

Feldydigest, 1999

Title: Sexual, emotional, and other 'somatic' confusions:
the obviously elusive FM

by Yvan Joly, Feldenkrais Practitioner-Trainer
yvanjoly@compuserve.com

Some of the recent conversations in the Digest have been raising quite a few controversial topics: interpersonal boundaries, sexual connotations of touch and emotional expression to name a few in my own words. It's very interesting to me that what started as a request for support and orientation from our now famous anonymous 'Eve' turned into what is now a discussion on emotions, on Moshe's inadequacies about it and on the failure of Trainings to address the issue satisfactorily. Soon we will deal with Moshe's inadequate emotional and sexual behaviour! This is quite a sheer in focus. As usual, we speak about what is interesting to us. Meanwhile the logic of it all may not always be so apparent! Therefore I can now jump in the forum on emotions, with no need for rationality. Ha Ha! Yet I beg us all to keep Moshe out of it. With all respect and admiration for him, let's agree that the man is well dead now, and since he was such a multifaceted persona, one can invoke him to justify virtually anything at this point, the affirmative and it's opposite. Let's talk about us, our profession, our method.

Back to... the future of emotions. First, I think that we need to move in and around and about this fixation on so-called 'emotions'. Particularly in our community, this word had grow to some all purpose all serving tag . And I will bet you that if we interviewed 25 practitioners about 'emotions' we would find 39 meanings of it, including intimacy, sadness, sexual experiences, hate, relationships, inner child stuff too, and rage, fear and other things that actually have little to do with 'emotions' only. Furthermore, it is obvious to me that if the Feldenkrais Method was centrally involved with emotional expression it would not have attracted most of us, starting with myself and perhaps you too. As a traveller of the 60-70ies and psychologist, I had already seen quite a bit of that 'emotional' stuff before encountering Feldenkrais work. And I chose Feldenkrais specifically because it offered a new paradigm, and not only, as some of you will think, because I was afraid of my feelings Ha Ha! There are still tens of great methods out there that approach the human experience with more explicit interest and skill in the emotional expression, in relationships, in past experience not to mention past-lives, early or late traumas etc. It so happens that this I think that this is NOT our focus NOR our method. We or should I say 'I', with the Feldenkrais Method, approach the person via the process of learning of awareness though movement of the soma in space. And when I say 'soma' I don't mean 'the body', or the sensory-motor system, , I mean the living embodied biological self-regulated whole-at-every-moment person (Statements like this are really useful to reduce the confusion are they not!).

For example, when I touch someone 'at their head', I am not touching 'a head', or 'a body' but actually a 'soma' , a whole alive and aware person with their full

experience. Rolling a person 'from their head' (note again that I do not do or say: 'roll a head') I interface all of a person's experience, their sensations of involvement of the neck, chest, breathing yes, but also included, their emotional experience, their images, memories and with no doubt their political opinions and spiritual insights. When the movement of the head is more harmonious, more personalized, more functionally integrated, also when the person learns to transfer this quality and skill in space and in various contexts, I don't feel I have to do some other direct emotional, political, spiritual or artistic intervention. And if I do, I will refer to another professional to reduce my own and my student's confusion about this FM.

It is not because we do not explicitly and with emphasis and with words raise these so-called 'emotional' issues that we cannot include them in the scope of our lessons, in our own awareness as teachers of ATM or FI. Our method is one of the indirect and of the whole through the whole.

Furthermore, in the FM we, surely 'I' care about the process, not so much the content. We obviously cannot do it all in details of content, we surely can address it all in the process. For me the FM is a strategic content-free approach to the whole of behaviour. The person feeds in the content with their own attention, we propose a process that virtually includes all contents. That IS the specific value of our competence, the all-encompassing perspective of the process. Please don't misunderstand me, I don't mean that you do not need to visit once in a while with your hairdresser, accountant, therapist, surgeon or family counselor. And I do refer to other professionals of all kinds, including hairdresser and voice teachers and therapists too. But this specific content-free somatic and strategic approach is perhaps the specific though obviously elusive characteristic of the FM and I am afraid that it is obviously becoming more and more elusive. Meanwhile this insight on process and embodiment is now also shared by many in the contemporary scientific, psychological, philosophical and spiritual domains. And meanwhile we will be the last ones to realize that we had something very precious to offer and never got acknowledged for it for lack of knowing it!

