

ON FELDENKRAIS AND PSYCHOLOGY
(a lunchtime lecture!)

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SEGMENT FIVE
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**Transcribed by Zoran Kovich and edited by Yvan Joly from a tape recording of
a casual presentation on the lakeside at noon in the sun!**

BEING A TRAINEE IN AMHERST, WITH MOSHE WITH MY BACKGROUND IN HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

During my training time in Feldenkrais being a psychologist was almost a “stamp” you had to hide. Do you understand why? It’s because the way Moshe developed it, with his style, with his own cultural background, with his own age and where he came from, the intrapsychic and the emotional aspects of the work were not put to the foreground, to say the least. And having had some experience in psychology, and it’s the same thing you might hear about physiotherapy, everything that you have learned before has to be reframed completely differently. And because you have had previous training it is more difficult to learn this work. Maybe you have heard some of that. I know I heard it, and I must say I agree.

I have not had an extensive psychotherapeutic or clinical training in psychology. But I have worked in many different fields of psychology and have done quite a lot of therapeutic work and therapeutic training, but I have never had a “traditional” psychological practice. So you must understand that everything I will say will be coloured by my non exclusive background.

And during the training time, I had many colleagues in psychology and I felt I was a part of what brought Moshe and his work eventually to the states, which was the human potential movement. The people interested in Feldenkrais at that time had not so much an interest in knowing how they could heal their back or do something for their pain or something like that. In the seventies people had an interest with all kinds of other things, such as how we can grow as human beings. So this is why I historically came to the work and I thought, and still think, that this is one of the nicest approaches and one of the most powerful ones for the development of human potential.

But over the years of my training I still had many questions, and I remember the first summer in Amherst, I really had to hold myself to stay there. I could not understand what was going on with Moshe, how much he was doing with us without acknowledging explicitly what was going on with our inner life. Some of what I am saying now I have written in a small article in the Feldenkrais Journal (no.4) 1988. I call it “Feldenkrais and the Emotions: A Psychologist’s Loop”. It’s about the loop I did myself as a person. I also wrote another article in one of your newsletters here, “On intimacy and Feldenkrais”. So if you want to read about what we are going to talk about today some of it is in writing.

So for me the story started from a very funny point of view. I really had a hard time because I felt a lot of things going on within myself emotionally, in my dreams and in my fantasies and in my physical symptoms. Some of us in Amherst had had some previous training regarding the relationship between movement and emotion and our own psyche and on transference and all of this and we could not figure out how come it was not being acknowledged by Moshe.

But I decided to stay with Moshe there nevertheless because I realized that even though he was not talking about this explicitly, or doing anything about it, that I was going through a lot of changes. And it was seemingly all for the good. And so taking my patience in one hand I decided to stay and hold myself there with the other hand.

RE-DISCOVERING THAT MOVEMENT INCLUDES SENSING, FEELING, THINKING

And I am really happy I did, now that I look back at it, because what happened in between, I think, is that I discovered through Moshe's approach a whole way of approaching the person, our behaviour, our emotional life, our inner life. I am so grateful now. I personally believe, and Moshe did believe, that the future of psychology is in our work. And it's also the future of many things. Moshe was supposed to go to an international symposium on psychotherapy in Spain just before he got sick. He never got there. I am sorry he never got there. I would have been very curious to hear what he would have said. If you read *The Potent Self* or some parts of *Body and Mature Behaviour* it's obvious, explicitly, that Moshe developed his work not just to heal his bad knee or to find a better way to throw someone in Judo. He realized along the way, a lot like Wilhelm Reich and other people of that era, that not only is there a relationship between the mind and the body, the spirit and the somatic, but that basically the person is always whole. And if you put your hand on someone you can say "I am touching Mark's arm" but you are in fact touching the whole person. I am touching his experience, the way he feels about himself, the way he uses his arms, not only for playing tennis but for touching people, for taking in things for pushing away and so on. All of this is always included in all of our work. So now for me it's just a passion to realize that as we work with people, taking into account movement, the skeleton and the nervous system, we are nevertheless doing something that is very holistic, where the whole person is involved, and where the whole of our behaviour can be improved.

