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ATM: Seeing Yourself and the world around with New Eyes

An Awareness Through Movement Lesson created by Daniela Picard

Some general considerations

This is an ATM about improving the quality of movement of the eyes related to our habits of looking. It creates conditions for increasing the diversity of choices of where we direct our gaze and how easily we do so. Most people have clear preferences of directing the gaze in certain directions more than others. This ATM can help us to become a little more flexible in our habits of *where* we look.

When the eyes are open, we tend to use more effort, and because our habits of looking are very strong, they can be difficult to change. Sometimes people have pain or discomfort when they do ATMs where the directions involve having the eyes open. For someone like this, we can offer an ATM with the eyes closed because it lowers the level of stress significantly.

Closing the eyes during the ATM also creates the opportunity to use a simple and familiar frame of reference. Many people need a clearer frame of reference when they are new to the Method. The frame of reference should be something that they can feel concretely, not an imaginary frame like certain lessons where one is asked to imagine the movement of a bug or a little ball, for example.

We all need some kind of frame of reference. This is why many lessons are done on the floor. The floor itself is a frame of reference. There are many ATMs where you

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caress part of the body, or the arm creates some kind of a frame. A baby needs this kind of frame at the earliest stage of development. The baby only gradually enlarges his domain of action.

In this ATM, we will use a very concrete frame, the skull. Most people are not really aware of how the shape of their skull influences their habits of looking. This ATM is not about analyzing these patterns, but simply becoming curious about them and beginning to become aware of their existence.

Preparation

Come to standing. Simply observe your comfort in standing. Try to get a sense of your overall skeleton. What is the feeling of the skull resting on the top of the spine? Pay particular attention to the bones of your skull. Do certain areas of the skull seem more present in your sensation, in your attention?

Shift your weight onto one foot then the other. How confident do you feel when you support your weight mainly with the left leg? With the right leg?

With the eyes open, look along the horizon left and right, turning in order to look around you. Notice where you can look to comfortably, and where it less comfortable. Feel the quality of your support from the legs, your freedom in looking around you, and what happens when you become interested in things which are above you, below you, to your left, to your right, in front of you, and behind you. Also look in the places in between (eg., down and to the right, up to the left, etc.)

Scan

Lie on your back. Get an overall sense of your skeleton as it rests on the floor. Of course you are not just a skeleton. You have muscles, tendons, ligaments, organs, and many other things. Acknowledge the complex system that carries out many ongoing movements internally, even as you rest. Returning to your skeleton and the exterior surfaces of your skin, study the image of your body's contours: the thicker and thinner places, the hills and valleys, the hard and soft places, the parts that contact the floor and the parts that do not.

Begin to feel bones of the face and skull with your hands, taking care to keep your hands as soft as you can. Become interested not only in the more prominent contours of the jaw, nose, eyes, forehead, etc., but also notice other little bumps, grooves and changes in direction in the path of each bone. Feel the face, the sides of the head, the top of the head and the back of the head. Just feel what is there.

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Although we often think of the skull as one thing, It is made up of many bones, most of which are connected by fixed joints called sutures. Some of these joints are more moveable when we are born and only join together in a more fixed way as we mature into adulthood. You can think of the skull like a vase that was dropped and shattered and then glued back together again - with a glue that is a little bit flexible. Maybe you will discover some of the points of connection under your fingers.

Bring your fingers to the outer border of your eye sockets. Using the pad of one finger on each side, move very slowly back in the direction of your ears, but travelling less than an inch from the corner of the eyes. Feel how your fingers will pass over a ridge and then enter into a slight depression to discover a flat surface. You are now touching the outside of the greater wings of the sphenoid bone.

(for beautiful, simple videos about the sphenoid and the skull send a mail to: mentoring@daniela-picard.de)

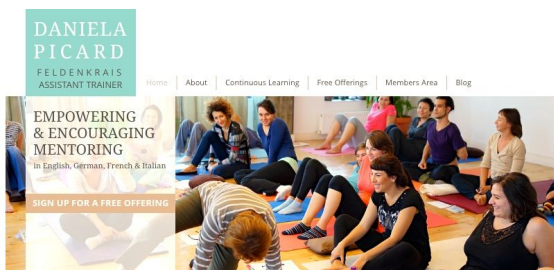
All around this flat surface are the meeting points of many other bones of the skull. You can feel these other bones by moving your fingers slightly forward, back up or down. See if you sense any differences between the shape or size of these two different surfaces. Sense if one of these surfaces is closer or further from the floor. Is one of these surfaces closer or further from the opening (*meatus*) of your ear ?

