

European Feldenkrais Congress 30 March - 3 April 2005

Notes for a lecture:

"Wounds are the doors to the movement secret."

The role of the individual in art, education and therapy.

A

I am an artist, which means I will be personal, yet I am talking to the other in me: I am talking to you.

To me being personal means respecting the parts within me that I do not know. These are shaped in early childhood and are buried very deep inside us.

In order to relate my ideas about the movement secret, I will talk about some experiences in my early life which left their traces on me and became very important instruments in my work. They gave me a lead in overcoming a crisis and helped me to develop my activities and understanding of myself, and through this to understand others as well.

B

I am an artist.

This means shaping a very clear point of view, which means being an individual who listens to his/her own path.

The power of art comes from the fact that it talks from the depth of the individual, who shapes its form and exposes it to others.

Its healing power comes from being faithful to oneself – working with the vulnerable spot through the accumulation of individual experiences – and culminates in the art product.

C

We humans are expressive beings. In therapy, education and art we use the same language. We use the same language for everyday survival and for expressing our joys and sorrows. We read and write very different texts: newspapers, shopping lists, poems by Paul Celan and novels by Franz Kafka. We find our way through the city using signs, and with the same eyes look at Rauschenberg paintings.

We hear the car horn or the ambulance siren, and with the same ears listen to Bach or John Cage.

We are expressive beings; we need art in its many forms and manifestations.

D

Not everyone is an artist, but every one of us is an expressive being.

The teacher and the therapist can gain insight from the example of the artist. We all grow up with sorrows and joys, and those of childhood in particular are responsible for our later development. We all have the same danger of becoming the victim of our early imprints if we don't get in touch with them again. We will pay too much attention to the outside, to our survival, to the student or the patient, forgetting that we too are human beings, expressive beings, with wounds – secret wounds which we got as a result of the confrontation between our

imagination and the world around us. We hide our wounds because with our first failures in the things we were sensitive to – that attracted us – the failure was imprinted. Yet even without knowing it these secrets direct our lives, privately and professionally.

E

Doing art – creating a dance and performing it – comes from my very various experiences. I cannot tell if these follow my imagination or are created by it. And when I am creating a new dance, a whole new movement experience is shaped. Separate moments, gestures, memories are now in a new positive context, and the dance helps me and the observer to integrate an unknown experience into our world.

F

I insist on the wounds; movement is a secret. The movement image is connected to the body image, and both are created at an early age.

Yet they have the potential to change throughout our lives.

The early impressions are imprinted on the individual, leaving signs in the gestures – and more in the inhibition of the torso.

Our experiences are accumulated in an inner order which is hidden from us.

Therefore our work on ourselves should respect this and start from any given point, not from a system, and hopefully we will reach the expressions and manifestations of our wounds: in pain, in everyday habits and in dreams.

G

Movement is one of the many expressions of the self.

Early changes within ourselves occur against the background of heredity, childhood experiences and early environment, and cultural norms.

All this is imprinted and buried in layers deep within ourselves.

Our wounds – like our dreams – are lids on the unknown part of the soul. By opening them we can learn something of our past and build a positive attitude towards our present and future.

Therefore teaching movement should be directed in many different ways – in therapy, general education or art – according to the learners.

The basic task in all three areas is to create an authentic movement experience.

To confront the individual with his/her inner life and imagination, and enable him/her to trust it and engage it with the environment.

To encourage each person to learn from past failures and to use them as an instrument for the next attempt.

Trust implies waiting and listening for the images to emerge from the deep and tell us how to handle them.

H

Inhibition

The term has many meanings; its source is in psychology. Later F.M. Alexander used it in a very particular way. In his method, he means creating a conscious gap between the command to perform an action and the execution of the gesture. Feldenkrais used it to explain the development of the use of the spine. In his terms inhibition enables us to achieve a differentiation between head and

pelvis, and between the spine and the extremities.

I want to stress the stage at which the small child is acquiring the upright position – in order to stabilize the pelvis and to give the head the maximum freedom to move without the danger of yielding to gravity with extreme gestures.

In order to acquire the new pattern we need the help of our parents. Although potentially we are equipped with the upright position, we probably wouldn't attain it without imitating the environment with the encouragement of our parents.