I like professionally to include the emotional life in my own awareness when I work with people. Again, not because it is something I do because I am a psychologist but because it's part of my life. It's part of who we are! You do a movement like this (*arms go out to*

the sides at shoulder level, head tilts back so that face looks upwards) and you start opening up, like this (arms come back in from the side and tuck in close *(to the torso, head tilts down; chin to chest)*) and closing up. Some people will describe what they see in terms of what's going on in the joints and where the elbow is in space and so on and so forth. But if I do this in front of you *(takes arms out to the side again, lifts head, etc.)* it also has a communicative aspect, it also has an emotional aspect. Dancers use this movement all the time. As I do this movement I am opening up and closing in. It has meaning. It has connotation in my personal life. It means something to you. But not everyone of my colleagues seems to decode the work at that level and I don't think it's necessary either.

But for me this is part of what we do. It is like opening up and closing in. What does it mean for you emotionally to open up and close in? The emotional content of a lesson is not always in the foreground but for me any movement has an emotional component, just as much as it also has a kinesthetic component and a sensorial component. And people also have images and ideas associated to their movement. Some of you, when we give you lessons, describe your lesson like "Oh, I am flying" or something like that. This is also part of our work. What Moshe developed, and what I think is very clever, is through movement he found a way of taking all of the person together at the same time. So that is a powerful thing I have discovered through the work.

Now the other thing I discovered over the years is that compared to what I have learned as a person going to psychotherapy, and as a trainee in different psychotherapeutic systems, the way Moshe approaches the development of the person is really different from what existed in the 70's and early 80's in the humanistic psychology domain.

FELDENKRAIS. A STRATEGIC AND SOMATIC APPROACH

When you are a psychologist in Québec, (I am still a member of the corporation, the professional body) they ask you every year to re-register and identify the approach you are using. They would ask if you have an analytical orientation, or existential, or behaviourist or whatever. I used to write down "Feldenkrais". And back five years ago there was really no name to categorize this Feldenkrais approach. Now I write: **strategic and somatic!**

I profoundly believe now that what we do in this work is what we can call a "Strategic Approach". My family of belonging now is not so much with body-workers. I feel my belonging now as a professional is more with what we call strategic approaches. Moshe's work is akin to Milton Erikson, to some of the Brief Therapies, some of the Watzlawick ideas or

Gregory Bateson. And what does strategic approach mean? To me it means, very simply, that whatever we create for ourselves is the result of what we do and how we do it. The universe that we create for ourselves is the result of how we concretely create it. In traditional psychology this was not that well acknowledged until very recently.

But there are new ways now of dealing with therapy and behavioural change, which recognize exactly the same thing. If I have a lot of pain in my life, if I have a lot of sadness, it is the result of how I organize my own self in relation to my environment. Not that I should stop myself from feeling anger for example but that the anger is the result of how I organize myself through life, the interaction I have with my own family, my peers, my environment with the people I am living with. And after a certain age, which we here all have reached, we cannot call on our parents' responsibility. What happens to me is about me and that is the approach we use in this work. If you have difficulty breathing or if you feel you are not moving in a certain area, what can you discover through movement and awareness that will enable you to get what you want?. I think all of our behaviour can be dealt with on that same level. If you want a happy relationship with your partner it's a matter of organization. How do you organize yourself to create this present result and how can you create more of what you want.

Now what we have with Moshe Feldenkrais' contribution is such a very nice, simple and concrete way of looking at strategies. It's a no nonsense kind of thing, very concrete and very physical. Let's say I want to be close (friendly) to Mark. I say to him, "Mark, I am so happy to see you and I want to be close to you" and all the while I am (physically) pushing him away or moving my ownself away, or I am stepping on his toes. A very concrete thing. And in our general behaviour I find it as concrete as it is right now (in terms of this demonstration with Mark). Milton Erikson, Walzawick and Feldenkrais and a lot of other people use strategic approaches now. Strategic meaning how we organize ourselves to produce the results we get or don't get in our lives.

So maybe we could say that what we do in Feldenkrais is a strategic approach which has a more somatic point of reference. Rather than working with your fantasies, relationships or working with your emotional life directly as such. We approach our living being more from the point of view of what we do as living beings, moving the skeleton in space from a very concrete way. Some people like to call it a somatic - point of view. I say "somatic" not as in "psychosomatic" which is different but I take it as Thomas Hanna likes to say it: somatic from the Greek root meaning "living being". A living being is a living being in the context of gravity.

It's a living being in the context of breathing, of changes in the environment, of relating yourself to other people and all of this.

