming one?

During the International Feldenkrais meetings of the last few years it has been stated worldwide that the FM is perceived as a link towards the third millennium, and that the FM is developing.

One may ask: how do we now stand?² Certainly we are working towards recognizing it as a profession. However this brainstorming includes a question, which is the theme of this paper: is the FM becoming a religion? And if it is, what kind? If it isn't, is there a risk of it becoming one? Finally, what is the extent of such a risk?

Enlarging the discussion, one can say that such a question also involves the other body techniques; therefore the relevant responses for the FM include *mutatis mutandis* an application also for the other techniques.

In this paper, the FM itself is used as the point of departure, and from here I would like to clarify what the FM is, what its essentials consist of, and its possible relationship with doctrinal or religious systems. I am aware that in doing so I am going beyond the thoughts of the majority of the FM practitioners. I propose therefore to distinguish in order to unify, to differentiate in order to integrate, and to discuss the multiple factors included in the FM in order to demonstrate their unity.

2- A brief history of the FM

2.1 Moshe Feldenkrais and his method

Moshe Feldenkrais (1904-1984) was a judo expert, athlete, mechanical engineer and educator, who obtained his doctorate in physics and collaborated with Joliot-Curie at the Sortone. The FM was born and developed in order to resolve a knee problem that impeded Feldenkrais in his movements.

The FM is an educative process, which seeks to obtain “an organized body that moves with the minimum of effort and with maximum efficiency, not using muscular strength, but improving the awareness of how the body functions” (M. Feldenkrais). Feldenkrais states, “with this technique one tends towards improving the development of the nervous system using the mutual relationship between the nervous and muscular systems”.

¹ In the paper henceforth FM represents the Feldenkrais Method, and Feldenkrais is for Moshe Feldenkrais.

² Regarding this it is interesting to notice that in the different international legislative bodies, there is not yet a specific place for the FM, and this creates a tendency, a push to consider it as natural medicine, holistic, in other words therapy.

The FM, is fine tuned to transpersonal education, emphasizing the classical concept of actualizing one's potential or, as the hebrew founder says, to "learn to learn". The importance the method place on the whole person, not just to individual muscles or organs of the person himself, allows – according to the studies of some experts – it to be considered as the educative equivalent to holistic medicine³. Feldenkrais stressed the fact that it is primarily educative and not therapeutic, even if can also have therapeutic applications⁴.

2.2 Cultural influences on Moshe Feldenkrais

Feldenkrais gained international recognition for his work. In the USA he was commended by academics such M. Mead, K. Pribram, Heiz Von Foerster, J. Salk, M. Erickson and G. Bateson and had personal connections with them. He also had success at Esalen, the place where alternative activities work-shops were organized. It is, therefore, interesting to note the connections of Esalen with Findhorn, the first New Age community, co-ordinated by David Spangler.

We know that the "awakenings movements" of the New Age have three characteristics: those of the alternative magic religions; those that include medicine, different life-styles and alternative psychologies; and lastly those with new tendencies, "born in the environment of sciences and of politics, two fields which have certain ecological convergences"⁵.

2.3 FM and religion

Feldenkrais declared himself a "disbeliever"⁶, but admired personalities such as Buddha, Confucius, Moses and Christ. While not completely closing the door on religion, he did not allow it enter into his own life or into the method itself.

3- Characteristics of the FM

3.1 The two modes of teaching of the FM:

There are two ways of teaching the FM. The first is "Awareness through movement" (ATM), where the instructions are verbally given; and the second is "Functional Integration" (FI) where the teacher simply communicates using his/her hands.

Feldenkrais had an enormous respect for the human being as a "person" and emphasized the importance of touch when communicating with others. He went so far as to say that "through touch, two persons, the toucher and the touched, can become a new ensemble: two bodies when connected by two arms and hands are a new entity"⁷; he also states that when he is working with people, he is "dancing"⁸ with them.

Moreover, he stated that "there are great similarities between men, but there are also personal ways of acting, moving and feeling that allows each individual to be unique, and my work really consists in helping him to realize his true oneness"⁹.

³ J. VERNETTE, *Il New Age*, Paoline, Milano 1992, p. 36.

⁴ In order to be faithful to Feldenkrais we hope that this profession will situate itself within an educational roll.

