Ruthy Alon interviewed by *Dalik Volinitz*

on Israeli Educational TV, September 24, 2009

D = Dalik
R = Ruthy
L = Luly

Dalik – I've stolen a cookie, but I'm unable to eat it — so I put it on the table and enjoy just looking at it. Our next guest has taken it upon herself to create a program that develops fitness in a feasible way. Ruthy Alon is a phenomenon of nature, my friends. She describes her program as "Movement Intelligence for Bone Strength and Posture Improvement." (I'm already trying to sit more upright!) She's almost 80, she is a grandmother, and — as she says about herself — every year her body is getting better and better. Shalom, Ruthy!
Ruthy – Shalom!

D – Shalom also to your student, Luly Hen-Shamir. Is it Luly, or Loly?
L – Luly

D – Luly, Luly, that's nice.
(Turns to Ruthy)
Look, I know it is a difficult demand, but give us in a few sentences the secrets of your method. I understand that the origin was Feldenkrais.
R – Yes, the origin was Feldenkrais. I have been a Senior Trainer in the Feldenkrais Method for many years. I use his learning principles in a different context: the context of resisting gravity; of posture; of power-loaded dynamic and rhythmic movement. The special insight of Feldenkrais, and his unique contribution to the world, was that he gave us "somatic learning." It is not that we teach the body how to do something "right" — according to some authoritarian standard — but that we bring the body to feel, sense, and reconsider its self-management, and we are able to change it's functional policy accordingly. This is the interesting thing.

D – How can you cause the body to change its policy? It sounds very theoretical . . .
R – No, it's totally experiential. You just lead a person to experiment with few unused options. Our habits are very inhibiting. When people are led to step out of their habitual ways, their bodies become creative, like a child that has the resourcefulness to learn how to reach, to manage, to jump — how to do anything. This is the awakening of "Movement Intelligence."

D – You are taking this basic thing that is important for you, for which you have a lot of appreciation, and you are bringing it to another place.
R – I needed to bring it to another place because of the laboratory of coordination. (You know, in Feldenkrais, every person, within his own body, is a laboratory.) In Feldenkrais the laboratory takes place while lying on the floor — free of gravity, free of a confined pace, without demonstration — and people truly obtain wonderful results. But in order to talk to our *bones*, we need to relate to their destiny — which is resisting gravity. Bones respond and become stronger by coping with the challenge of bouncing, such as in a vigorous walk. That's why I needed to shift the context of learning to another arena. My work takes place while standing upright, with more dynamic movement, and relies upon the safety and comfort of a supportive environment. Having learned that there are ways that the body can make discoveries by itself, discoveries that it accepts and applies to life, I benefit from leaning against a wall, or with the help of a harness. Because: *without meeting conditions of comfort and safety, it's impossible to learn.* Somatic

learning occurs by bypassing the frustration we feel when forcing ourselves to overcome obstacles. Instead, we decipher the code of efficient organization.

D – Soon we will move on to a demonstration.
R – Okay.

D – Luly, why have you come to learn this?
L – I came to Ruthy, and to her method, because I wanted to solve a personal problem. I suffer from osteoporosis, and I couldn't get an answer that I liked about how to solve this problem. It was clear to me that the solution needed to be in movement, not in drugs, and I went on to learn how to teach Ruthy's program. Actually, I found her exercises also solved my back problems! And I have proof: I have been taking bone density measurements, and there has already been an increase.

D – Amazing!
(Turns to Ruthy)
Ruthy, I would like you to demonstrate for us. There is a violet cloth behind us.
R – Certainly. This is just a simple cotton cloth . . .

D – Yes.
R – . . . and it is possible to wrap it around the body. Here I wrap it around my loins.

D – Yes.
R – I think of what was written in the Bible, to "gird up your loins." When you connect your leg with the pelvis, your stability is much stronger. I can tighten it once more, and then I can toss each strip up over the back.

D – Yes . . .
R – I catch them behind, and pull them down — and the body raises itself up. I don't relate to it as a project of confronting gravity; I pull down, and by itself the body rises. When I demonstrated this at NASA the officer pulled like this, with his hands down, and his body straightened up. Then, all of a sudden, his eyes lit up, and he said "Only Israeli's could think of such a thing."

D – Maybe we need to clarify that, at NASA, they are searching for and experimenting with these kinds of methods in order to solve the problems of the astronauts.
R – The zero-gravity problem.

D – Sometimes they carry them out on stretchers after they return from space.
R – Yes. Here, now I am twisting the harness from behind; I am reinforcing my spine — I add to it an additional exterior spine. I wrap the strips again in front, and now my body is held together in one unit. I can safely perform anti-gravity movements like this. If I step in place, the stepping begins to train every part of my body to accept this new postural organization. And if I run in the wrap, my posture becomes even more reliable.

D – Yes, the body is listening now to what is happening.
R – It happens by itself, it's not an instruction through words. The body receives a message of confidence, it senses its capacity to be protected, and this creates the possibility that it will adopt this kind of standing in daily life. Now I bounce on my heels in the wrap. This is one of our basic exercises, one which loads the bones with power; it is more than what happens in a vigorous walk, but using the harness I do it in safety and with ease. It's even possible to jump like this, and further strengthen your bones.

D – Hey, a girl of 80 years old! My goodness, what lightness!
R – This is my message to people: there is no necessity for us to deteriorate; our body is built for movement. But it needs to be intelligent and natural movement.

D – Tell me, you are touring the world with this method, right?
R – My program is currently taught in 22 countries.

D – You don't say!
R – Yes.

D – What fun! Where in Israel can people encounter your method?
R – Next year we will start teaching a course at the Wingate Academy to train teachers of movement intelligence for bone strength. It's also possible to visit my website — BonesForLife.co.il — where you can find a list of about 100 teachers in Israel, arranged by location.

D – How beautiful!
R – Definitely.

D – Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful! In our conversation beforehand, you mentioned something that I liked very much, about an analysis of women in Namibia.
R – Yes.

D – . . . That they do not have especially high bone density, but that they have no problem carrying huge loads of weight on their heads — because they know *how to walk*. They have their own natural movement intelligence.
R – They were obliged to discover how, otherwise they wouldn't be able to sustain this project. They are actually my model — these small women who carry more than a third of their body weight, day after day. Their hearts are not damaged, their breathing is not compensated, and their posture is the most beautiful in the world — *and, they have no bone fractures!* This is the thing: the researchers found that they have a one-percent fracture rate in comparison with the west — and this is in spite of their bone density *not* being any higher than that in the west. It makes you think: What functional factors build bone resistance? This is my passion — to decipher this, and to teach people.

D – Listen, you have many more years ahead, Ruthy — to decipher and to teach — and I thank you very much. And thank you, Luly, too. Thank you very much. I have personally been seeking, just recently, how to adjust my posture so that my body will learn, because many times . . .
R – Come on — I will show you, do you want to see? Cross one knee over the other.

D – Leg over leg . . . Aha . . .
R – Put the same side hand of your bottom leg on the seat behind you.

D – The hand of the bottom leg on the seat.
R – And your other hand in the front.

D – Yes
R – Now push down with your fists — and see how your body rises up.

D – Oh this is wonderful, oh, wonderful! Thank you!