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Challenges

I was asked by the editors of *feldenkrais zeit* to write an article on how I view the training of practitioners. I am happy to do this but I want to make a few preliminary statements. One thing I enjoy doing is watching videos of Moshe either giving FI lessons or teaching in Amherst. It is very clear to me that none of his acolytes have the depth or breadth to teach in the comprehensive manner he did. I find a great deal of what he conveyed in Amherst or San Francisco is not included in today's training programs, mine included. I simply am unable to stretch myself into the totality of his message. My trainer colleagues and I, in my estimation, are like the story of the Blind Men and the Elephant. Each of us has our own unique interpretation and limited perception of Moshe's work. Each of us sees the monk pointing to the moon but none of us can see the moon. Moshe was the moon, he was Feldenkrais.

It is my opinion that what my colleagues and I do in our basic training programs is provide our students with a basic introduction to the Feldenkrais Method. We provide the educational context from which our students develop the means to begin studying the Feldenkrais Method. I consider a Feldenkrais Training as I consider gaining a blackbelt in aikido. A person who attains blackbelt has developed the necessary skills and is proficient in the basic forms of the art from which to develop their practice through the following years of their training. Aikido is considered to be a practice. I would like the Feldenkrais Method to be considered as a practice by its students as well. With that in mind, I believe my trainer colleagues, in their own way, provide a very good roadmap for the beginning seeker and traveler exploring the Feldenkrais world of learning and function. All trainers are unique and we can appreciate and applaud each other's creativity and individuality, in helping our students to develop a basis from which to practice and move far beyond their initial training exposure.

With this I am happy to share my personal view of training practitioners.

Every boat builder knows how important it is to lay a straight and true keel if a boat is to perform well.

Over the years working with people in advanced training programs, I have found that few practitioners have laid their own keel or have a true foundation that they can build their Functional Integration lessons from. It is often, not always, the case that practitioners learn a first approximation of Functional Integration based on explicit bits of FI practice or “constellations of movement” they learned in their training that come from doing an ATM lesson and adopting some aspect of the lesson into hands on work. For a musician, this is tantamount to learning to play the notes but not play a whole piece of music. For the artist, it is like learning brush strokes, the application of paint to a canvas, but it is not painting.

Something far more complete has to be developed for a practitioner to practice and be present for the emergence of a Functional Integration lesson. To me, it is not Functional Integration until both people come together in the moment and both learn something new. It is a lesson when it creates something that has never existed before for each person. It cannot be limited to the application of a few learned techniques to make a person feel better. Good Functional Integration leads to both the client and the practitioner functioning at a new higher standard than when the lesson began.

In the *Elusive Obvious*, Moshe states, “I have formed in my imagination an ideal human brain and function.”¹ He then writes for two pages on the subject of ideal human functioning and ends with this quote, “Without my ideal image I am at a loss to know what to look for; each function grades itself when compared with an idealized function, and although this is not a measure (as from a scientific instrument) it is still a mental auxiliary of the greatest value to me. It has guided

¹ *Elusive Obvious*, page 100, paragraph 2

my inquiry in neurology, physiology, evolution theory, and so forth, enabling me to find the pertinent facts which are dispersed in an ocean of knowledge and intelligence which in itself has no ports, only vistas.”² It is clear that Moshe had evolved his keel from which to work.

As I was a student in the Amherst training, I had the opportunity to experience first hand how Moshe laid and expressed his keel in the training process. He continually laid the foundation for what might be called, “biological fitness”. I believe one of his main tenets in the training program is little understood or practiced. To Moshe, a person is biologically fit if they can move from one orientation to another without hesitation or preparation. Over the years, I have seen that many training programs do not place the importance on this quality of human action that Moshe did. As mentioned in the preface each of us trainer’s presents a different interpretation of what the Feldenkrais Method is and what is important to us. For me this tenet of Moshe’s, living with a potent posture in biological fitness has always been the prime directive for me in my private practice in teaching ATM and FI and how I present my training material. Every FI I personally give is based on my ability to observe whether a person has the means to move to another position without hesitation. It means I have a profound sense of the ideal of what is possible for each person in relation to meeting the hypothetical ideal of biological fitness. Metaphorically speaking, this ability to move without hesitation to another orientation is also related to a person’s awareness and maturity. To me, a person matures into “Functional Integration” when they can move freely in all of the aspects of experience; thinking, sensing, feeling and acting. ATM and FI lessons are foundational to helping a person develop the necessary awareness for developing choice. Through this attention it becomes possible for some students to develop the maturity necessary to know how they form and maintain habits. With attention and time they learn how to suspend parasitic habits, leave the past behind, and develop new more efficient and appropriate behaviors that help them find the richness choice brings to life.