⁵ M. INTROVIGNE, *Storia del New Age 1962-1992*, Cristianità, Piacenza 1994.

⁶ M. FELDENKRAIS, *The Potent Self*, Harper & Row, San Francisco 1985, p. xiii.

⁷ M. FELDENKRAIS, *The Elusive Obvious*, Meta Publications, Cupertino CA 1981, p.1.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 75.

At this point it's necessary to clarify Feldenkrais' understanding of the person.

3.2 Feldenkrais' anthropology

The human organism is composed of organs and systems which are inter-organized and carry out specific functions. It is possible to over-emphasize either the static-structural-anatomic aspect or alternatively the functional-dynamic-physiological aspect.

Feldenkrais does not deny the existence of organs. He considers, for example, intelligence itself "a way of functioning and nothing else"¹⁰. He justly contests a static conception of the person and aims to demonstrate that "the human frame is essentially a dynamic organization, that human behaviour is equally dynamic..."¹¹. In fact, his famous phrase is "movement is life, without movement life is unthinkable".

Therefore Feldenkrais is opposed to those who, in his opinion, place excessive emphasis on the static¹² element of the self, namely those who use concepts such as soul, instinct, unconscious, constitution or intelligence, and reacts against their limitation of human potentiality. For Feldenkrais, the majority of the limitations we encounter depend more on personal experience than on inherited characteristics. Nonetheless some of Feldenkrais's expressions can be misunderstood, as if he considered functions to be independent of their respective organs. Moreover, continually identifying the intellect and the will with the nervous system constitutes a materialistic reductionism, that in the end could diminish if not destroy the uniqueness of the non-material aspect, that in the person is called spirit. On the other hand, an excessive emphasis of unity with distinction of psyche and body (which is technically designated using the expression "dual unity") can produce a confusion without distinction (technically: "a holistic unity or monism), thus opening the door to pantheism. Instead, the FM as conceived by the founder, has nothing in common with pantheism because it lacks everything which properly defines a religion.

However, some tendencies, in the evolution of the FM, very evidently extend beyond their proper limits, as I shall demonstrate. At this point I can risk a plausible explanation: as we have realized – more or less consciously - the missing spiritual dimension which is constitutive of the person and we have attempted to recover, it is conceivable that, instead of searching for an appropriate anthropology free of reductionism, a spiritualistic religion is being juxtaposed to an anthropology closed to the spirit, as if one reductionism (materialistic) could be corrected by another reductionism of the opposite kind (spiritualism)¹³. Those acting in this way, don't always realize that beneath such a type of religion there can be found a reductionist anthropology that is included in spiritualistic monism.

Therefore, I think that the dynamic viewpoint of Feldenkrais could be extended and advanced by means of a concept of the person that recovers and integrates those spiritual aspects set aside by Feldenkrais. This anthropology is surprisingly more dynamic than the previous one, reaching what one can analogously call "superdynamicity". Let us now examine this vision.

¹⁰ M. FELDENKRAIS, *The Potent Self*, Harper & Row, San Francisco 1985, p.1.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 5.

¹³ Spiritualism affirms that we are spiritual energy and therefore often concludes that we are angels or even gods.

Many, including Feldenkrais, accept that the person is constituted by three dimensions: vegetative, sensitive and rational. Frequently this threefold unity is translated in the following way: *soma* or body, psyche or soul, reason or spirit. The first unity encompasses the various corporal organs (e.g. respiratory, digestive or endocrine system); the second the senses (e.g. sight, touch, imagination); the third unity, called *mens/mind*, denotes the intelligence, the will and the intellectual memory.

This terminology becomes muddled when the threefold unity becomes a twofold unity: often we speak of body and mind/*mens* (in the Anglo-Saxon world) or of *corpus et mens* or, with a misleading expression, of *corpus et anima* (in the latin world). It is clear that the vegetative and sensitive dimensions we have previously mentioned now constitute the body or corpus, while the rational or spiritual dimension constitute the mind/*mens*. Such terminology marks out the boundary between what the human being possesses in common with the animals (*soma* or body plus psyche or soul) and that which he/she possesses exclusively (the reason or spirit). The hidden risk consists in separating too much and falling into a platonic dualism. In the Aristotelian tradition instead, the terminology of a twofold unity is used in a content which is radically diverse from the preceding, even if it is equivalent in wording: *corpus et anima* or *soma* (body) and psyche. Here, the soul or psyche is integrated from two dimensions which in the previous terminology were kept separate: the sensitive dimension and the spiritual dimension.

