DONNA FARHI
Teacher to the teachers.

Mastering Simplicity

Theme: Feet First
Physical Focus: Releasing the feet, standing postures
Special Equipment: An additional bolster and washcloth
Poetry/Extracts/Resources: "Dem Bones" by James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938)
Music: "Held" by East Forest (the entire album has a lovely reflective quality)

Introduction

• Our ability to walk with ease is almost entirely dependent on the health of our feet. Anyone who has ever sprained their ankle will know how debilitating this can be for mobility. Stiffness and restriction in the feet, plantar fasciitis, bunions, and other conditions can create pain and discomfort and make buying shoes a nightmare.

• In our last class, we spent quite a bit of time mobilizing the ball of the foot, as well as releasing the Achilles tendon. We also explored how to improve our gait through releasing the hip joint in all directions and mobilizing the thoracic spine to improve the rotational swing through the trunk and arms. In today's class we'll be exploring improving extension of the foot through opening the front of the ankle, foot and toes, and improving extension through the thighs and iliopsoas. This can improve comfort and capacity in kneeling positions.

• Finally, just as the old spiritual song "Dem Bones" stacks the bones from the ground up, we'll investigate how initiating movement from the feet can radically affect other body parts.

"Toe bone connected to the foot bone
Foot bone connected to the heel bone
Heel bone connected to the ankle bone
Ankle bone connected to the leg bone
Leg bone connected to the knee bone
Knee bone connected to the thigh bone
Thigh bone connected to the hip bone
Hip bone connected to the back bone
Back bone connected to the shoulder bone"

Experiential

Centering

1. Heroes' Pose (***Virasana***) with the aid of a bolster under the pelvis and gradually reducing the height of the support (if this can be done safely). Paying particular attention to the centered placement of the knees and centered placement of the feet.
    - Extending the toes gently with the hands.
    - Isometric press of the toes and the tops of the feet for 5 seconds followed by a release.
    - Kneeling with the lower legs on two blankets and the feet off the blanket.

Warming Up

2. Cow Face Pose Flow (***Gomukhasana Vinyasana***) in the lineage of Ruthy Alon.[1]
    - Cow Face Pose (***Gomukhasana***), sitting on a block or bolster, with the aid of a belt or dynaband (elastic band) to link the two hands.

3. Half Supine Heroes' Pose (***Ardha Supta Virasana***) with the support of two bolsters set in a **T** position:
    - With right leg extended for 1-2 minutes (repeat on the left side).
    - With right knee bent for 1-2 minutes (repeat on the left side).
    - Supine Heroes' Pose (***Supta Virasana***) actively drawing the pubic bone toward the navel.

Active

4. Downward Facing Dog Pose (***Adho Mukha Svanasana***)

5. Standing Figure-8 Loops
    - rotation
    - lateral
    - double

6. Mountain Pose (***Tadasana***) into Spinal Rolls
    - center, left, and right X 5

7. Wide-Stance Preparatory Position for Standing Postures, turning into lunge . . .

[1] Ruthy Alon (1930-2020) was one of the original students of Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais. She later went on to write her own book, *Mindful Spontaneity,* and to create her life's work, the *Bones for Life* program in her mid-60 's.

Active continued . . .

8. Triangle Pose (***Trikonasana***) from active lunge, left and right X2 with the support of a block under the hand. Final repetition from the preparatory position. Focus on keeping the weight primarily in the ball of the foot.

9. Side-Angle Pose (***Parsvakonasana***) from standing, X2 each side, with the elbow on the supporting thigh. Focus on keeping the weight primarily on the ball of the foot.

10. Warrior Pose One Flow (***Virabhadrasana I Vinyasana***) into Revolved Triangle Pose (***Parivrtta Trikonasana***) *X3* (initiating each movement from the feet on up . . .):
    A. Arms extended towards the hips on descent, arms extended to the sides on ascent.
    B. Arms extended in line with the shoulders on descent, arms extended in front of the body on ascent.
    C. Arms extended in front of the body (in line with the trunk) on descent, arms extended in line with the trunk on ascent.

Relaxation

11. Corpse Pose (***Savasana***) with a bolster under the knees and a roll under the ankles.

Transition to Everyday Life

Take opportunities throughout the day to move your feet in non-habitual ways. Circle your ankles while you are watching TV. Spread and release your toes as you are eating breakfast. After your shower or bath, take a little time to massage your feet with oil or if you have a friend or partner, exchange a foot massage and notice where your feet feel tender or even painful. Notice the difference when you walk barefoot, and when you wear shoes that assist and even improve your walking compared to fashion shoes that impede your ability to walk or run.

Resources

• *Mindful Spontaneity: Moving in Tune with Nature: Lessons in the Feldenkrais Method,* by Ruthy Alon, Prisma Press, 1990
• *Mindful Spontaneity: Lessons in the Feldenkrais Method* by Ruthy Alon, North Atlantic Books, end edition, 1996
• There are also many short YouTube videos showing Ruthy Alon demonstrating and teaching her method. Her *Bones for Life* program continues to be taught by many contemporary Feldenkrais practitioners.