Waiting For My Mentor-Ship To Come In - The Role of Initiation by Shelley Duke

Reading the last issue of *In Touch*, I was moved by the beautiful "handwriting" of at least a dozen different *Feldenkrais* practitioners. While only a few of the stories described Moshe's professional lessons, all drew intricate word-pictures of Moshe Feldenkrais as a teacher who deeply touched his students.

To me, such stories are proverbial tales of how the master "tied his shoelaces". They witness to how such "tying" can dramatically transform our lives. What gives these simple stories their compelling power and enduring comfort is the personal voice of a colleague who was "there". He (or she) invites me into an intimate oral tradition of mystery that reflects the profound innocence and power of our collective work together.

Initiations, and the transformations they describe, bear witness to and renew what I call our *Feldenkrais* group-body's "Passover Stories". They are the tales we tell to our students and the students of our students and anyone else who sincerely questions us. We recount how we, who were once enslaved by unconscious habits, got carried (and then learned to move on our own) from bondage and limitation into freedom. We tell each other about the miracles of "Red Seas" that opened for us because someone before us extended a simple lesson and a "friendly hand". We share how we alone, and yet we with all of our people, were transported to touch the Earth in new ways that felt free and full of promise beneath our feet.

While we may be able to professionalize *Feldenkrais* training and regulate teacher certification, I do not believe we can quantify or control intitiation. We can learn to organize ourselves more effectively as a professional body to welcome initiations' powers and blessings, but we can't service-mark their grace.

Like Kabbalah, the mystical tradition of Judaism that means literally "to receive", I think we have to recognize that the process of initiation can be complex and even dangerous. We can spend "forty years" successively approximating in the desert before we find our own ground. Only rarely will we come to the heart of our promise in a weekend workshop - no matter how advanced it is!

Some forms of initiation can and do occur within *Functional Integration* or *Awareness Through Movement* contexts. Most mentoring for the purpose of initiation however, must extend far beyond the standard *Feldenkrais* table or our society's ways of defining professionalism. The trusting journey of a true mentor and student almost always crosses over some pre-conceived and mutually-respected boundary. Without risking such crossings with each other, we benefit from well-guided "lessons" but often miss our true "passovers".

Differentiating between an "initiation" and a "lesson" can be subtle. In my gut however, I have always known the difference. Lessons support me to take bite-sized, reversible steps towards my own independent transformation. They touch me but leave me totally free to learn whatever I want next, whenever I want, with whomever I want to learn. They are ethical, valuable, teachable, supportive, effective, portable, relatively uncontroversial and the bread and butter of a *Feldenkrais* professional practice.

"Initiations", on the other hand, often involve some nebulous "course of transformation" that engages both teacher and student. They open us to levels of trust and intensity that cannot be fully comprehended or controlled. Whether for an single instant or prolonged decades, a mentor and student engage in some mutual, multi-dimensional constellation of discovery. It is a relationship that can be poorly defined, easily mis-interpreted, vulnerable to abuse and very inadequately role-modelled in our society.

In my own experiences, mentors have been synchronistically drawn to meet my life and learning with their own. Often, they recognize some underlying commitment in me that speaks to them or vice versa. They respond by letting me in close enough to hear their stories and see them "tie their shoelaces". Our shared commitment is not to each other, but to some higher power of Learning-Between-Us that mutually seems to be calling us to listen.

There is a nice story from Native traditions that one of my mentors, Sun Bear, once shared with me. He said that a good Medicine Person prays for students smart enough to steal his (or her) medicine because if they're not smart enough to steal it, he can't give it to them.

Mentoring invites such paradoxical challenges. It takes liberties, breaks rules, exposes vulnerabilities, risks errors and bears disappointments. It can lie confusingly close in form to an unlikely love affair or models of guru-worship that actually distort and can even corrupt successful mentorship. The student (and sometimes the teacher) can feel drawn "in" and/or penetrated to the furthest reaches of his or her soul. Often the mentorship relationship vulnerably returns one to passionate places within that seemed forgotten— to those "unavowed" dreams Moshe acknowledged in his definitions of health!

While love serves love however, and guru-worship serves gurus, I believe that mentorship serves the renewal of teaching traditions within a community. Mentorship consciously recognizes and chooses to utilize the imbalance of power between an individual teacher and student to enlighten a community-inclusive, transformative process that can ultimately rebirth all of us into greater levels of freedom and movement.