The difference between a materialistic anthropology and a “spiritual” one (not a spiritualistic) resides in the nature and in the capacity of the mind/*mens*. For the former, the mind is so inter-dependent with the body that it is organic and corporal (identifiable with the brain or, better, still with the nervous system). While in the latter, the mind is rather more independent, emerging somewhat from the material environment (it is spirit but not only spirit: it is embodied spirit, incarnate). In this way we do not deny the dependence between the diverse dimensions and the respective organs; instead we affirm therefore that there exists a relative autonomy between each one of them. Experience shows this autonomy: the vegetative functions are dominated only with difficulty by the mind and, conversely, the mental functions can sometimes manage without needing the body and the senses. For example, reading a sentence requires time because it is necessary pronounce clearly the words, while understanding a sentence happens only at the end of the reading and it does not require any time. In the person, we can therefore prescind from the immaterial mode of action of animals, arriving at an immaterial mode of action that transcends space and time which is called spiritual. The mind is spiritual, which doesn't possess organs, and thus the brain is not the organ of the intelligence. In other words, we can say that intelligence and brain are not the same thing but they are interwoven together.

Thus we can clinch this superdynamic conception of the person which illustrates the functionality of the mind that goes “beyond the material” in a specific way. The intelligence, in fact, can understand the past, the present, and the future in an intentional or mental way, while the senses have a narrow functionality, limited to a certain kind of object. Consequently, there is a certain independence between intellect and sensation and this is confirmed by the fact that there is not a perfect correspondence between idea and sensation.

From the above anthropological vision, from the emerging human characteristics that are intelligence and will (with the corresponding self-knowing and self-willing) come forth the properly human actions, and thus the realm of ethics. A dynamic virtuous circle is created between intelligence and the will: “the intellect that desires and the desire that reasons”, such a circle also influences every sensitive part. And it's here that we can speak of ethics as “instructions for the use” of the human being, obviously not intended as simple propositions but as the more efficient way the person can act manifesting to the maximum his/her proper human potential (holding to his/her ideal

of what he/she should be), becoming the author of his/her own history¹⁴. On the other hand, we have also to keep in mind that the person has a limited mastery of his/her ends.

And yet, it is not sufficient to state the interrelation of the organs. It's necessary to explain what type of interrelation, or in other words, how these are organized: this intellect is molded according to the person, it even extends to walking. In classical philosophy, such organization is called human substantial form, that is an organization, limitation, determination of the form of the organized dimensions. (Today the distinction is reposed in the field of computer science – by formatting a magnetic material, with the software functioning by means of the hardware -, by the management organization, etc.). But we must realize that the organization is not one more organized element.

Further complicating the matter, such organization is often called “soul”, while the organized elements (including the spiritual elements), are called by the name of “body”. But it is convenient not to confuse them with the soul and the body we have just described. When we speak about the person we have to be aware of two perspectives: the horizontal perspective (organizing/organized, form/matter, soul/body) and the vertical perspective (the unity of the diverse dimensions or faculties, of the mind plus the body). The misunderstanding arises when we confuse the two levels, that which is the twofold unity soul-body and the one mind-body. The soul is not the mind, the body (in the horizontal sense) is not the body (in the vertical sense).

Therefore, it's useful to stress once again the multiple (dual) unity in the person: with the classical expression, “it is not the senses that sense and the intellect that understands but the integral person that feels and understands through his/her senses and his/her intelligence, in the same way that it is he/she who walks with his/her feet and sings with his/her mouth: *hic homo intelligit*, each one of us is self-permeating indivisible and identical in space and time”¹⁵.

4- Characteristics of religion

4.1 Definition of religion

The person is constitutionally a relational and social being, and the discovery and the knowledge, amongst all the relations, of the one with the Other, provokes in him/her a reaction that is a “new relation, re-relation”, a *re-ligatio*, a religion. By religion, then, we mean the integrated human behaviour elevated to the supreme Being/God. It derives from the fact that we possess an intellect that is capable of knowing is dependence on God, and the fact of having a will that is able to thank the being on whom it depends. In this sense, the religion is a natural essential fact (as is being social, political, *faber*, symbolic etc.).