Through aware movement, we deal with the generator of the whole of our behaviour, with the 'fractal' equation that generates all the scales of our behaviour and with that perspective in 'mind' (language is fun!), we need a minimum of involvement with the content. This content is the prerogative of the person involved in the learning and frankly I also believe content is none of our business! And I mean too not our business. Not because as practitioners we don't want to deal with emotions, memories, fantasies, ideas, but because I believe that our competence, our Trainings, prepare us (barely perhaps) for this somatically based process of the whole self. If one wants to do beyond that, another form of emotional intervention, some adjunct of physiotherapy maybe, some creative work in expression, in the arts, or some business applications, great, fine... but it will be on the basis of competencies that are not included in the basic Trainings, because the basic Trainings have a scope, and it is the specific scope of our method that should be addressed in our already too short training programs.

Talking about confusion, a good example of semantic disagreement on this notion of 'soma' can be found in Ralph's contribution in the latest Digest : (and I rephrase his citation hoping that the meaning is still the same). Ralph says: 'Psychological modalities focus on the cognitive and emotional dimensions, and neglect the somatic' ...(...) Moshe's appreciation of the somatic dimension was superb, but he did not give adequate weight to the emotional'. Earlier Ralph had said: 'My interest is in working with human experience as an integrated phenomenon-- INCLUDING (my emphasis) it's somatic, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, and sometimes it's spiritual dimension as well'.

I think that Ralph is still nurturing the body-mind dualism, or from the dualism he moved to somatic-emotional-spiritual pluralism... It's looks more sophisticated, but it's still the paradigm of 'parts' and elements. There is also here a misunderstanding about the notion of soma itself. Is the 'soma' limited to sensations and movement, and then we have to deal with emotions, during, after or before? If so, somatic work is just a sophisticated term for body-work and it's not all that interesting to me too! By using the word 'soma' I mean that I approach all phenomena from the point of view of their embodiment, and that includes emotions too, but not only. When I work 'somatically' I relate here and now with the whole person. It's happening in the lesson, in my hands, or in my words and presence in ATM. Again, not that the work does everything, not to say that crying during a lesson is not appropriate. Not to say that remembering a trauma or having a great creative idea is not appropriate. These are all content issues. I approach the living person in a very specific way, that encompasses, through awareness in movement, the emotional, the sensorial, the imaginary, the creative, the intellectual, and the cognitive and the spiritual if you want, and the economical too! Separating emotions as if they were an event of life separate from the somatic and needing special attention is neither my belief nor my method, nor my intent in Trainings. If some of our colleagues chose to deal directly and sequentially with one or the other of these aspects, it is surely not by virtue of what they learned in Feldenkrais Trainings.

Please colleagues, don't attack Feldenkrais Trainings for what they don't want to do and for what is not the paradigm and the originality of the method. Do your own somato-emotional-spiritual whatever integration. That is fine with me, I have respect for that too and I am sure that such synthesis deserves admiration and clientele. But this is not what I, and I would say with some risk taking here yet, what 'most of us' involved in Trainings now have chosen to do. We chose to train our students on the specifics and originality of the Method itself. Not on all of what is missing in it, not on all of what is done elsewhere with such skill and success sometimes, most of the time better than us.

Mixing up the boundaries issues with the sexual connotations and the emotional expression and putting it all in the face of Moshe and Trainings and trainers, and then in some case with a little added touch of criticism towards this and that, does not really clarify anything. Surely, these topics need to be addressed, but in the context of OUR method. I don't mean that Trainings in their actual form are the greatest as they are and without need for improvement. But Trainings should improve in what they should be doing, i.e. the Feldenkrais Method. If people come

out of Trainings thinking that they need extra emotional training, or some spiritual coaching that should have been in the Trainings, maybe it's because the specific approach of our method was not clearly presented and surely that must be improved. Perhaps also some of us need specific emotional and relational coaching (I surely did!), like some others need voice or dance or ski or finances coaching too (I surely do too!). That's another issue. What we have in common is the domain and the methodology as delineated in what is now called the Feldenkrais Method. We all found each other on that territory, because it is a round-about place. If all of us start to pull the blanket in all the directions of what Moshe forgot, discarded, hated, was afraid of or chose to exclude. etc. I will bet you that not much commonality will remain. We might obviously be missing the elusive essential. Or obviously there is a non elusive disagreement on what is the core of the method. No doubt about that. But Moshe would agree with me, I am sure because I channelled him last night and he was smiling. But who knows why? I have to ask him tomorrow.

Somatically yours, sympathetically and para-sympathetically,
Yvan Joly, practitioner-trainer