

WORDING

the non-verbal process of ATM

or **WHY**

don't I just shut up!

by YVAN JOLY

This article got its momentum during an ATM workshop I was giving a few months ago. For five days, five hours a day, I talked, almost non-stop. I could hardly believe it myself. The flow of words was just incessant. From movement instructions to casual jokes; from philosophical-existential comments to personal life-stories; from pedagogical suggestions to responses to students - almost anything that came to my "mind" (whatever this can mean anymore) seemed relevant in its own sense and time - a whole web of interconnected themes, words, ideas, movements, memories and creations; a knitting of movements, words and pauses; in short, a good ATM lesson. Obviously, two years with Moshe in Amherst, Mass. did leave their traces. He had his own reasons and style of speaking. But what am I now doing when I talk? This question came to be even more relevant in the last hours of my workshop. Taking a few minutes to share comments, gather appreciations, and evaluate the experience, I realized my flow of speech had not gone unnoticed. Most of the people commented rather positively on this fact, saying how that style made it easier for them to learn in different ways, except for a very intense masseur who, from the beginning, had announced his goal as coming to a "movement" workshop, to move. His final comment, which, I had noticed, had been cooking for a few days, was that he "had the impression of having lost his week listening to bar jokes" (I must admit I did make a few like that!). The emotional charge behind his comment was obviously high and it did awaken quite a reaction in me. Obviously, I did not want the workshop to end on this note, and at the same time, I realized I needed clarification for my own self-understanding. So I started quite affirmatively, on the spur of the moment, to enumerate, in a very direct style of language, the first eight very professional reasons why I was speaking during ATM lessons. The week after this event, in a weekly class a long-time student asked me if it would be possible for me to "just" give a lesson and to "shut up". In a rather provocative way, I wove into the next ATM sequence of that day an hour-long speech on "reasons why to speak in giving ATM". Mind you, I could also have shut up, and I did experiment with more silence a few weeks after.

We could say a Feldenkrais teacher does what he or she wants, including speaking up or shutting up. And the case could be closed. But frankly, the questions raised by my students have now stayed with me for a few months and I wonder: how much of the talking is my own body-mind agitation and how much is very deeply embedded in the teaching style and contributes to the power of our method? Couldn't I just shut up? So I have begun this reason-finding process, and I decided I could share it with you here. You are welcome to add to the list of reasons, in our next edition of this journal!

Reason 1: direction of movement

Talking in teaching ATM first serves the basic purpose of creating movement problems; bringing attention to movement; triggering, observation of sensations; and simply indicating what to do. The words replace the FI hands giving the movement directions: "sitting on a chair, holding your chin with your left hand, from behind your head, bring your left armpit to the left knee, and lift your right arm to the ceiling... and say hi!" See what I mean? How could we do without words? Using words, we need to be precise about our intentions. One of the pupil's tasks is to translate our words into action. Our input needs to create problems to be resolved and by noticing what actions our words produce, we need to modify our own words to carry out our intentions. Thus a dialogue is established. Some pupils get stuck in the search for the right answer. But in fact, we need pupils to make whatever movement errors our language produces. It is our feedback. In that game of verbal/non-verbal dialogue, both poles in the communication are learning. Sometimes, our words create confusion and we must refine our speaking skill. Other times, it is the movement restrictions of the pupils that make the words confusing. Teaching ATM has thus a lot to do with words. The possibilities of variation in wording ATM are basic in giving movement instructions. They allow us to reach different persons in different "languages". It keeps everyone awake.

