

## Notes on Amherst Tape #31

- Written by Lynette Reid, sometime in 2002-4, as a contribution to the Canadian regional newsletter of the FGNA.
- When I wrote it, I found myself thinking, “how *does* one write about ATM?”
- Posted on <http://feldynotebook.wikispaces.com> and [kinesophics.ca](http://kinesophics.ca)

On July 2, 1981 (#31), Moshe begins to introduce FI to the Amherst trainees. He is silent for a long time at the opening of class. After a joke about the hard work of yesterday's lessons walking on the buttocks, he comments “I don't know how to plunge into that thing of getting so many of you doing Functional Integration.”

One row lies and the row behind sits over their heads, and he has us begin to explore rolling heads. [I'll use “us” throughout to capture the experience of following the tapes.] In an atmosphere of calm and patience, he gives us a long time to feel the experience of rolling our partners' heads, and the partners to experience having their heads rolled.

In the previous week we've seen and discussed videos of Moshe doing FI with Raesa, a child with CP (June 29-30, #26-7), and Elizabeth (June 30, #28), a child born with brain damage such that she could not even lift her head when she came. Discussion often centers on the question, what is missing for the student so that she can bring her intention into action? Sometimes it's what we would classically think that we teach in Feldenkrais—how to be able to turn the pelvis when using the feet on the ground (for Raesa). Sometimes it's the deeper issue of the student's sense of her own power. Elizabeth has everything Moshe can give her to be able to walk; she doesn't walk because she's learned that there is a strategy safer than personal risk—getting help from her father.

At the end of this first head-rolling session, he comments on a person lying on the floor—comparing the space behind left and right knees. He brings the skeleton to the table, to show the contribution of the skeleton itself to the way the knees rest on (or away from) the floor. Moshe teaches in paradoxes: This is the famous moment when he sits the skeleton, showing that the skeleton itself can provide a completely stable sitting “posture”. At the same time, he makes the point that this stability of the skeleton is death. Life is risk, instability, movement: That's what the muscles are for. He says his next book will be called “The skeleton and the future of consciousness.” Your skeleton will survive your soul—it will exist long after you are gone. (Moshe puts his shoulder around the skeleton and leans on it as though it's a good, reliable friend.) At the same time, in what sense does it “survive”? It exists, that is all. Is it “alive”?

And he comments about these paradoxes that you learn from what makes you think. Understanding comes from questioning, from not being complacent about the relationship of words to thought.

The person whose knees we were noticing comes to lie on the table. Unless you have skeleton consciousness, you will not understand why the one knee is further from the table than the other, Moshe tells us. He comments on many features of how the person is lying on the table, introducing some of the many landmarks we look for, that indicate to us the unequal tonus the person brings the table from his habitual manner of standing in gravity. The midline of the face pointing to one foot. The angle of the eyes that would rest on the horizon in standing. The midline of the legs and whether the head is to the left or right of that. The tilt of the head relative to the shoulders. The direction of the feet. The person on the table is more organized to stand on the right leg; there is more space behind the left knee.

Suppose that medicine wants the leg to lie flat: they cut the muscles attachments, or push the knee with force (i.e. apply force in a direction that would break the leg). He seems to be referring to the surgery that Raesa underwent, cutting her Achilles tendon, and the question someone had asked about what pushing from the knee did to allow her previously contracted leg to lie long. You have to look at how the whole skeleton is organized such that the knee rests like that; and you have to change not just the muscles (with reference now to Elizabeth's FI), but create a change in a system that makes its own choices, manifests its intentions in action. And the idea of supporting the skeleton in its current configuration is important here.

After a break, he leads an ATM beautifully shaped to the questions he has raised in this first FI session. What would enable the knee (and similarly the elbow of an arm stretched overhead) to lie flat? The ATM is one we're all familiar with, rolling from the fetal position lying on the (right) side to the back, arms outstretched overhead and legs outstretched, a smooth reversible movement. I'll go through the ATM with the assumption that basically it's familiar to you, and mention what he highlights.

He begins us in side-lying with the movement of the left arm sliding overhead on the floor, feeling where the arm (the elbow) wants to stop lengthening, feeling where the chest and head want to start to turn. Then we explore the movement of the leg lengthening down, feeling the pelvis participate, and adding a movement of very slightly lifting the head (1/10"). Combining the movements brings the discovery of what in the middle co-ordinates and leads the movement of the whole left side lengthening and turning back. Then each movement is done alone again, to sharpen awareness of where the "two" movements meet in the core. Then the focus comes to be on the moment where the arm and leg are partially lengthened, still bent, and a slight roll of the middle backwards, shoulder and pelvis turning simultaneously, allows the arm and leg to straighten further, in a completely passive fashion. Slowly more and more of the Amherst students are rolling with simplicity and ease all the way to the back.

From the back he has the students shorten the right side, arm and leg bent half-way to where they were in the original position on the side. Then slowly, slowly, in 50 movements, a lengthening of the left arm and leg, and then folding of everything together brings us back to our sides. Only you can feel where you need to stop and go back and begin again, he tells us; only by feeling the whole left side and its length can you roll with simplicity and ease to the side. We spend some time leading with the arm and chest; some time leading with the pelvis and leg, to clarify timing. Then rolling with everything together: the whole side moves together in a thousand bits, the rate of contraction the same for everything. (The tonus therefore equalized.)

Starting from the right side again, he develops the movement, bringing awareness to the knee moving away from the elbow, the ankle from the wrist, the toes from the fingers, the movement of the head at a crucial point. If at any point there is an exertion in the movement, he says, stop there and swallow saliva. (See AY #17.)

How do the knee and elbow lie now?

When we come to stand and walk he assures us that the brain is smart enough to make the side that feels worse come to match the side that now feels better, rather than vice versa.

That afternoon (tape #32 PM2), he teaches the other side, and mentions at some point that in **this** place, half-turned from side to back, you will learn things about what it is to be standing vertically that you could never learn in any other way. This will make clear to us many of the things we do in FI and why we do them, he says. And what trapeze artists need to do as they jump high to catch hold of a trapeze.