Keeping the pad of one or two fingers on each side of the sphenoid, imagine the complete shape of this beautiful bone, a kind of butterfly that sits behind your mouth and nose and carries your eyes on top of its wings. By putting the fingers here you have this bone between your hands.

Using enough pressure so that you feel that you are not simply moving the skin over the bone, imagine the tiniest dream of a movement where one finger moves up (in the direction of going overhead) and the other moves down (in the direction of your feet), tilting the butterfly as if it were redirecting the course of its flight. As you do this, perhaps the head moves, or the skin and muscles move. This is fine, but your intention is to inform the sphenoid bone about a tiny possibility of movement. Try this movement in both directions, noticing if one of the movements has a smoother quality.

Now explore a different movement, also *infinitely small*, where one finger moves the tiniest amount forward (in the direction of the ceiling) and the other finger moves the tiniest amount backwards in the direction of the floor. Again, try both possible movements and compare their qualities.

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Movements:

1) Close your eyes. Place one or two fingers (whichever you prefer) on your forehead above the eyes. Begin to trace with your finger a line around your face: pass over the forehead just under the hairline, descend in front of one ear and travel down and along the jaw bone to the chin. . . Continue along the other side of the jaw, up in front of the other ear and return to the forehead. So you are tracing something like an oval. As you do this, you are following the movement of your finger with your closed eyes. Explore both directions with this hand, clockwise and counterclockwise.

This basic process of tracing with the finger and following with the eyes will be used throughout the lesson. The speed which the finger moves is important. If you move too quickly, the eyes will skip and jump to stay with the finger. If you move too slowly, the eyes may lose their attention to the hand or, perhaps will jump ahead of it in anticipation. Find the speed where the eyes can stay with the movement of tracing with a soft, easy and continuous movement.

2) Trace the same oval of your face with a finger of the other hand. Explore both directions with each hand.

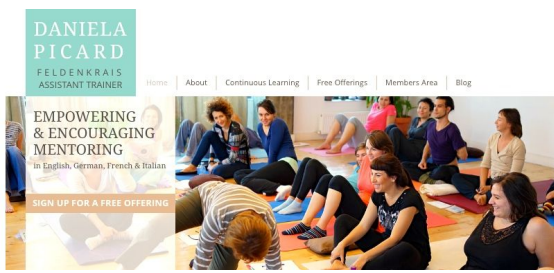
Also, please be aware of your breath as you move your hand and your eyes. There are many details to notice in this process, but if you only notice one thing, let it be the breath. Make sure that your breath remains a resting breath throughout the lesson. If you can discover the quality of breathing of a sleeping child while you do the movements, you will create beautiful new possibilities for the use of your eyes.

With the same hand, trace this path a couple of times in the other direction.

3) Switch hands again. Trace a slightly different path where the finger now passes *behind* the ears. Notice the involvement of the shoulders and the chest as you bring the finger to these places. After several movements in one direction with one hand, do several movements in the other direction. Explore both directions with each hand.

Continue to pay attention to the quality of your breath. Also pay attention to the sensation in your fingers and hand. Think of keeping your hand soft. Notice as you trace the path, that in some places the skin is more tightly stretched over the skull and in other places it is looser. Where there is more movement of the skin, the finger

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might get stuck momentarily and this may lead you to increase your effort. If you pay attention you can adjust the amount of pressure under the pad of your finger in order to maintain the movement with a soft hand.

4) With one hand then the other, explore other circular paths, always following the movement of the fingertip with your eyes and being aware that the speed of the movement allows you to move the eyes softly. For example, you could make a smaller circle under the hairline, in front of the ears and then traveling across the face along the cheek bones and between the nose and the upper lip.

. . . Or you could draw a circle around the mouth.

. . . Or you could draw a circle around one of the eyes or around one of the ears.

. . . Allow yourself to discover other circular pathways that draw your interest.