Reason 2: conveying the quality of movement, the quality of learning

In FI lessons, it is the quality of our touch and the quality of our "presence" that maximize the learning process. The way we organize ourselves, our own sensorial pacing, is the learning material for the nervous system. As teachers, we thus take charge of the learning process. It is not so much what we propose but the way we propose it. In ATM the students need to develop their own ability to take charge of the quality, on the basis of sensitivity, doing their own pacing, pausing, observing, breathing etc. It is the special merit of ATM that it creates situations for such learning to emerge. Our words, our voice then become centrally involved in this process. The content of what we say is important: the pleas "not to force", the repeated instructions to go slowly, to not look for the end result, to rest when necessary, all those are direct pedagogical interventions. But also, and sometimes even more so, the rhythm of... our... voice,... of... our... own... breathing, the tonality, the choice of words, the accents we use are the teaching means, and the way to communicate the quality we are looking for. In this perspective, telling stories (whether the content has a direct relevancy or not), addressing ourselves to a specific student, making jokes, taking time for something supposedly unrelated to the

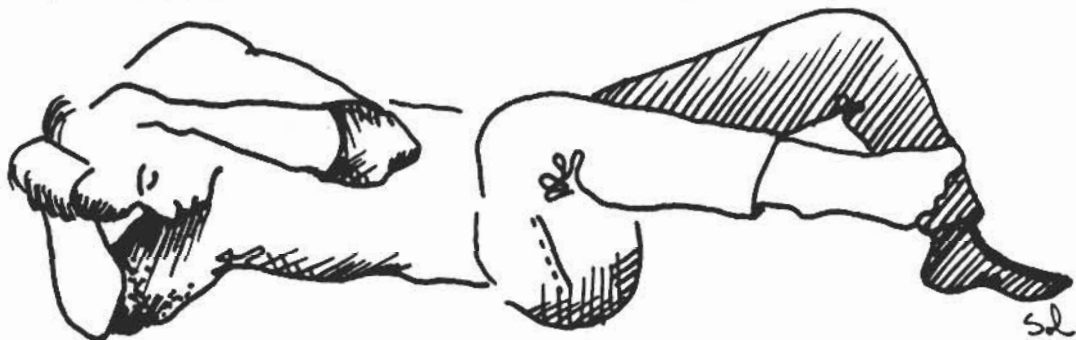
Lesson, all this can be part of our teaching schemes. Even talking foreign languages can be useful. As I was learning Italian, I started teaching in Italian to French-speaking students. One student who understood no Italian admitted he was, to his and my surprise, having more ease and more success when the instructions were given in Italian. Even though we have seen and heard a lot with Moshe, as he used words in so many ways, we certainly have not seen it all!

Reason 3: the teacher likes it

Quite outspokenly Moshe said he talked because he liked it... and he had a hard time not doing it! Talking does play a role in keeping the teacher well and happy. Indeed, for myself and some of us, talking is something we like. It keeps us focused, calmer, and in contact. Like chewing gum, talking keeps your tongue and jaw going, thus modulating your whole sensorial experience. I also like being heard and listened to. In fact, ATM classes are the ultimate audience since one is standing or sitting and the others are lying on the ground, listening and seldom interrupting. As I am teaching, I also realize I am often talking to myself aloud, talking about what I need to learn. Overall, talking serves a purpose for the teacher: it may be an important teacher self-maintenance mean.

Reason 4: keeping in touch, insuring presence

Talking does more than communicate thoughts. It expresses relationship. Without regard to content, the simple presence of an ongoing voice may be for some pupils, a reassuring "Ariadne's thread" in their voyage into the labyrinth. The voice itself creates the link with the outside that may make it easier to go inside. A few years ago, as I was in the studio recording French translations of Ruthy Alon's tapes, I was having a difficult time measuring the pauses between instructions. I remember I had the feeling that by leaving blank spaces, I was creating a potential vacuum by interrupting the linking flow of words. I now realize some of this was a by-product of my own anxiety in this novel activity. But another part of this was the awareness that the voice is the link. On the other hand, a continuous flow of words may not leave the space for experiencing certain insights about one's self, one's life story, or about existential facts like solitude, death, separation, etc. In using words or not using them, we must know what we do and want to do.