We say that this “Other” is personal, because, obviously, the supreme Being is superior to the human being, who is dependent on Him. We can then speak of action of God/supreme Being, and the response of the person, an answer to a call that is the creation of each one of us.

As previously stated, among corporal beings only the human being possesses a spiritual mind, and can know and truly love him/herself and his/her neighbour and God.

¹⁴ Regarding this see A. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Duckworth, London 1985; and R. A. GAHL, JR., *From the Virtue of a Fragile Good to a Narrative Account of Natural Law*, forthcoming in “International Philosophical Quarterly” (1997).

¹⁵ On this argument see J. VILLANUEVA, *Intorno al body-mind problem*, in “Acta Philosophica”, (1994), p. 143.

4.2 Types of supreme Being/God: immanent and transcendent

We can say that in religion there are always both dimensions because God is immanent to the human being for that which he has in common with him, and transcendent by that in which he is different. Both aspects can be overvalued one damaging the other, with the risk of falling into two reductionisms. In fact, if we only affirm the transcendence, God is very far away and is not taking care of the persons, and is not love for them; if we proclaim only the immanence, we are god and we are getting into the religion of the divine potential that is inside the person (the religion of human potential) or we get to pantheism.

But we have to stress that talking of religion of the self or of the human potential is contradictory. In order to understand this assertion, one must remember the difference and the relationship between ethics and religion. We can say that the formal aspect of ethical action is related to the person's good, to the ideal person, to the self-perfection of the person him/herself. The ethical code, therefore, is designed for the human being to reach his/her perfection. The formal aspect of the religious action is, instead, the relationship of the person to God. Therefore religion is the code of instructions designed to reach the perfect person that is God. Nevertheless each religious action is also ethical and vice-versa. In fact when we "write our own life (= our acting) the meaning that we have to give to each singular phrase is within a history that has a beginning and an end, and this corresponds to the idea that we have of God".

Ethics and religion, therefore, are reciprocally reinforcing, because the person's self-actualization pushes him/her toward the society with the others and with the "Other" and because God wants the perfection of his creatures.

The nature of God is inserted into the religion of the human potential self-perfection and so his divinity. But reducing God to the ideal person, reduces religion to ethics, as Kant proposed. In this way we have an ethic without any intrinsic reference to transcendency. So "each sentence of the history that is our life is atomized, has no real sense within the history, but only in itself" and, as we shall presently see, the result is disharmony or disunity in the person.

In addition to ways of human self-perfection, the useful techniques used in order to actualize our potential, are becoming the means to obtain supreme happiness, and a substitute for religion. Maintaining this pretence, and without evaluating these results (work that properly belongs to sociological methodology) it is right to admit the definition of religion used in sociology which consider religion the existence of a social movement that is proposing answers that are not purely empirical or scientific (and philosophic) to the fundamental questions concerning man's origin and destiny.

Yet, it's common experience that even those fortunate persons who have achieved the fullness of material, psico-physical (health) and spiritual (success, love) goods realize that they are not possessing the "Good", the happiness, and they cannot flee from the evil from which they wish to avoid, if not it's very presence, at least its threat.

Therefore, these persons that should be satisfied are looking for something superior, they search, often aimlessly, for a relation with God by means of a circular movement, where knowledge leads one to love him more and love to know him more; where an identification with the beloved is pursued by going beyond oneself, an *extasis*, a donation. When this correspondence with God has been discovered these persons realize surprisingly that donation is happiness, that altruism

is happiness, and instead egoism is not happiness. Giving ourselves, we realize ourselves. It may sound paradoxical, but the truly practical person is the mystical one¹⁶.

Yet, the one who tries with his own strengths to achieve the spiritual fullness has, as the first step to eliminate the bodily, psychic and spiritual defects. So he/she makes recourse to techniques in order to cancel the moral evil that is within him/her (the so called "sin"), frequently ignoring it or transforming it into a simple "error" (like the ancient and modern gnosticism). Religion of the self is a contradictory term from a logical point of view because it is a relation with oneself. Thus, we can only speak of a religion bringing to the fore the split between my reality and my ideal image, the disunity and disarmony.

5- Necessary conditions in order to consider the FM a religion

We have defined what religion is, now we proceed to the FM to determine if it meets the necessary and sufficient conditions to be defined as a religion.