As I see it, a mentor invites (or allows) a student onto his or her own pre-seasoned, relatively stable "mentor-ship" for the purpose of discovering new frontiers for learning. The mentor's most valued maps, tools, contacts, treasures and blessings are shared in hopes of reaching a whole new generation of possibility. While riding life's waves from the vantage point and security of a mentor's vessel, the student's personal relation-ship to a collective fleet of *Feldenkrais*-ships is confirmed.

Beyond training, graduation or certification, the student in this model receives her or his personal licence and

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integrative, sea-worthy platform for self-discovery. She (or he) is lifted up from being a random, isolated, floundering swimmer to someone validated and reinforced by the gifts of precision, refuge, nourishment and direction that will let her float gracefully as part of a whole to a new shore.

My own *Feldenkrais* mentor-ship and initiation took ten years beyond my Amherst training to finally come in. It began when an ocean-worthy *Feldenkrais* teacher, with a personal history with Moshe, told a story during an *Awareness Through Movement* (ATM) class he was teaching. I knew immediately that the story he was telling was "my story" and this ATM was to be my ATM. I acknowledged my sense of connectedness in the class and opened myself to a series of synchronicities that brought me near this teacher often during the next few days.

In good faith but with no explicit contracts, this teacher and I entered into some mystical dance together. Spontaneously, we acted out an archetypal *Feldenkrais* story that was mine but also his. There was a moment during our "dance" that literally was a dance for us. We did a movement together where I was swung into the air. I rolled across his back and pelvis with my own back and pelvis. In a millisecond of that sequence, my entire heritage as a *Feldenkrais* practitioner moved through me.

I felt legs beneath me that were not yet my own, freedom in front of me that I had not yet tasted, and a clarity of direction that I cannot yet describe. I was also deeply confused and disoriented by the power and passion that came alive through this intensely intimate interaction with someone I barely knew. I very much needed, and remain grateful for, the sensitive responsive integration time, the willing kinship and the gentle care this particular mentor took in helping me to find my own balance again with my new "under-standing".

Since that initiation, *Feldenkrais* learning has come to me with far more ease and grace. I seem to be en-route finally for wherever I am meant to be going. The precise teachings and teachers I need appear more frequently and accessibly along my path. But I desper-ately needed the hand, heart, skill and miracle of a passover to get me beyond water-treading and onto my course.

I do not believe that such levels of initiation can be regulated, although our collective awareness concerning their ethics and professional boundaries must be sincerely addressed and developed. I also don't think that mentorship can be "organized equitably" for fees, although professional programs can be structured and financed functionally to leave more room for mentoring to occur.

A true mentor's worth cannot be measured and reimbursed in standard professional terms. She or he serves as an on-call midwife to a power and grace of learning that is uniquely birthed within fundamentally "unequal" relationships. Mentors cannot expect fair material exchange from their students any more than parents can expect adequate recompense from children. Like mid-wives, they may charge for services, but their commitment to healthy new life must extend far beyond any dollar and cent value.

Our community's collective debts for mentoring, both advertised and unknown, will rarely be repaid in full to the actual mentors who were "there" for our personal passovers. Ways must be designed therefore for our true mentors to be recognized, honoured and nourished (financially as well as otherwise) by the communities they serve beyond any programmed teaching fees.

I believe that the often mysterious but potent grace of initiation is one of the strongest forces we have for rebirthing and renewing the promise of the *Feldenkrais* Method as a vital, established profession. At our best, we belong to a people of mentors who share "simple lessons" and extend "friendly hands". Our initiations let us uniquely embody and express the rich, often unspeakable learning tradition that we ourselves have been so blessed to inherit.

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On Mentoring and the Mentoring Experience

by Martin H. Weiner, Ph.D.

When the Editor of *In Touch* asked me to write something about mentoring, I readily agreed, thinking that since I had been offering a program called The Mentor Experience for practitioners for the past year, I should be able to dash something off. As it turned out, this has been one of the most challenging pieces I have ever written because the topic is so important, both for us as practitioners and for our clients.

The nature of the mentor experience is dictated by the nature of the work that we do and what it takes to be an effective practitioner of it. I have addressed extensively elsewhere* about that I think is the essence of the *Feldenkrais* Method but would like to make some abbreviated comments on it here.