This means that each individual finds his/her own way to the upright, acquiring it through trial and error, imprinted as an experience with emotional resonance. Each differentiation of the extremities calls for a new application of the inhibition, which in each individual produces unique patterns of action loaded with emotional resonance.

This process goes on throughout early childhood, and as adults we have the possibility to revise this process – as with our inner life – to gain a different view of it and thus to change our behavior.

I

Therapy

Most patients come because they are not able to function in daily life. The key words here are trust and authenticity. The process needs trust between the two people involved. It calls first upon the therapist get to know his/her own wounds, and through the process of accepting them to support the patient – until a phase is reached in which the patient in turn can accept his/her wounds as part of his/her inner world, and is able to confront the changes that accrue in life.

J

Education

In education we are dealing more with the values that are common to the members of the group, and with the new values presented by the teacher. The teacher is an adult who helps the young or the old to experience movement, to understand the subject matter and to acquire or revise the necessary skills in accordance with their own inhibitions and potentials.

K

Art

Art is practiced (today) by individuals. Artists produce images, gestures, sounds, paintings, dance, music and poetry that not only reflect personal needs, but also always include the other within them. The ideal is to create a product that can move the audience as well as the artist. The instructor will help the (movement) artist to develop his/her methods and systems to create the art, and encourage him/her to change and transform constantly and – through the art product – to induce further movement experience.

L

Conclusion

We are witness today to a great confusion between personal expression and art. It is very important to know the differences between them.

Between expression in therapy and recreational activities. Between social forms of expressive activities – e.g. folk dances, amateur orchestras and choirs, sport –

and art products.

While entertainment and personal expression are the outcome of an instant need, art and philosophy are intended to enlarge and deepen our experience and our understanding of ourselves and others.

They differentiate and integrate our world, enabling new experience by erasing the dichotomy between ourselves and our environment.

M

Let me introduce you to some heroes of the past whose wounds were a source of their power.

Achilles – heel

Thetis wanted her sons to be immortal. She managed to achieve this, but with her seventh son Achilles didn't quite finish the job. When she laid him on the fire and rubbed him with ambrosia, the anklebone escaped the final treatment.

Peleus his father gave him a new anklebone taken from the skeleton of the giant Damysus. So Achilles was strong, but not immune. He knew this, and it was part of his struggle. As we know he was wounded in the heel, his weak spot, and died.

Siegfried – vulnerable spot.

Siegfried was made immune through being bathed in dragon's blood. But during the process a leaf from a lime tree fell between his shoulder blades. It was here he could be wounded, and here he was injured by Hagen and so died.

The weak spot makes us human, otherwise we tend to inflate and think we are Omnipotent like the gods.

N

Our teachers are the heroes of the modern movements in education and dance, and shared the same ordeals.

Elsa Gindler suffered from her lungs and was compelled to find a way of curing herself, which she then offered to others.

Although Heinrich Jacoby was an accomplished musician and an excellent pedagogue, the fact that he suffered all his life from back pain was a major motivation in developing his very personal way of teaching. He found Gindler and collaborated with her.

Matthias Alexander developed his method because he was looking for a way of treating his voice in order to go back on stage. I don't know if we lost an actor, but we certainly gained a very powerful system.

Moshe Feldenkrais was a martial arts practitioner, and among his other achievements he established the first judo club in Europe. Yet the fact that his knees betrayed him motivated him to search for a way to solve it, and from this he developed his method.

Gerda Alexander was engaged in music and dance from early age, yet again a

lung infection was a powerful impulse towards deep research and the development of her own method in education and therapy.

This is just a very short list, but I am sure that many others shared the same fate. I want to restate my claim that wounds are the doors to the movement secret. If I am right, this fact is of great importance in the different fields of movement activity: therapy, education and art.

O

We do not know the wounds of our teachers, therapists and artists, as we hardly admit our own. They are hidden from the individual, and more than that from the public eye. Yet we do have a long list of people who were conscious of body and mind and offered us their knowledge – some in a more “objective” way, some insisting more on the personal factor that leads to an individual approach.