² Elusive Obvious, page 101, paragraph 3

To me, this is the ultimate ideal. In order to create the conditions for learning, I have to also know the ideals of physiological functioning, optimal skeletal organization, how to utilize ground forces to help people experience “levitation” as Moshe mentions, how to work with people’s ability to experience their emotions, how to support growth, and how to meet each individual, in each moment where they are and to be present to the emergent moment appearing--- helping people have the means to move and thrive in times of uncertainty and change. Moshe’s statement, “life without movement is unthinkable”, becomes a truth.

As a trainer then, I have to help my students in my training programs and advanced trainings grow in their abilities to expand their own sights and find their own keel to work from. There is so much to help them develop before they can truly paint on their own. Over the years I have developed post graduation workshops designed to drill more deeply than possible into aspects of human functioning than possible to uncover in the first approximation of a basic training program. I attempt to create the conditions for learning so my students deepen their own abilities in a way that becomes directly applicable in their lessons. I work with my students to engage in the Feldenkrais Method as a personal practice as they would continue to develop their skills if they were a student of Tai Chi, aikido or meditation. My students learn to look at underlying movement patterns that arise in childhood that underlie all human functional action. They learn to see how different ways of rolling side to side relate to how a person walks, turns and runs. They learn how to find the powerful relationship between stability and movement. They become adepts of the basic human functions of sitting, standing, and walking. My training is principle based. Students learn about balance and counter balance, finding equal and opposite support, use of ground force, developing refined skeletal support, maintenance of equal, proportional muscle tone in action, etc. I attempt to teach so that any of my students have the internal resources to meet the unknown, be present to each moment, and yet meet the needs and help the people who come to their offices.

For me, I make every attempt to remove mystery from the FI process. I hope to awaken my students to the internal mysteries that are implicit in ATM lessons, so their command of the material is strengthened and is not only a resource for their own growth but also becomes available to their own students. For example, recently I taught a workshop called “Crafting Functional Integration Lessons with Confidence”. In the workshop I offered several opportunities for practitioners to expand their horizons as to what Functional Integration might mean. On the first day of the workshop I showed and discussed a FI lesson I have published on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiukopzvzKQ>. The lesson was given to a ballet dancer named Dorothy who had had a Lisfranc fracture of her right foot. For that day I spent the entire 6 hours of class breaking down and elucidating the inner details of the lesson. It was a very thorough discussion of what went into the creation of the lesson. Every effort was made to remove any mystery from how the lesson developed. Each point made pointed to skills that could be acquired by a practitioner. Nothing was hidden from view. This class description of Dorothy’s lessons will soon be put up on Vimeo and made available.

Additionally, in the workshop, I gave two lessons to people from the public that demonstrated thinking that expanded the student’s view of what FI could be. One lesson was to a woman experiencing a painful condition with her back that required her to find more and more constrained and reversible ways of moving to insure her own stability. She had to learn to move from position to position while maintaining complete reversibility so she did not fall. Any fall lead to painful self-protection. As she learned to maintain her balance she found she could skillfully change positions without engaging a pain reaction. The process of the lesson was surprising to many class participants in that it went against the grain of their thinking. The point of the lesson was not to make movement easier by helping her gain a greater range of motion, but rather the point of the lesson was to increase her stability, move less, but with much greater reversible skill.

In the other lesson, a man who had had recent double hip replacement surgery was given the opportunity to discover how he could direct force from the ground up through himself rather than fall into his hip joints as he did prior to the lesson. In the lesson he was discovered lightness in movement after years of pain and difficulty. The advanced training then went on to clarify how I helped the man find the drive up and through him self in a way where they could reproduce the principle based thinking with their clients.

With this introduction, while only a verbal representation, I hope to paint a brief perspective on how I see training practitioners. For me, it my responsibility to help each student I work with, mature in their personal development, develop their own ideal organization, and help them gain the resources and wide range of options they need for working with their clients. The underlying task I give myself is to my students develop their own straight keel and framework from which they build their own boat as a resource to float their own practice.