5.1 Exchanging a partial end for an absolute end, and self-control and self-awareness for absolute happiness

This danger of absolutising affects all the techniques. In fact, coordinating movements, acting without strength with the maximum efficiency, achieving a psychosomatic harmony, means obtaining a certain self-actualization, a psycho-physical well-being which though it has some value it cannot be considered everything, except by the person who has previously assented to this kind of reductionism.

In the last years, with the dissemination (also positively) of new techniques that stress the psycho-somatic unity and the corresponding dynamism (against dualism) it is very easy to fall into excessively focusing on each of these techniques, absolutising them as if they resolve all human aspiration.

5.2 Closing in the psycho-somatic unity and its dynamism

From this point of view, conceiving psycho-somatic unity and its dynamism not only as loose or independent from the effects of the techniques (in fact they are considered therapies that help to express the human potential) but as close to each kind of relation or dependence transforms the technique in something self-sufficient, absolute, in one word, religion (of the human potential).

In answering to the fundamental questions of persons, their origin and their destiny, the technique that heals and educates the human being toward the harmony with him/herself and with the others proposes answers that are not purely empirical, scientific (and philosophic).

This, for example is the developmental process that occurred with Scientology, Mahikari, and Ivi becoming new religious movements (NRM).

Regarding this, it is very interesting to note the questions that Vernetta asks in order to distinguish in groups in formation that which is worthy of being approved from that which is unacceptable. The questions are: "Is the healer using the powers that he/she has been given him/her in order to reduce the persons to a dependent condition alienating their freedom of thoughts? Is

¹⁶ In J. ESCRIVA, *In God's Household: Homilies*, Sinag-Tala, Manila 1990: in A. DEL PORTILLO, *Epilogue: getting to the roots*, p. 63.

he/she pretending to heal everything? Is the intervening action always completely positive? Is he/she taking advantage of his/her faculties in order to found a new religion? Is he/she deliberately using the promise of healing as a means to gain publicity? In the group organization is the leader autocratic or does he/she respect individuals? How is it being financed and furthermore who controls the funds? Who ultimately has effective control and power? Lastly how much inner freedom are the followers allowed?

5.3 To consider it all comprehensive style of life

From what we have previously mentioned if this life-style is restricted to the psico-somatic field, it cannot be considered a religion. But if by life-style we mean a vision that comprises all of one's personal dimension then it is. In fact, a holistic way of thinking can be validly used in the field of psico-somatic education. However transferring it to an all encompassing intellectual context is an erroneous application so that everything becomes human psyche and soma.

6- Where is the FM now?

In the last few international meetings, while considering the FM's development, it has been asked: how do we now stand? Here the question is posed: what is the present relationship between the FM and religion?

It is very important that regarding this theme we use a common language so as to avoid misunderstandings, even if we know that for Feldenkrais "in self-knowledge speech is a formidable obstacle"¹⁷ and he puts little trust in words, because for him they themselves have no significance, rather they express more the creativity of the one who is speaking. For this reason it is possible to see in the FM some elements of philosophic idealism and of a New Age creative idealism. Besides it is necessary to have at least a certain consensus on the usage of words, perhaps a certain flexibility or analogical use. Therefore I can think it is important within the FM itself that there be a discussion dealing with FM and religion without any accompanying anxieties.

Often there is a reluctance to deepen this topic, fearing that acknowledging his incompatibility to be integrated with religion, this will impede a licit contribution to psychology, physical education, art, etc. in other words different kinds of activities that in the ideas of numerous Feldenkrais clients and practitioners are identified with the religions of human potential.

There are some indications that manifest the affinity with the New Age "*humus*"¹⁸, (it is sufficient to remember the success of Feldenkrais at Esalen and the cultural environment in which he was moving), and here there is the risk that the FM could easily slide into something different, despite the fact that collaborating professionally with philosophical and doctrinal systems different from our own, does not mean sharing them. Furthermore the respectful exchange of ideas has always enriched everyone.

Here are some indications, and for the moment only indications that I shall outline:

¹⁷ M. FELDENKRAIS, *The Elusive Obvious*, Meta Publications, Cupertino CA 1981, p. 146.

¹⁸ Regarding this, in agreement with Introvigne I think that the New Age has to be taken seriously, keeping in mind that it criticizes many negative aspects of the modern world that deserve to be criticized, especially the world that has been created by positivism and rationalism, the problems the means used and the relative proposals are not the best solution.