Reason 5: the transferential voice

I know the inner events, the so called "psychological aspects" of our learning process do not receive much direct attention in the Feldenkrais approach, at least in the Moshe Feldenkrais approach. A certain way of talking helps to keep psychological content out of awareness. And over the years, I have learned a lot by postponing involvement in psychological content of the movement in favor of new possibilities of experienced. Some habits may have been adopted under difficult if not traumatic circumstances. As we experience novelty, our nervous system compares, remembers, selects, differentiates, and relates it to the past. All of this processing is, in our approach, left for the unconscious to deal with. And now, even from a psychologist's viewpoint I believe this is one, if not "the" choice to make. Our use of language here plays a major role.

Whether we want it or not, while the students are on the floor through our sheer presence as teachers, we provoke certain inner processes. What we say, and the way we say it, given the state of consciousness our pupils are in, is received by the person in relation to their past experiences. People hear different things, not only in terms of literal directions but also in terms of meaning. A whole person interprets our words, our voices and our selves. This process needs some form of acknowledgment from us. It is part of the full experience of ATM. Our students use us in processing their experiences; always on the verge of re-experiencing the past as they learn new ways, and come closer to finding new solutions. In this sense, we are playing a role as transferential screens. We should have our act together. Our ways of using ourselves can facilitate our students' processing and make it more efficient.

My perspective is to work so that movement instructions progressively are interpreted by pupils in a more and more simple and direct fashion. So that when I say "move your head to the right", I want to make it clear that I mean nothing more or less than that. Do I have to actually say, "this is not your mother, father or ex-lover asking you to correct yourself" or is there some way I can use my voice, my language, my actions to indicate that the Feldenkrais approach is to learn to be more matter-of-fact, and to be more present to the here and now experience? Beyond what my pupils need, I myself hope to be accepted for what I am at the moment, without the "other stuff" getting in the way!

To sum it up, I would say that by in our ATM teaching including talking we present to our students materials to transit from the past to the present. I remember in the first FI lesson I had, how clearly I was in touch with feelings and memories of being nurtured by my mother. For the practitioner giving me the lesson, hearing my experience was a first. My after thought was: was I just trying to integrate the lesson in the context of what I had learned to be valuable in some forms of psychotherapy or wouldn't we have something to gain in including in our awareness, a broader sense of what we do, and do trigger? We can do what we want, as long as we know what we do.

Reason 6: giving content to chew on, aiming at issues

During the seemingly casual movement process of ATM, a whole brain whole person activity is going on. Through ATM we are creating a situation where everyone is going to play in the backyard, attic or basement of their unconscious, as well as in the livingroom, kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and whole house of their dreams. No wonder we need to repeat, "do it slowly", slowly enough for all this processing to go on. Once again, our method is not concerned with an explicit process of emergence, emotional release, symbolization, analysis and sharing of these very real experiences. It seems we favour an uninvolved, meditational, "witnessing" attitude. Our talking, what we say and the way we say it, can support this process. As I observe my teaching I realize I do make reference to children and parents, to going to school, to feeling limitations, to being toilet-trained, to having brothers and sisters, being spanked and loved, to having friends, making love, being in love, going to work, changing jobs, dying and being born, etc. As I myself am more comfortable with more of these "simple" life facts and events, I like to evoke them, and weave them into the movement process for the nervous systems and brains to chew on. Perhaps like a catalyst I raise issues for the unconscious or even the conscious of the person to consider in the context of the quality of movement and life ATM creates. Raising such life subjects also is a first step in applying the Feldenkrais principles to different domains of life... which brings me to another reason.

Reason 7: towards a transfer of learning

Moving on the floor in ATM is great. It is a learning situation par excellence. As Moshe once said in Amherst, there are many people in the world who teach what he teaches. (I wish I had had the nerve at the time to ask him who he was thinking about). But, to his knowledge, he said, he was the only one to have concretized the learning process. As concrete as ATM lessons are, they are nevertheless the manifestation of a profound philosophy and way of thinking that can be applied to all realms of life. Doing ATM is the essential ingredient. But by stating the principles, by giving examples of ways and domains of application, we facilitate the transfer of learning, i.e., its application to a wide range of activity. We make openings, sow for further reaping, create gaps to be bridged. For example, making a parallel between love relationships and ATM is quite a way to sow. And believe me, it is also quite a way to keep an audience's attention. Often students have come to me to say how much something I said inspired them in dealing with various issues in their life. The philosophy implicit in ATM would remain abstract in our lives if we were not living it in the floor work. But the power of words and ideas connected to the doing seems like a plus.

