

In Touch Newsletter, 2nd quarter 2004
Feldenkrais Guild of North America

By Yvan Joly, Practitioner-Trainer

Q. Where did your experiences with Moshe begin.

A. You have to know I'm from the Amherst generation (graduation 1983). Though Moshe was our trainer for the first two years, I cannot say that my experience with Moshe was very personal. Some other colleagues of the Amherst group have had more direct rapport with Moshe as a person, either because they worked for him or around him in a variety of functions or because they met with him more intimately. I myself was rather shy about contacting the Master and did not compose well with the competition for Moshe's attention. I was part of that crowd of 220 people covering the floor of three basketball courts. Paradoxically, Moshe's persona was omnipresent in the room when he was teaching. There was one microphone and guess who had it? Thus, day after day, I was eminently exposed to him in direct channel, sometimes more than I would have wished for. Yet from the person to person point of view, my rapport with Moshe was pretty distant. During class, I was most of the time in a real quiet area of the room where Moshe did not stroll to. I called this area "the shady rest." This choice served the purpose of not being disturbed by Moshe. I was intimidated by Moshe. I was impressed by his dimensions. I guess I was also too easily vulnerable and insecure to have him monitor me personally, point me out in the group, yell and scream out of impatience and irritation, and make fun of all us "idiots."

I loved the fact that the Amherst training was a village. One could go unnoticed, and yet learn a lot and even eventually become a trainer. I think that smaller trainings-and these days some of them are really small- pose a completely different learning dynamic and interpersonal challenge.

Over the two years of training under Moshe, I talked to him three times. I actually had little to say that I thought he would think relevant. I did ask a few questions in class. So except for these precise days and dates, don't look for me on the Amherst videos. It's still paradoxical to me that the last 30 years of my life, have been unequivocally and centrally influenced by Moshe in that remote way.

When in the Amherst training, Moshe was in the last stretch of his teaching life, actually of his living life. As I have listened in the last three years to all of the Amherst videos of training, I can recognize that he was often in an agitated mood. So much so that I sometimes reluctantly choose to not bring him on video in the training class. On other days Moshe was very gentle and easy going. He was also funny a lot of the time. And most of all he could be very tender particularly when giving Functional Integration® lessons where he had such a quality of love and affection. He himself expressed how tired he was, noting that he was working too much. Somewhere, somehow, he probably knew that this would be his last training program. So he was probably going for it all the way, four hours of teaching to this large audience, then FI lessons after class with a variety of persons with complex requests. For a long time I thought that it was somewhat paradoxical that such a work of grace and harmony had to be conveyed through so many mood swings and such work intensity. I probably was having my ideal guru projection being shaken by Moshe. Over the years, even if I wish I had met Moshe in a more quiet and restful environment, I have learned to appreciate this intensity, reversibility, and variety of emotions. A multi-faceted persona is closer to my current ideal. But it did take me years to come to that understanding that movements of the limbs and movements of the mood and movements of the emotions can be expanded in all directions and that our own neutral is not a "place" to stand but an expandable range of possibilities.

Most of all it seems obvious to me now, that I was learning a process, a method and not a person. For years many of us had to differentiate our learning the "Method" from our exposure to Moshe. The Feldenkrais Method was the method of a man. In fact, one could contend, as he did frequently, that he was the only one doing "Feldenkrais." Twenty years after his death, 100 years after his birth, Moshe's name is still tied to the Method. For years the trainers have been telling Moshe stories. At this time Moshe has probably been quoted for having said everything and its contrary. In fact, like the I Ching book of changes, this is what Moshe was modeling: possibilities, arguing, as well pros and cons. Embodying rage, threat and tenderness and care.

Having let go of a rigid image of a teacher, I feel grateful to have been "trained" albeit partially, by Moshe. Yet sometimes, I feel I also need to let go of Moshe himself as the source. For years, and still today, Moshe's phantom has been my super ego reference to find out if I am doing Feldenkrais or not. I wonder if the colleagues having graduated from the current trainings do that with their trainers; with me too. Well, maybe it's part of the process, until we let go of it all to make

it our own authority.

