

## **The Act of Rising – a Skill for Self-Preservation**

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### **Introduction**

Getting up and going down are **survival abilities**, protecting the body in response to threats in the environment.

When Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, a Judo master, taught the action of rising from sitting to standing, he rhetorically asked: “Why, for example, from the point of view of self-preservation - did we get up?” Moshe continued: “Normally an animal would not get up unless it heard or saw or smelled or felt a change in the environment, which it could not interpret as being safe”. (Master Moves).

*Rising* is an action characterized by lifting the center of gravity from its original position, in a harmonious movement motivated by a specific reason, through a trajectory, which leads to upright standing and is compatible with continuing the action.

Different starting positions can constitute the beginning action that leads to rising and/or transferring through various positions. For example: lying on the ground, sitting, kneeling, standing on all fours, bent over. Rising to standing is an essential daily action, which becomes more difficult as a person ages.

### **Rising from sitting as a survival mechanism**

Rising from a chair is a routine action consciously performed by more than a third of the world's population. The principles used in standing up from sitting on a chair are valid for rising from all seated positions.

Here I will relate to the principle of self preservation, looking at the action of rising as it pertains to survival. Moshe dealt with the self preservation aspect when he taught rising through rotation. Rising while rotating allows bringing the gaze towards the disturbance or threat, or possible escape routes, no matter from which direction the threat appears.

Dr. Feldenkrais on the advantages of rotation: “Rotation is so well developed in humans that they turn faster than most animals, and in bull fighting, Japanese martial arts, boxing, and all such activities, impact with an oncoming object or thrust can be avoided by simply turning sideways.” (The Elusive Obvious)

The kernel of the lesson that follows illustrates the theory of rotation: “The pelvis moves from the sitting position and twists spirally upward to your left... it will complete its rotation until you are facing what was your rear standing on your feet... the head is carried in the same

ascending spiral, with the eyes moving to find the horizon when the ascent is completed.”

(The Elusive Obvious, Chapter Awareness through Movement)

The stability of the body during the act of rising, and upon completing the action, influences one’s mental ability to decide the continuation of the action.



**Photo vignettes showing the efficacy of rotational movement when rising in reaction to a threat.**

## Efficient Rising

ATM teachers often see inefficient performance of getting up from the floor. At any age it is certainly possible to learn techniques for efficient rising. However, it is preferable to begin educating towards efficient rising from a young age, thus reducing the possibility of difficulties developing.

The photos illustrate some key points that are critical for learning and performing an efficient and successful act of sitting-to-standing:

1. *Proper placement of the feet before initiating the rising action.* Feet should be on the surface (floor) similar to their position when standing. Attention must be paid to the placement of the feet relative to each other and both feet relative to the center of gravity. Proper placement of the feet permits easy and safe movement in the upper body, so the center of gravity moves to a point over the feet, which affects the timing of rising. Proper placement of the feet helps getting up in the intended direction; the trajectory of the action guides the completion of the movement, which is oriented to the demands of changes in the environment.
2. *The direction of the gaze and the intention that leads to rising.* The advantage of rising via rotation is expanding the space that can be observed during the transition. It is imperative that the eyes notice changes in the environment throughout the entire action so as to organize at an angle suitable for defense or escape.
3. *Completing rising and continuing.* It is necessary to consider the speed of the action and the preparation for completing the action. Changing the body's angle, the lift, and shifting the center of gravity at an inappropriate speed can cause one to lose one's balance, making it obligatory to restabilize by moving the feet to a better place. It is frequently necessary to even take a step to restore balance. Efficient organization leads to quicker, effortless action, which is a preparation for the continuation of the intended act.
4. *Reversibility.* An important contribution to the learning how to rise is the awareness of the reversibility of the action. To improve the act of rising it is important to be aware of how the act of sitting is carried out.

## **Conclusion**

Martial arts played an important role in the life of Moshe Feldenkrais who, as a young man, fought to survive. His method included the concepts of survival and he talked about the survival aspect while teaching the method.

Most of the elements I have mentioned here can be learned through lessons that do not specifically address the act of rising.

I will conclude with a quote that reflects Moshe's view on efficiency of movement: "The most drastic test of movement is self-preservation."