INTEGRATING PSYCHOLOGY INTO FELDENKRAIS AND NOT THE REVERSE

So in short this is a little bit of the loop I did and I am so happy now that I had the patience to stay there. But the whole process was difficult and painful. I find that the broader framework now for me, when I work with people or consider my own life, is the Feldenkrais way of thinking. It is a more global model than psychotherapy or psychology. I am not integrating Feldenkrais into psychology. I personally find that the model that Moshe created or helped create in each of us is a more powerful model than what I had known of psychology. So I integrate psychology into Feldenkrais. So if today you thought you were going to hear how a psychologist puts Feldenkrais into psychology please erase this from the subject of the agenda, if that is possible, for I actually do the opposite. And interestingly enough I now get more and more people who come to me for what you could say are traditional reasons for going to a psychologist. For example, people come to me because they have anxiety attacks or because they are not happy in a relationship. These people come to me because they are aware that I have this psychological training but also because I do work with them very differently. Yet what I do is what we do in a Feldenkrais lesson: please lie on your back. I find it's the same approach. I may have an awareness that includes a few more things than some colleagues, and I do realize this but I don't think we have to do something that's very different. You don't have to take a training in psychotherapy to be able to work with people and encompass in your framework what we are as human beings from the point of view of our inner life. It's there anyway. You touch someone and it's there. But maybe a little more awareness of that aspect will help us as we work more and more with a broader scope.

I am curious to hear why you came to hear this talk. What kinds of questions and answers you might have about this? It's a very broad domain. Let's hear some of your comments or maybe your own experience of these things.

QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

Student: I feel that what Moshe says, what the trainers say, does cross the physical boundary and applies to life and applies to our own way of thinking and acting and being. So it's obvious to me what you are saying. It rings very true.

Yvan: Great! Are you comfortable with what is happening for you in the training process?

Student: Well I am comfortable when I am in the group. What I don't like is I feel myself slipping back between segments.

Yvan: That's a tricky one. Are there other people who have that experience, that we're fine as long as we are moving on the floor a couple hours a day?

Student 2: I've felt that this work always touched me in an emotional way.

Yvan: So the whole thing is not a novelty to you, it's a part of your experience.

Student 2: Yes. It would surprise me if it wasn't.

I think the most difficult thing for me in my training was to not have the emotional aspects acknowledged as such. I felt that I was left to myself with what was going on inside. I think the trainers and assistants here increasingly have an openness to hearing more about who you are and what is going on with you. You have to remember in Amherst there were 220 people and only one microphone and I won't tell you who had it.

TAKING CARE OF ONESELF EMOTIONALLY TOO!

We constantly repeat in the training, go slowly. If you do this here and do this there (takes arms out to side widely, expands chest, arches back and tilts head back) and you are doing it slowly but you do it 25 times well, maybe 22 times was enough. And then you start to feel an opening up here (*points to the upper chest*) that you cannot cope with. Do you understand what I am saying? Going slowly is an instruction not because we are just concerned about your joints. I am concerned about your emotional articulation; the way you are going to keep together all this opening. And sometimes what we basically learn, I think, is that when we open up and we come back to ourselves there is a certain amount of novelty that we can happily welcome. Then there is another amount that is just over the border and we get a little bit disturbed, we don't know what to do with it, we get disoriented and disturbed emotionally or neuro-

vegetatively. So doing things slowly and simply and small and comfortable is such an important guideline.

To be able to deal with the processing of some of these emotional aspects I've used for myself a diary and we had a support group of people where we could talk about ourselves. I find expression is very valuable. You have to find a way to take care of yourself. Some people in our training chose to go and see a psychotherapist, a counselor who understands what's going on through Feldenkrais and who works in the same direction we are as in training programs. This is a possibility but surely not a necessity for all of us.

ON REGRESSING OR NOT!

But these therapists who think along the same lines as us are rare! There is one thing I think we should acknowledge. In this work we are not learning to regress as such, to go back to our earlier experiences and relive them again. Some of you have been exposed to, I imagine, Reich's ideas. One simple way of stating these ideas is that "your muscles have a memory about all of your past life". In fact, all your biological system has a memory of what has happened, whatever trauma or growth experience. Sometimes I think of a trauma as in this example: we have a child at home and maybe one night we let him cry for ten minutes too long and when he is 25 years old and he breathes deeply long enough, he'll be going into this regressing thing and think his parents have been doing terrible things to him! Please don't believe that what we feel as a trauma is actually what happened as perceived by the adults. Yet anything we have been through in our lives is a part of our memory. How can it not be? Now it may be a part of our memories and sometimes it's really processed well, or what Gestalt Therapists say, it's a "Completed Gestalt". That means that I had something painful here (points to chest), I was emotionally hurt or I hurt myself knocking my head. I would cry the amount I needed to cry as a healthy human system; and I would re-establish a support contact heal well, be active again, be happy again and that's it. I have a memory of it and could probably re-run it but there is not a need to do it. Yet there are some things that are a little more tricky.