P

While in the arts it is very clear that the individual voice is the message, in education and therapy the emphasis is still on the system. My point is that although systems are important as a corpus of “objective” knowledge, transmission is effective when teachers or therapists are clear about their own wounds, their own individuality. Accepting this fact opens the way to self-reliance and inspiration from many sources, not falling victim to one aspect of a system.

Some leading teachers of the past two centuries:

François Delsarte (1811-1871)

Genevieve Stebbins (pub. 1885)

Bess Mensendieck (1864-1957)

Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869-1955)

Emile Jacques-Dalcroze (1865-1950)

Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925)

Isadora Duncan (1878-1927)

Rudolph Laban (1879-1958)

Elsa Gindler (1885-1961)

Gerda Alexander (1908-1994)

Mable Elsworth Todd

Andre Bernard (1924-2003)

Ida Rolf (1896-1979)

Moshe Feldenkrais (1904-1984)

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen

Q

None of them grew up without parents or teachers. In many cases we do not know the chain of succession, but we often know the following generations. In an argument between Noa Eshkol and Moshe Feldenkrais about the Alexander technique, Moshe said that the fact that Alexander had succeed in teaching other people to do what he was doing was an achievement in itself. It was indeed an achievement, but there is a big difference between someone who initiates and develops a method and the follower who receives it as a

complete final system – rather than as the healing process of its creator. The followers often tend to put the system in the foreground, not respecting in full the inner interests of its creator, or their own wounds. The consequence is an impoverishment of the method.

R

A habit can produce anxiety, or physical problems and pain.

Seeking a way to overcome it, finding new channels, applying them, teaching them to others who haven't gone through the whole process and have missed the dynamic component – all this is very necessary to any effective education, therapy or art.

It is very interesting to look at the ways different teachers did this:

Gindler insisted on the dynamics of immediate experience, and on not creating a form or exercises.

Her followers were small in number. Those who did get the message continued in their individual way: Francesca Goralewski, Sophie Ludwig, Lotte Kristeller, Gerda Alexander, Charlotte Selver, Lilly Ehrenfried and in the next generation Miriam Goldberg. And probably many others we haven't heard about. Each of them developed their own interests and as a result created their own river.

Mable Todd

Looking at the people who studied with Mable Todd we also find them continuing her work in their own personal ways.

Lulu Sweigard taught at the Julliard School of Music and Dance for many years. Her work was extensive and she wrote a book about her experiences. The first half is theory, the second its practical application.

Barbara Clark was originally a nurse. After studying with Todd she used her knowledge to treat and teach people. She gained quite a following – the zeitgeist probably had a hand in this too.

Andre Bernard, the oldest of Todd's students, passed away last year. He was very devoted to the work, teaching it at NYU up to his death, and giving workshops in the States and in the last few years in Switzerland. His two disciples in Europe, Wolfgang Steinmüller and Ursula Stricker, took protocols of his continuous workshops and published them.

Mary Fulkerson, Nancy Topf-Gibson, Marsha Paludan and John Roland all studied with Barbara Clark. Each of them made an important contribution in different fields.

S

Yet we do see that today systems are taught with an accent on the specifics of the forms and method, with less emphasis on the transmitter and his/her unique personal involvement.

In the Sufi tradition if the sheik does not bless a follower before his death, the order is dismissed thereafter and the followers seek another order.

T

I want to tell you parts of my own story, and how I came to the idea of the wounds.

a

In my childhood I was shy, withdrawn, given to daydreaming (bending my head to the left, looking inwards in the direction of my lower-right chest) and very sad. I preferred being at home to going outside like my brother. School was boredom with some wonderful moments: a day of funny competitions – walking with a glass of water without spilling a drop – or the last lesson on Friday when our teacher read to us.

Reading Hans Christian Andersen's miserable biography was very comforting. At this time I also saw a play of his story "The Nightingale".

b

After my mother's death (sense of shame, wanting to hide or disappear) my father married again and we moved to his wife's kibbutz.

From that time I remember being photographed – at Pesach, and during the Seder I was thinking: "I'm not going to let anyone hurt me again."

At the kibbutz I started to play the piano, danced a lot and gained my place in the group through my painting skills (stage design, illustrations, posters).