In describing his work, Moshe was particularly careful to point out that one cannot easily make a distinction between exploring a client and treating them. Since we are educators whose primary focus is on awareness rather than on the diagnosis and treatment of specific problems, our own manner of being aware of clients and helping them become aware of themselves is the foundation of our work. The very process of touching and interacting with a client is, in fact, the treatment.

In a very real sense, what we do is who we are. This is not just a metaphysical suggestion. It contains the seeds of what makes us effective with our clients. What we bring to another human being that stimulates their system to "wake up" and be more functional is our own "awakened" awareness, the vitality of our own heart and spirit.

What does any of this have to do with the mentoring process? I believe at some point in a practitioner's maturation, the *Feldenkrais* Method moves from being the process of acquiring an external body of knowledge and technique and becomes, instead, a process of developing our relationship to ourself, which Moshe called "the elusive obvious." As he said in his book by that name,

> "I believe that knowing oneself is the most important thing a human being can do for himself. How can one know oneself? By learning to act not as one should, but as one does." (THE ELUSIVE OBVIOUS, p. xi)

This point - that our method and the training of a practitioner is primarily about coming to know ourselves - cannot be stressed enough. Lee Strasberg, the director of the famous Actor's Studio in New York, said,

> "When you find things that are right to do, and you do them once, you must face the problem: 'How do I do that again? What set this off?' this, for the fine actor, is the real need of technique. Only by technique can he preserve those things that are most precious in acting - the moment of revelation, the moment of experience, the moment when something happens most fully and completely on stage...All we are asking is that you live up to your talent. We cannot give you talent but we are going to force you to live up to the talent that you have. I would like to see a real grappling with this problem: How must I explore so that this thing that I have found...can be done with at least part of the fullness and part of the vision and part of the experience at each perform-ance." (Strasberg at the Actor's Studio, Theater Communications Group)

With appropriate substitutions of "practitioner" for "actor" and "office" for "stage," the same is true for our training and our work. Technique is not something we do to our clients; it is what we do with ourselves as practitioners to move to a mode of awareness that generates the appropriate creation that we call a lesson.

It is very difficult to understand this point fully because we have been structured by our culture to search outwardly, in the realm of external forms, in order to develop our skills. Our method, on the other hand, seeks to give us the tools of awareness to move into our experience and explore the possiblities that we may not find in the public models against which we measure ourselves. I have seen many students and practitioners turn away from, or a least doubt, some profoundly unique and mystical experiences that they have had working with clients because these experiences aren't talked about or evidenced by other practioners. I think it is a pity, because to develop their ability to its fullest depends on exploring these experiences and discovering the new realms of consciousness that they open.

So, at the heart of the mentor experience must be the heart of the mentee. This helps us define some of the desireable qualities in the mentor and the structure of that relationship. Since the focus in mentoring is not on producing results in a client but on producing results in the mentee, it is not enough that the mentor be an accomplished practitioner. The skill that should be equally prized in the mentor is her** ability to bring the unique essence and healing qualities of the mentee into greater maturation and expression.

I tray to be very clear about this with the people I am mentoring. When we are doing FI, I of course show them my own orientation and style of working with clients. However, I try to do it in a way that gives them an opportunity to go deeper into the moment and learn how to find what they need in their experience as it is unfolding. I want them to find the authority for what they do in their touch and what it conveys, rather than in what moves , what they know and how much technique they have.

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* See the reprint of my keynote address at the Annual Guild Conference, 1993 in the Winter 1994 issue of *In Touch*.

** Instead of the cumbersome convention "he/she", I use the feminine to cover the masculine as well. This is not just a nice gesture, but a reflection of the fact that our work attracts more women than men (both as practitioners and clients) and also that our work is, I believe, more an expression of the feminine- intuitive side of our nature than the masculine-categorizing aspect.)

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When I explore how to "see" a client, for example, I try not to teach diagnostic categories and, instead, return to the fundamental act of seeing non-judgementally, seeing what is going on for the client from the client's side. To do this, it is imperative that we move beyond the pressures to see "the right" thing and to have a methodology that we often feel. Our aware presence is the most reliable method.