5) Turn to lie on one side. Draw up your knees so that you can rest comfortably. With the arm that is free, use one finger to trace a circle around the back of your head, similar to the first movement you did of tracing around your face.

Notice how, with the eyes closed, there is a funny way that the eyes can almost seem to see backwards and behind you. How clearly do you see the trajectory of the finger? Are you able to visualize how the hand and finger change orientation as they pass through different curves in the path? Can you allow your chest to remain soft as you do this and continue to breath gently?

Trace any other circular pathways that you find while lying on the side.

They can begin at the front of the skull, go to the free side of the head, around the ear, go as well the back of the head. All variations are welcome.

For example, trace a circle around the “free ear”. You should always explore in both directions. If one direction feels unpleasant, go again to the pleasant one.

There is a rationale to it.

Rest on the back. Gently roll your head left and right.

6) Turn to the other side and carry out similar experiments. Any circular path that you travel can be made slightly larger or smaller. Always be aware of whether your eyes can follow your finger smoothly. Perhaps there will be parts of some paths where this does not happen.

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If this is the case, you can spend a little extra time moving back and forth over this portion of the path to find out if it is possible to improve the movement of the eyes in this place. Perhaps it is not always possible. So then you just move on to something else.

Rest on the back. Gently roll your head left and right.

7) Put one hand on the opposite shoulder with the elbow resting on the chest. With the hand that is free, trace one or two fingers along the resting arm from the shoulder to the hand, and even to the tips of individual fingers. Follow the movement with your eyes.

There are infinite possible paths between these points. Allow yourself to travel over different parts of the surface of the arm or become interested in particular places along the way where you might trace smaller shapes that you find in the landscape.
Rest.

8) Switch arms and try the same thing, always following the movement with your eyes. Continue to be aware of the speed of the movement and whether the eyes can follow smoothly. Continue to be aware of the amount of effort you use in your arm, your hand and your fingers. Continue to be aware of your breath.

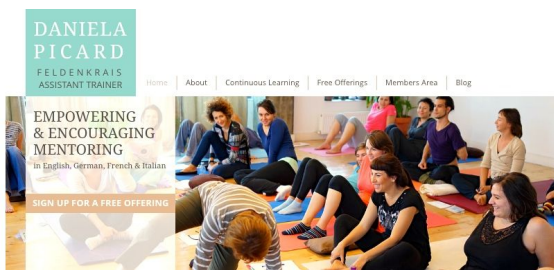
Rest on your back.

Perhaps another time, you will explore further variations. For example, you could draw one knee over the chest and explore movements of touching the leg and following with the eyes. You could create a nice game with a friend, your spouse, or, perhaps best of all, with a young child where you each take turns slowly drawing letters or numbers on the other person's back. The person being touched follows the movement with closed eyes and tries to understand what has been written.

9) Before you get up from the floor, again, place a finger on each side of the sphenoid in that flat area just behind the outer rim of the eye sockets. Again make exquisitely small movements of the sphenoid.

10) Place the palms of the hands over the eyes such that the heels of the hands rest just under the cheek bones. Move the head left and right while making one hand go up, the other hand going down in small gentle movements, as if you were turning the bones of the face around a point somewhere behind your nose.

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11) Stand up. Take a moment without analysing anything to simply feel how you are. Breathe. Then, notice some of the same things that you noticed at the beginning of the lesson. How do you feel in standing? How do you feel the support from the ground when you shift over one foot or the other? How does it feel now to look to the left, right, up, down, and elsewhere? Perhaps you are curious to test some other quality that may have changed as a result of the lesson. Is there something else that has changed that surprises you?



Meet Daniela

I have been an Assistant Trainer since 2013.

In addition to Yochanan Rywerant, I have studied with many widely respected Feldenkrais trainers and Assistant trainers. I have completed the German Cross-over process to get recognition as a fully certified practitioner.

For many years I did not think that it was important to become an Assistant Trainer, but, after I gave some Advanced trainings, colleagues convinced me that I should apply and get some official recognition. So I did it.

If you wish to know more about me and my background I can send you, upon request, relevant parts of my Application for Assistant Trainer which was enthusiastically accepted 2013 by the Euro-TAB.

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This ATM was beautifully and carefully edited by Seth Dellinger, Feldenkrais Practitioner in Washington DC.



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