Q. Where were you in your career when you started at Amherst.

A. Before I came to Amherst I was working as a psychologist in applied social research, organizational development and personnel training. I had been exposed to the work of Moshe through workshops with Josef Della Grotte, Ruthy Alon and Carl Ginsburg. I came to it for myself on a 70's kind of wind, where many of us were looking for different ways of being in the world and a different approach to existence, trying to resolve some of my neurotic patterns and looking for a better quality of life. In that moment in time, late sixties, early seventies, there were so many approaches being made available: Gestalt therapy, Bioenergetics, acupuncture, many forms of body and psyche therapy, all kinds of workshops of group dynamics, meditation groups, music and dance groups and so on and so forth. I encountered the Feldenkrais work pretty early in my quest. I was coming out of a painful divorce that was hard to integrate. I was about 27 or 28 when I started to look for some other ways to be.

At the time, the Feldenkrais Method was often presented in the midst of the Humanistic Potential Movement. This is how Moshe came to America in fact, at the Esalen Institute, mecca of that Humanistic Potential, then with the AHP (Association for Humanistic Psychology). After having experienced so many methods, including many methods of somatic education, I came to realize that for me, this Feldenkrais Method was really the most logical, the most common sense, the one that had the most in common with all my senses! Mind you I had a degree in psychology and in psychology and in the early days of cognitive science I was always interested in how people manifest their intelligence and creativity and how behavior is generated. It was obvious that Moshe had profound insight into behavior. So it was almost common sense to me to appreciate his work and after a few years of workshops, I did not have to decide to register for the training in Amherst. It was a "non elusive obvious" fact coming my way.

Mind you also for me at the beginning, all this diving into my sensorial intuitive self was not such a pleasurable experience. At the time, I had spent most of my career in college and university in researching the first stepping stones of what eventually became cognitive science. Most of it was pretty high headed. In lying down and scanning myself and doing Feldenkrais lessons, I was not foremostly seduced by what I felt. I was actually seduced by the elegance and the relevance of the ideas. That was how I came to Amherst to meet and train with Moshe.

Meeting Moshe as the founder of the Feldenkrais Method was a great event of my life in that this encounter influenced the rest of my life irreversibly. As I said earlier, my rapport to Moshe from person to person was practically nonexistent but the rapport to the Method has been life transforming. Until the end of the training actually, this disproportion has been prevalent. Here's the story of my last encounter with Moshe.

In the Amherst training group, half of the group stayed in Amherst and half went to Tel- Aviv, in hope that Moshe would teach a bit, also as a pilgrimage to Nachmani Street, Alexander Yanai Street, etc. I enthusiastically went to Tel-Aviv. Moshe never showed up in person at the training. He was already too sick. At the last week of that fourth year, I did visit Moshe in his home. And it was both moving and somewhat awkward. That would be my person to person closure with Moshe. Baruch, his brother and faithful caretaker, let me in the small apartment. Moshe was in his room, in his white sheets bed, partly sleeping, partly moving, doing some kind of ATM as if in his sleep. I sat beside his bed, not knowing what to do or say. I talked with him a little bit, introducing myself, he turned in my direction, but he was really incommunicado at that moment. I meditated in his presence for a while, thanked him and left not knowing if he was acknowledging even my own presence. It was a kind of a closure, closing the impersonal and personal relationship I had with him. Which left me with some sadness yet some satisfaction too of having faced the true nature of my being at the time vis-à-vis Moshe. It was finally, in a certain way, a very personal ultimate contact. My process in the Feldenkrais Method as such is not unlike what many people go through these days. Those who currently take training programs do not have a personal contact with Moshe himself. (Most colleagues do seem to have though, a close personal contact with some training staff members). Yet everyone seems to create some kind of contact with a virtual image of Moshe. Do we need to "personalize" our rapport to Moshe in the training process? Surely we will if we continue giving our work the name of the founder.

It's a paradox in a certain way that says something about the fact that the Method stands beyond its founder, but not completely. Because of who he was, because of his history, his personality, his culture, Moshe could invent the Feldenkrais Method. On the other hand, I always believed that for us to teach "his work," we have to imitate neither his history nor his personality. The Method is a certain way of approaching life and learning awareness and making it our own personal process.

I am amazed daily at how clever and ahead of our time Moshe's discoveries were. In a certain way, once it's going to be presented

by any one of us who is not Moshe, the Method is beyond Moshe
himself. www

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