If I have learned to adapt like this (*contracts chest*) in my family because this is how I could contain my emotions and not say something, and I was choking myself not to talk, well after 20 years of doing this I am not even aware I'm doing it. Do you follow me? Of all the different approaches that cope with this I think we have a unique one. I'll tell you how I think it works a little later but now I'll describe how I think other approaches do it.

BIOENERGETICS

In Bioenergetics you have this, and the person does this (*same contractions of the chest and shoulders as above*) and the practitioners have a great way of looking at people and seeing that this is connected to some kind of transference thing you had with your parents or something like this. Lowen was a doctor, he had a great deal of knowledge of what bodies are about in terms of what people are doing with their muscles. So what do the therapists usually do? They create a situation of stress by which you cannot hold this body attitude anymore. This is a traditional bioenergetics strategy. So they'll put something under your back here (*lower back*) put your arms up like this (*extended above your head*) and put you over a bench. By the way Bioenergetics has evolved a lot, it's not that intrusive anymore. But basically that is their model. If there is a tension holding you here (*the chest*) they are going to put you over a bench and you're going to breathe into it heavily over the bench in extreme extension) and you're going to breathe into it heavily until actually you are so fatigued that you cannot hold the tension like that anymore. Do you follow me? Now what happens when you cannot hold it anymore? You will start to remember what it was that you were trying to do originally by holding the bodily pattern. Right? It's really common sense to me. If I hold this here in my chest and I don't know why I am holding it and someone supports me, finding a situation of stress where I cannot hold anymore then I will begin to open up and experience "forgotten" or avoided feelings. Is that clear? I don't want to reduce Bioenergetics to this but I must tell you that this is how I understand that it does work.. It can be done softer, it can be done easier but basically that is the model behind it.

How, for example, would someone doing Rolfing cope with it? There is a way in Rolfing of coping with this, I am just asking a question. I don't know exactly what the theory is about but the same phenomena appear. We are all aware, all of us who work with the person from the somatic point of view of embodiment, that there is an emotional content, memories and images connected with our postures and habits. In massage it's the same thing, or in accupressure or acupuncture. You find a point or an area that is tense, and you stay there and you stay there. What happens? You've stayed there long enough! Once you know how we work it is so easy to send people into regression, catharsis, abreaction, because you just have to find the tension, work the tension, and to overdo it a little bit and then this is what happens: the person accesses consciously, they relive things that they've been avoiding Right?

MOSHE'S ORIGINAL APPROACH

Now what I think Moshe discovered is a very clear new way and a clever way of doing something else! Rather than confront someone with their pattern and suggest that they should leave it, let go and open up, what we do in Feldenkrais is first exaggerate the pattern.

What do we do when we exaggerate the pattern? First we become aware of it. And we convince ourselves that it is an OK thing. That's very important. We don't say to ourselves or another person, "Well you should let go a little bit." We do with the person what they need to do and then if they want to let go they'll let go in their own rhythm. And that is why there is not as much cathartic experiences and abreactions in our method of working. It's because we give people the chance to experience as much relief as they want to give themselves. Right? And then you may go on and maybe you suggest the alternative or the opposite or the complementary or something altogether un-related!. Or you say: keep this one in (*right shoulder contracted in and forward*) and lift the other one (*left shoulder elevates and make a circle*). Wow, I don't know what this one (*elevated, circle pattern*) is. This one's in (*the right shoulder*), this is my pattern. But this one is still in and the other is up. I don't know myself like this! Who am I? I am not this pattern. Who am I? Bring it (*the old pattern*) back (*left shoulder lowers, contacts forward*). Now you bring this one up (*right shoulder goes up*) and this one in the front the front (*left shoulder goes even further forward in contraction*). Oh my God! This is not my usual pattern. I'm not just trying to protect my feelings. It's a whole new world of possibilities. And then you get to the point where you can do this and this and this (*several different shoulder configurations*) as an option but it's not the one we are going to drill into the person because they need to be up and open. It's just some of the many options and up and open is just one of them. It is as important to be able to bring one (*shoulder*) forward and one back, or both forward, or both back, or both up. I don't care which. Furthermore, what is even more important is your possibility for action is space when you are not stuck in one holding pattern and this is our functional perspective!