A mentor must be willing to take risks and openly share what is going on for her as a lesson is unfolding - what she feels with her hands, her moments of insight and her moments of confusion, those times when she is frustrated with not getting results and isn't sure how to proceed, moments of being emotionally moved by a client, and on and on. By the time students/practitioners have reached an appropriate time for the mentor experience, they have already seen many demonstrations by highly skilled practitioners and have heard many explanations based on that is going on in the client. What I think is invaluable is to get some insight into the experience of the practitioner and how the practitioner works with her own experience during the lesson.

The mentor experience is about evoking in a mentee a profound sense of the legitimacy of following her heart and spirit. It is about validating curiousity as a dependable map for growth. It is about helping people to feel comfortable exploring new territory in themselves and their clients and finding their security in being open to the experience of the moment. This process cannot be a packaged plan but must remain an unwritten, spontaneous adventure in discovery, created anew each time two people enter into a mentor relationship. How else can you show someone how to improvise and be creative unless the act of teaching it is itself an improvisation? To this end, both mentor and mentee must be willing to explore those aspects of their personality which stand in the way of going deeper into trusting themselves and revealing the salutary nature of their fundamental awareness. In this regard, mentoring has provided me the opportunity to discover some of my own baggage and to work with some wonderful people who are committed to the conscious evolution of their own consciousness. It has been the most challenging and satisfying work I have done.

The nature of the mentor experience - encouraging a mentee to become self-reliant in her own process - suggest certain features of how it can be structured. First, it is desireable that mentoring be done one-on-one or in small groups. In the mentor work I am doing, I limit participation during any one segment to no more than eight people. I like this number because the group is large enough to generate a high degree of energy and intensity but small enough that we don't lose a personal feel for each other.

Second, I think the experience needs to be highly focused. By that I mean several days working closely with each other. It is important to spend enough time together to begin to recognize the self-imposed limitations that exist within us and to become comfortable enough to explore together the unknown territory beyond those boundaries.

Third, mentees need an opportunity to explore on their own, in their own practices, areas that were opened up for them during their experience with the mentor. During this time away from the daily contact with the mentor, the mentor should be available for consultation and exploration of other ways of deepening her relationship with a mentee. I am still investigating how to maintain contact with the practitioners I am working with so that they will experience me as an ongoing resource in their life. I am thinking of a newsletter and perhaps some audio tapes as a way of continuing our relationship in some form. Periodically, there should be further intensives and prolonged sessions together in groups.

I don't think this is the only way things can be done. This is the model I am currently exploring with people and I hope others will develop different possibilities.

I am thrilled that the Guild is beginning to discuss mentoring in an open, communal dialogue. Hopefully, a discussion of these issues will help us develop a thoughtful, consciously designed experience for students/practitioners. I know it would have been extremely valuable for me in my career to have had the opportunity to work with someone not only skilled in our method but also able to understand and address my specific needs as a person and practitioner. It is and important part of one's development and needs to be considered as an integral part of the training process.

Finally, let me say that our work has to do with learning, learning to: look at another human being who is distressed and be able to see their wholeness and grace; touch another's body and feel their life, their pulsation, their rhythm and in this touching to become one with them; feel the miracle of someone's body (and life) change in our hands as they come to rediscover themselves with a love that is free of self-judgement; ignite vitality in others with the flame of our own vitality. These are the challenges of our work with clients and helping to develop these skills in our colleagues is the challenge of the mentor relationship.

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***** News Flash *****

The Board of Directors has appointed Richard Rogers to fill, until the next election, the vacancy created by Joanna Dawe's resignation as Vice President.
Congratulations Richard!!

In Touch, SPRING, 1994
DRAFT

Mentorship Proposal for *Feldenkrais*® Practitioners

PURPOSE: To encourage support for sharing the work with practitioners in an open, generous spirit. We will all benefit when everyone in our field improves and keeps the *Feldenkrais* Method a professional and beneficial way of living.

1. Experienced practitioners who would like to help other practitioners would be listed in a separate "Mentor" section of the Guild directory.

2. These mentors would agree to charge 60% (or less) of their normal fees. If a mentor allows observation of FI's, it will be done at no charge.

3. The Guild will include on the annual dues statement a Mentorship agreement with the rules attached. This will begin in the 1995 directory.

4. Mentors shall be certified practitioners with five years experience and Guild members in good standing with an active practice.

5. In future conferences, there shall be a workshop to train mentors to be more effective teachers of practitioners.

Recommended to the Board of Directors by the Steering Committee - February 20, 1994