But although I showed these talents in public, I was also hiding myself very deeply (behind an invisible cement block around my chest).

c

After high school (which was not very much better than primary school, very boring) I went to teacher-training college. It was my first step to freedom. The school offered a wide variety of subjects, and I choose the ones that interested me. These included Ausdruckstanz with Gertrud Kraus and gymnastics with Lotte Kristeller, who was one of the few teachers following Elsa Gindler. Her lessons were a revelation: acquiring movement skills without any pressure, respecting oneself with all the fears, shame and awkwardness. We used very simple actions, objects, games and lots of skeletal images, and I was in heaven. I could respect myself as I was and enjoy it. The second year I joined the class of another movement teacher, Judith Binneter. We mainly improvised with objects, music – or without any additional things. There were very few obligations and almost no rules. Expressiveness "without borders" and hardly any criticism.

For a year it was new and exciting, yet slowly something start to creep in and accumulate. I felt I was repeating myself and got bored despite the freedom.

d

During my army service I was stationed as a graphic artist in Tel Aviv, so I was able to continue studying at the Avni School of Visual Art, where I enrolled parallel to my movement studies, and joined the Feldenkrais lessons as well.

It was very different from Lotte's class: very clear, very form-oriented. Step by step you arrived at your goal. I was able to tread carefully, taking almost no risks. At the end of the year I told a friend I wasn't going to continue next year, as I felt that he, Moshe, was withholding the secret, and if I wanted to know what it was I should take private lessons with him.

e

One more year passed. I took part in a performance of a movement theater piece directed by one of Noa Eshkol's dancers, Naomi Polani, and enjoyed it very much. The next year I joined a two-year course with Noa Eshkol, and from the first lesson I had the feeling that this was my place: clarity, each subject going through endless variations, and so many opportunities to create through the

notation (Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation). It was clear to me that this would be my way.

f

Two more – very wonderful – years passed by. I was 32 years old, ready to start dancing, and without warning I was faced with a big crisis: I couldn't move at all. The pain was almost paralyzing. And the crisis was also in my painting. After finishing art school I had made two successful children books, but I couldn't paint any more and stopped the graphic work too.

I managed to make a living through teaching painting, but I realized that I was in deep trouble and started looking around for help.

g

Through a friend of mine I found an analyst. From the first dream I brought along it was clear that some of my inner troubles were taking the form of physical images. There were images of body parts (wounded bird, wounded back), which I learned to connect not only to my inner world, but to my movement world as well. While working on my own body I realized that facing a pain – tracing a problem – in one part of the body made connections to other parts. I began to reflect on this. Then sometimes it happened almost of its own accord that certain body images were connected to my inner problems. They would just pop up, pointing to inner links between the past and the body, illuminating the whole complexity.

h

Many years after my mother's death my father gave me some of her documents. In her health insurance card I found a letter from our family doctor to the orthopedic specialist: "Amos's mother claims that his back is out of order. Please check."

I was very relieved. Suddenly I realized that my back problem had been imprinted by my mother's worries. Like another fact my father told me, also many years later: "Your mother was very disappointed about the fact that you were not very good in school." I felt I did now have the right to hate the school. Another fact about wounds: when I was seven or eight my father tried unsuccessfully to teach me to swim. I couldn't swim until I was 15, when I taught myself.

Years later my father confessed that he regretted very much never having learned to swim, and again once the secret was out. I breathed a sigh of relief.

i

The crisis was a big lever. I was 32 years old and needed somehow to start bringing together all my experiences, which were scattered about without any contact to my almost totally absent self. To bridge the wide ocean of the self – to learn who you actually are – is something you can only do by getting to know the ocean's floor. And this is hidden very deep – in the early past, where body and inner life are connected to our first experiences, shaped and wounded by our confrontations with difficulty. We carry these experiences and wounds all our lives.

j

I began an analysis with Dvora Kutzinski, a disciple of Erich Neuman, and started to observe my dreams and reality, and to dive into my oceans.

With the movement it is harder to describe, although there are some similarities. I had no success with conventional medicine, and started to visit one body

therapist after another. They included Moshe Feldenkrais, Hannah Hon, Miriam Goldberg and a few teachers of the Alexander technique. The experience was very deep, with a lot of frustrations; it was a real learning process. I also started to work by myself, and some connections began to emerge.