Reason 8: keep the verbal mind busy (the teacher's and the student's!)

Do you remember your first ATM lessons as a student? Did your attention go here and there? Were you subvocalizing? Did you busy yourself with judging, commenting, comprehending, etc? When we, as teachers, talk, we can take charge of some of this hyperactive verbal-thinking mind, doing the verbalizing for our students. This is another form of support we can give to what the system is

doing. We convey the message that "since someone is doing it, you don't have to do it yourself now". Learning can thus happen more where it needs to happen, that is, in the actual experience of doing, rather than in the verbal thinking about it. Keeping ourselves busy by talking, we can also take advantage of thus freeing other parts of ourselves.

Reason 9: stimulate more of the whole brain

As cited in an issue of the Brain Mind Bulletin, (May 9th 1983) our brain is more efficient, it seems, when it is challenged with complexity. Obviously, we have evolved to handle complexity, whether it is digesting while walking, talking while driving, sitting while reading, etc. By giving input to different parts of the brain, by pointing to the sensory-motor information as well as getting the language thinking going, we create better conditions for the brain to learn more effectively. By talking while teaching ATM (or FI in that perspective) we can virtually by-pass the less efficient linear processing strategy of some brains. Talk, interesting talk, sometimes complicated, or even boring talk, funny, dramatic talk, intellectual talk, knowledge talk—all talking while moving and pointing to movement, seems like a good strategy to maximise learning quality and speed. A multi-faceted discourse is a better stimulation for whole brain learning. It is thus appropriate to develop our talking abilities, for the sake of our "teaching" and of our own learning.

Which brings us back to the movement sequence, started a few paragraphs ago. This time, as you are, sitting, put your left index finger in your right ear, passing your arm from behind the head. Please do not put the index finger in too deep!!! Now, keep on reading this text, in this position. Notice if the quality of your reading, the ease of "understanding", the breathing are in any way changed by this stupid contortion. And think about what is the purpose of it all anyway?

Reason 10: ATM as a simulation of "real life"

One of the basic skills in life is choosing. Should I stay home and rest, watch TV, or go to the movies? Should we go on with this relationship or end it here? In a context where, for some of us, over-stimulation seems like the name of the game, learning to live with ease and grace is a real challenge. A dense, over-stimulating ATM class, can then become a useful learning context. Listening to oneself in movement while someone is giving information, making jokes, even becoming confused—all of this seems like a minimum level of complexity for transferring learning from the floor to sitting, standing, walking and leading one's life in all its rich and complex demands for choices. Listening or not listening seems like a basic skill for students to develop. Letting go of some information, or listening while moving with comfort as a parallel objective, seems like another skill. Such skills can be better developed if the ATM we create includes more rather than less content.

Reason 11: talking, to do what we do

Moshe once said that lying on the floor with awareness would be enough for learning. But nobody or very few people would do it. It is too boring, too

difficult. So we suggest movement, we convey a philosophy, we apply the principle of no principles, we suggest a way to go about it. Our words intervene in the process. It is what we say, but maybe more how we say it, that counts. Our words have voices. They have accents, intonations, rhythm, pitch, loudness, angles and roundness. Have you heard of some teachers who give lessons for the whole self, only with music, singing, voice sounds? These lessons can be thought of as ATM or FI. They say nothing content-wise, and everything goes process-wise. All is in the how. How much of our talking in teaching ATM and FI is necessary? Sometimes a lot, other times none. The verbal dimension of our nonverbal process is part of what we can do, to do what we do,... whatever it is we think we do... or say we do!