- 1- the success of Feldenkrais in Esalen, bearing in mind the cultural environment that dominated there;
- 2- the improper use, by structures who are collaborating with FM practitioners, of the name “therapy” instead that “educational system”;
- 3- the usage of the FM by the followers of Osho Rajneesh. These persons are looking most respectfully for the unity between East and West. Nevertheless the combination brought about by the “Osho Movement Integration Training”¹⁹, between meditation and FM has passed from the religion/FM juxtaposition to an integration. Nevertheless from what has been published in Italy, in the booklet “Activities by Osho Miasto” there is a noted effort towards understanding other religions. In fact if in 1995 the explanation of the FM’s practise was obviously integrated in Osho’s thinking, yet²⁰ the following year it was only including sentences by Feldenkrais. But it seems that they have been simply changing the way of describing and not its use. From what Osho says²¹, there is a first phase which is not considered as spiritual growth but an initial preparation, achieved trough including western therapeutic methods (in which the FM is included, and- we want to point out- with the name “therapy”) and a second phase in which actually, it is integrated and assumed by Osho in his religious system. In this way the FM according with the religious and philosophical system of the human potential become a religion;
- 4- the video presentation of J. Campbell’s “The power of myth” during advance training breaks, as his particular way of speaking about religion, bears close similarities to the thought of Feldenkrais;
- 5- the invitation of Campbell’s disciples and other intellectuals with New Age tendencies to officiate as relators at FM meetings;
- 6- the use of “guided vision- sharing process” in order to become “a visionary leader” at international meetings of the FM;
- 7- the fact that FM has erroneously listed together with some sects in Austria as stated in a magazine, perhaps due to a misuse of the method by a FM practioner;
- 8- to have been considered a religion by some practitioners with psychological problems in Australia (and this fact raises the following question: are trainees awarded without exception the practitioner’s diploma? The international FM international bodies are investigating this matter);
- 9- the method has attracted the attention of the New Age academics such as Massimo Introvigne, Wouter J. Hanegraff²² and Jean Vernet²³;
- 10- the fact that some of the Feldenkrais teachers consider it as the more sophisticated western instrument to bring love to others;
- 11- the insertion of the name of God in word games (erroneously called prayer) in some workshops’ publicity literature;

¹⁹ Trainings planned in 1995- 96 in Antwerpen, Utrecht, Zolle, den Haag, Leuven, Gent and Amsterdam.

²⁰ In the booklet “Osho Miasto Acitivities” an explanatory page of the FM states: “Feldenkrais is a method about working on the body discovered by M. Feldenkrais. It is a subtle work of energy... it helps you to feel how to flow more easily, how le you go without stoppino yourself. When you understand this art life assumes a different color. A freezed life it is like to be dead. A flowing life... is like to be as a river”. (Osho – What is, is, What ain’t, ain’t).

²¹ in *Light on the Path*, #16: “The western therapeutic methods cannot help you to grow spiritually, but can prepare the ground”.

²² WOUTER J. HANEGRAFF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, E.J.Brill, Leiden-New York-Kohl 1996, p. 54.

²³ J. VERNETTE, *Che cos’è il New Age?*, Sugarco, Carnago (Varese) 1992, p. 83 and *Il New Age*, Paoline, Milano 1992, p. 92.

- 12- to say that the FM is becoming a life style obviously in the second sense we have previously mentioned;
- 13- the fact that on internet the FM is mentioned eightytwo times together with the New Age in somatics opinions (New Age Mall: Resource: The Feldenkrais Method), sometimes considered as Moshe Feldenkrais intended it: an educational system and other times considered as a therapy²⁴. And besides that on Internet there is also a New Age Directory California Feldenkrais²⁵.

I am aware that the above overview is just an indication, but it is useful to demonstrate a tendencies which though embrionic at this stage could come to maturation at later date.

Yet there is progress in the very direction that is desired because the Italian Guild has recently inserted in the description of the method that “FM has no connection with religious, esoteric or political movements. It is a learning educational process, and it is taught by recognized professionalists of related professional associations...”, and I hope the Italian Guild is strong enough to maintain the definition of it as an educational system not as a therapy.