My first activity every day was to listen to my body and ask myself what I needed today. Over the years I developed a 5-minute process: I set the timer, let myself be carried by my interest, and when the stopwatch gives the signal I stop, listen and then start from another part, with another interest. This can go on for an hour or more, until I feel ready to go on to the next stage. Then I work on my dances.

k

I maintained a dialogue between the movement of the body, my inner life, my dreams and surrounding reality, and the wish to create dances. As a result I started to ask my body "What is the inner meaning?" Or, when faced with an inner question, tried to trace it on and in the body as a gesture. Tracing the signs of the early experience – usually a holding in one part and a collapse in another – finding a better solution, a better organization, usually releasing the holding and signing it with a word. This helped, and still helps me to continue with my discoveries.

l

When creating my first dances I used to carry a movement idea with me for a long time, then write it down with the Eshkol-Wachman movement notation, and then start to teach it to myself or to my group. But I realized that there were limitations to what I could imagine, and when I danced a lot more details would enter, and with them sometimes a change in the score. The biggest challenge was the torso. Each dancer has his/her own body, which means his/her own history – which can be seen more in the relationship between the torso and the extremities. Inhibition plays an important – unseen – role here, and cannot be controlled directly or notated precisely. We come back here to inhibition as a major idea: everyone carries their own unique version of it, unknown to them. It is, as such, our dark side.

I became very interested not only in the analytical side of this, but in the aesthetic implications as well: each person's movement uniqueness is created by individual inhibition in combination with clarity of form in the gestures of the extremities.

m

I gradually neglected composing for a group and became more involved in solo pieces and duets – in which I could deal with the differences between two dancers.

But parallel to this I began to initiate collective group works. Here I created an open score in which each dancer created his/her own dance, which we performed simultaneously. Creating, in a way, a diversity of aesthetics, in which a new kind of beauty emerges by allowing each dancer to be at peace with himself/herself. This form calls for a lot of trust between the dancers, and an acceptance of the aesthetics of diversity. Finding dancers who will cooperate is still a real challenge.

n

The collective approach was not totally new to me. From the mid-sixties I had been involved with teaching movement and had created games with a similar approach, and even performed them in the theater.

Teaching was laboratory and taught me a lot. Through it I learned more and more to respect the different ways people learn. I was teaching in the dance department at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, where most of the classes were held in the traditional way – the teacher shows the gesture and the students imitate and repeat it, and then repeat it every day in the most rigorous way. But my approach consisted of a) creating very clear geometrical concepts and giving instructions, and b) giving assignments, making suggestions and letting everyone do it in their own way. Both without demonstrating. Over the years my teaching changed – the way I presented myself, as a human being, as someone who is in a process of change. At the beginning I was very strict and severe, yet the lessons always took their own path: I listened and adapted according to the reactions of my students. Later I allowed myself (and I thought it would be good for the students as well as for me) to admit mistakes, to stand to one side, to remember my wounds. While my teachers (Noa Eshkol, Moshe Feldenkrais and my Alexander teachers) were conveying very objective truths (at least, that was how I understood it) I never heard them in class say they had changed their minds, that they had made a mistake. I never heard that what they were teaching was in a way a personal method, a work in progress. Yet I did feel that they were meandering, and that helped a lot.

I felt the need to admit I had changed my mind, that we should try things another way. The pattern can be clear, but performing it always brings in something unknown, and it is slightly different for each individual.

Changing my attitude was very hard at first; I was very afraid, but slowly the more I accepted my own limitations the more I was able let my students feel that I too was on my way – with more and different experiences, yet growing all the time.

O

Another change in my teaching occurred when during the eighties I started to teach in Europe – mainly in Germany. The differences between the reactions of people in Israel and Europe were huge. This opened my mind to changing not only the proportions of certain subjects (rhythm or standing position), but to set different priorities and accents in the lessons.

It became clearer that it is very important for me to respect these differences in each individual, to encourage trust in oneself, to widen up the action from the survival attitude to the poetic one, to trust so much that you can allow yourself to wait.

Waiting consciously.

P

Wounds are the doors to the movement secret. Yet the secret is never totally revealed. We live with it, it calls to us, and we wait to discover more of the beauty of the movement, the dance.