In that process what happens is that you are creating new options for the person and you are not just confronting them with the one they have built for themselves for their protection. If we do this, as we usually do, softly, nicely and comfortably it's actually a liberation process. We don't have the belief that to free yourself of a pattern you have to go back to why you (originally) did it and to clear it up with your parents, or whoever you did it with, and then you will be allright. This view is a very profound belief in psychology: that until you go there (to the first cause) and you do it and you re-arrange it in a new way you are not free. It can work if you avoid creating regression grooves in the system! Yes. Many approaches work like this but ours works also, yet differently. That's the minimum acknowledgement I want for this work. I don't want to say that psychotherapy in general does not work. I have done enough and have been through enough to know that it can work. But what we have in Feldenkrais is definitely an alternative way. I profoundly believe that what we have is just one of the options but a great one for some people. It's one option to realize that if I have a pattern like this I can begin to do this and that and soften up here, bring the head up in the pattern, bring the head down in the pattern, etc. There is an innumerable number of options where we could go.

I now really re-interpret a lot of what I have read, done and learned over the years about our unconscious as it concerns our somatic self. If you re-organize movement patterns, thus giving people a little more options in one posture or another, I think we can go a long way into a real opening up of our world. And we don't have to necessarily regress back to where we stopped our development and understand why! Our work is an invitation to keep on developing. It's not just a confrontation of why we stopped. Our preferred approach in Feldenkrais is not about understanding why we stopped, where we stopped in our development or who did it to us. Actually more and more I don't care about these things, even for myself. I don't care because I think I am old enough to have realized that at a certain point it is strategically a question of learning how I approach it and how I am going to learn something else. Where do I get it? Parents did whatever they could. They could have done better I feel I could have done better too. It's more a question of our responsibility. You take your life into your hands and try to do for yourself what you can, here and now. Once we understand human development in the learning-maturing mode, we can also understand why other things work.

If you do good Gestalt Therapy it's also very close to our process or if you practice a Milton Erikson process. If it is suggested softly as an alternative you give the person the chance to adopt it. I also profoundly believe that psycho-analysis should give people a different gait, as Frank likes to call it. It should change the way you walk. If not it may be nice, a lot of understanding, a lot of connection in your life and a lot of history. I know that some of my colleagues, who have been through years of psycho-analysis, have also changed their gait. But I also know many people who have interpreted a lot of their childhood and yet have very little change in their behaviour!

There are theories now that some people are visual, some auditory, etc. I believe that some people are more emotionally oriented, some more verbally oriented, some more abstractly, intellectually orientated. It's all an open ball field. I don't believe there is a necessity to do anything specific with anyone. If there is something you need to do specifically it should not have something to do with the theory, unless it's a theory broad enough that tells you that you need to deal with the person as a whole. I have worked with some people who have come in for an F.I. lesson and they have just lost someone they love. I tried to give them a lesson but obviously that is not what they needed. A good lesson is one where you give the person support in finding for themselves what they need, not what you have decided they need. Take someone who needs crying for instance. Make it the best you can for them. Make it a successful cry and you have a great lesson.

ON RESISTANCE

Sometimes people come for a lesson and they don't want to get on the table. You can say: "Oh! They are resisting the table." What we have learned in NLP and through Milton Erikson is that resistance is the result of the therapists actions. If you get resistance it is YOU who are getting the resistance, so find another way. There are so many things being done in psychotherapy based on the notion that the client is resisting. Clients are surely right to resist. We all have a right to resist and we should resist when we feel challenged in something important to us. Otherwise it's surrendering your power. And that's crazy, dangerous living. Not useful.

So whatever a lesson will be is really a very open field. But with Feldenkrais we do it very concretely. We try to learn how we do. How human beings function is a very simple concrete thing. Which does not mean that sometimes the best thing you can do is just to be with someone and to talk about what they are going through. That also can be a process. I like the Feldenkrais way because it does not limit me to the table. I love the table work, and the hands on method. ATM is also fantastic. But the way of thinking is not bound to that. You should see some of Moshe's videos. You would wonder, is he doing Rolfing here, or is he doing some kind of transferential stuff at the level of psychotherapy. All kinds of things. Sometimes he is dancing with people.

I believe that if the way of thinking is clear, the Feldenkrais Method can take many forms. And the way of thinking here is: this person has a certain number of options in their life, how can they get a little bit more without confronting them with why they don't have it yet! Can you imagine how much stuff we have to deal with if we try to deal with why we don't have the options we have right now? You could spend your life doing this. I think that what Moshe has pointed at is the importance of learning in action.now If we produce results we don't like, then let's just learn others ways of acting!

Thank you very much. I hope that stirs up at least some more questions. It's an open ended theme.