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Practice, or practicing, can have widely varying meanings depending on the type of activity being learned and its cultural context. In what follows I will use the lens of the Japanese martial arts to reflect on what it means to practice within the context of the *Feldenkrais Method*.

In the Japanese language martial arts are referred to as Budo. *Bu* meaning martial, and *Do* meaning a path, or way of life. The ending *Do* is found in many pursuits that involve development of the whole person over time: The martial arts of Judo and Aikido, *Kado* (the way of flowers or flower arranging), *Sado* (the way of tea), and *Shodo* (the way of calligraphy). All of these practices contain the idea that to master the art, you must also cultivate yourself physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Moshe Feldenkrais would have been exposed to this way of thinking through his practice of judo, and especially his study with Gunji Koizumi 8th Dan, in the United Kingdom. Feldenkrais expected his teachers to engage in a personally transformative process as a central part of becoming a teacher. This has not been the usual Western path toward developing expertise, but the idea of *Do*—studying and embodying an art, as a path or way of life---would describe well how many Feldenkrais practitioners view their ongoing development as teachers.

In many cultures, especially Western ones, practice has often been thought of in terms of quantity of practice, aimed at the specific mastery of a skill. There is plenty of Western literature about life lessons learned through sports, hard practice, losing and winning etc. But this is not the same as having the notion of cultivating and developing your whole self through practice, right from the start. The Japanese idea of *Do* can sometimes be expressed in English when practice is used as a noun, as in “my Buddhist practice” or “mindfulness practices.” I believe that the study and embodiment of an art, as a path or lifelong process, speaks directly to the heart of the Feldenkrais Method. In the context of Japanese martial arts this process is sometimes also expressed as the idea that what you must confront is not the enemy outside, but ultimately the one within yourself.

Today it would be difficult to draw a line and say the West practices like this, or in the East they do this. Ideas from many cultures mix and morph daily, and it's harder to make clear distinctions. Looking back at traditional practices can often be clarifying, especially when they persevere. Going deeper into the idea of *Do*, we can encounter a three-stage process referred to in traditional Japanese culture as *Shu Ha Ri*. Within these stages distinctions are made about how practice and study change as you mature. I have encountered these distinctions mainly in the context of my aikido training especially with my main Sensei K Chiba, 8th Dan, under whom I studied for more than 30 years. I find it can be a valuable lens for looking at development in the *Feldenkrais Method*.

Shu is the first stage, and in martial arts it's the stage of engagement with the "kata," or form. K Chiba wrote: "...Characteristic of this stage is the learning and embodiment of the fundamentals through the repetition of kata, exactly as they are presented...with total openness and modesty." Through repetition, the practices of the art being studied become second nature for the student. The distinctions that are important for the form are internalized. Referring to this stage, Yuki Yoshi Takamura Sensei from the Yoshinryo school of Jujitsu says, "In time different neuro-motor process become intuitively engrained in such a way that they are no longer consciously realized by the student." This allows the student to progressively become more responsive in the present moment as they do not have to devote attention to the basics.

One can see the Shu stage in the learning of the Feldenkrais Method, as the years of immersion in Awareness Through Movement (ATM) that form the foundation for study in most of our trainings. Over time the deep experience in ATM should lead to habits dropping away and the logic of the Method becoming more and more understood in action. Problems are confronted using the basic principles: distributing effort through the system, using more of oneself, working in imagination, learning to sense more, differentiation/integration, etc. Of particular note is the development of an "embodied awareness" as habits of attention are questioned and replaced with a broader and more elastic presence. All the elements together of this deep practice results in each practitioner being themselves an encyclopedic for reference in understanding Awareness Through Movement (ATM), Functional Integration (FI) and many aspects of human movement. The fundamental principles of the *Feldenkrais Method* become embodied in these early stages of immersive practice. At the beginning of this stage many of these elements are implicit, but as one matures, they should become more explicit, meaning that a student learns to articulate how learning is engendered through specific choices and practices.

One of the main elements of this stage is to take the form as it is and try to understand and grapple with it as it is presented. One of the entailments of this for a student of the Feldenkrais Method is that they take seriously the ATMs and FIs in their original form. It means immersion in the classic practice until the kinesthetic language of ATM and FI is not longer foreign, but begins to have fluency. It means engagement with the principles that result in the practices of the Method and applying them in one's life. It does not mean blind acceptance. I would express it more as serious engagement.

The next stage is Ha. In the Ha stage, one begins to diverge from the form and make it one's own. The idea is that in the first stage every effort is made to understand and embody the kata. In this second stage the student goes through a process of questioning, studying and ordering what they have learned so that the art becomes more explicitly their own.

If the domain being studied involves other people, then the Shu stage flows easily into this next step. In martial arts you need to figure out how to perform the techniques with people large, short, heavy, light, tall etc. This already involves modifying one's technique and searching for its heart. In the Feldenkrais Method as the new practitioner begins to teach ATM s/he is quickly confronted with applying the ATM's for specific people and their individual situations. To be able to do this and still keep the essence of the lesson (or kata) shows that one has already achieved a certain level of maturity and understanding of the practice. The same holds true for Functional Integration. During this stage the student is able to put together elements of what they have learned in new ways, and as Moshe would say, they begin to find their own handwriting. This is the Ha stage.

Y. Takamura says of the Ha stage: "Extremely attentive instruction is required by the sensei at this juncture because too much deviation will lead to sloppiness or bastardization of technique, while too much restraint can cripple any underlying talent."

I see teachers who are so worried about the purity of the Method that creativity and potential are stifled. The other side is equally a concern as people begin to create before they really understand and embody the principles the Method rests on. An understanding of phases can be helpful here. If one starts to improvise too early, during the Shu phase, that process of embodying the logic, practices and principles of the Method may not be solid enough.

As a teacher of new practitioners, I find this stage very interesting as there is a big range in individual student's comfort with improvising, or modifying the forms. In order to apply the learning strategies of the Method to the incredible variety of situations in which humans find themselves, one has to be able to improvise. In the beginning it can be small changes in rhythm and variations in an ATM, or putting together elements of learned FI in a new way. Eventually an experienced *Feldenkrais* practitioner should be able to create many different types of learning situations for people's unique situations. If a practitioner can't respond in the present to their students with improvised solutions, the Method is not yet theirs, and they have not fully moved to the Ha stage.

Finally there is the Ri stage, expressed as going beyond form or transcending form. Here one has made the art one's own and ready to be a teacher of teachers, or to practice the art at a new level. As K. Chiba expresses it:

"The completion of one's study is here, though it isn't the end of study. ...He/She has become one of the successors of the path who stands as the embodiment of the art to all others. ... [Further development] depends upon one's own continual inquiry."

There are many systems that strive to explain the stages of learning. I find the traditional Japanese system particularly relevant for the FM as the development of skill is inextricably intertwined with maturation of the whole person. In the FM this

attitude is very explicit when we are in training, but how do we keep this orientation when the “path of lifelong learning” becomes our job? In the Japanese system the idea of *Shoshin*, or “beginner’s mind” is an essential element for continued growth. Traditionally it depends on the ability to be in the present without preconceptions. Personally, I am the most satisfied as a practitioner/teacher when I spontaneously create something new that arises out of the present moment and its unique demands. The Method demands this, and early expressions can emerge at any stage of development. The challenge for the experienced practitioner is to have access to their knowledge and experience and at the same time come to each session with an open and noticing mind/body/heart (*shoshin*). This way we can engage in the “continual inquiry” on which our ongoing development rests.