In the international Bodies this question has been raised and it is recommended that:

- all practitioners, assistant trainers and trainers emphasize in their published material and activities that the MF is independent from any particular religious or spiritual perspective and also should not be introduced or considered as a part of the so called New Age movement.
- The same statement to be added in the “Code of Ethics” and also in the “Standard of practise of the method” documents as in Italy.
- Feldenkrais practitioners do not teach or promote the MF as integrating element intrinsic to other methods, theories or worldviews commonly associated with the so called New Age or any other religion.

While recognising that is a move in the right direction, one has to further add, that this beginning alone is insufficient because it doesn't explain the reason why it is necessary to keep distinct the FM from religion. This paper instead is forwarding some proposals that can serve as a spring-board for further reflection.

Oviously the fundamental problem resides in knowing what the majority of persons in the Feldenkrais world consider a religion, as from this concept an attitude arises that needs to be considered when surveying the problem. Moreover, he/she who seeks religion as a way of life, will be very sensitive to the problem and will desire to live his/her own faith without any technique impeding this faith (however, even if detached from faith could help to improve some personal aspects); while he/she who considers religion more or less as an “option”, will not only lack interest in the problem, but furthermore he/she won't even understand that nevertheless some characteristics that he/she doesn't call religious, in fact are. And here... the question remains open.

7- Conclusion

The FM is an ingenious technique designed to enable each person to re-inter his/her inner self and so improve self-functionality, and harmony in movement, but in itself it is not

²⁴ [HTTP://WWW.NEWAGEMALL.COM/RESOURCE/FELDENKR.HTML](http://WWW.NEWAGEMALL.COM/RESOURCE/FELDENKR.HTML)

²⁵ [HTTP://THENEWAGE.COM/NA/NA_D305.HTML](http://THENEWAGE.COM/NA/NA_D305.HTML)

able to proceed further. False expectations must be not created, transforming the method into a technique that offers absolute well being. It should be remembered that this method emphasize a forgotten aspect of a dualistic education and it is throwing a challenge toward a new education of “corporeality” and thus of the “psycosomatics”, and this truly needs to be taken into a consideration.

Enlarging this discourse and overstepping the FM’s anthropological base, as has been previously indicated it is essential to develop an anthropology that can complement the one of Feldenkrais, an anthropology that manifests the unity of the person and the multiplicity of functions, an anthropology of dual unity that is equi-distant from both monisms and dualisms. A complete anthropology, as we have said, necessitates an inclusion of the person’s religious dimension. This is because the person self-actualization is not closed within him/herself, but is rather open and transcends toward the Other and the others. Thus, religion must not enter into the FM, nor should the FM be completely closed off to religions. In other words, it is necessary to respect the individual’s creed and doctrine without imposing other religious points of view. Only in this way it will stay faithful to the will of its founder and to the nature of the human being that he was intended to serve.

This relative autonomy of the FM with respect to religion, nevertheless, does not cast us toward religious relativisms, nor does it imply that every religion could lead to a true actualization of the person. This work is outside the defined limits and competence of both the FM and anthropology, while it properly pertains to a philosophy of religion. A complete actualization of the human being does not lead us to assume that we have to prescind from the specificity of each religion producing a religious sincretism.

Once more one may perceive that we are at the threshold of the problem that the person encounters when he/she takes into account his/her true limitation and finitude while at the same time desiring transcendence and, while reflecting he/she asks him/herself “how to reconcile unity and multiplicity, how to preserve the former without extinguishing the latter (that is the perennial sincretist and monist temptation), how to respect the second without fragmenting the first (that is the result of dualism)...”²⁶. My personal response to this matter is “the dual unity, that is equally distant from pure and simple monism and dualism, as from the clumsy temptation to synthesize that has been described as a dualism ‘with a monist background’. In religious terms, the problem consists in conciliating and respecting divine immanency and transcendency, the matter and the spirit, the horizontal and the vertical, the equivalence and the hierarchy; reconciliation that achieves its summit in that *unicum* (that one) who is God incarnated, Jesus, with the two true natures – divine and human – in the one Person – who is divine -, and his program of being in the world without being of the world, a world that in itself is good and not a place of incarceration to which we have been relegated”²⁷.

²⁶ J. VILLANUEVA, *La New Age e le sue “teologie”*, in “Acta Philosophica”, (1997), p. 160.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

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