

Interview with Ruti Alon

by Ilan Jacobson

Ruti, the objective of this interview is related to trying to find out Moshe's ideas about awareness and the way he taught it and of course your understanding and your personal experience with this. So we came up with three questions, the first one is:

"What is Moshe's definition of awareness and how did he "teach" it? As he said "I don't want to teach but I want you to learn".

Yes, something very central, I would like to quote two statements of Moshe that seem a paradox, at the beginning:

One of them is: "If you know what you do you can do what you want" which puts the highest value on "to do what you want" and the knowledge or the awareness is the means, the instrument. The main aim is to be able to have a free choice, it was very important for Moshe. The other statement is "awareness through movement" which puts the highest value on the awareness using the movement as means to organize people, and being able to improve all kind of ways not just movement but thinking too. Movement is very easy for the purpose of showing how the brain works, how it can improve itself. So these are two different views, and actually is awareness the highest value, the central value of the method? In a way, when we give an FI we do not address the awareness of the person, we rather talk to the nervous system, to the sub-conscious, where things happen, we talk the language of the nervous system when we are talk movement, pressure, connections and it makes its own conclusions and the change comes about from the sub-conscious. It is not to be explained, it is not that the person knows consciously, in a human way, what is going on while doing the movement. If I take it to the extreme, if you do an FI to dogs they also improve very quickly, or children, it is not the awareness. In the process we need awareness for the purpose of learning; the teacher needs awareness to see what is going on. In the ATM we use more of the awareness of the student. There we really give the person the independent control so they have it, in their power; they know how to bring about again the changes and can control how to work on them, because they understand the process. Actually we do not have people who come to us and say "*oh, can you teach me to be more aware, I would like to be more aware*"; they come to us for their problems, usually in the body, in functioning.

Sometimes when I teach graduates and I ask them what is the central value of the method? What is the essence that makes it so efficient? They tell me: 'awareness'. I give them small examples of movement, very small processes, using no awareness, and they feel better, they feel improvement, so it is not necessarily the awareness that brought the change. Awareness is something we can use, sometimes more, sometimes less, but no doubt the teacher needs to always have it. It is very good when we can also involve the understanding of the pupils at some stage of their development. Until they are also aware it seems like a miracle, *only you can do that*, they do not know how. The moment they understand the inner dynamics of how you created it, it is not a miracle, then it is their asset, and this is beautiful. So this is what awareness gives us. Moshe used movement as a meeting ground between the human awareness and the sub-conscious. The body is a bridge between absent-minded and intentional movement, how else can Moshe get into the nervous system, get into the brain and convince it to change its conclusions? That is the beauty of the method, it is not that we form a preconceived change, the body acquires the idea and adopts the option, the body is willing to update its habits. The body, I call it the unconscious, can do movement unconsciously and we can also do movement in a controlled conscious way. That is the reason we can use

movement to get into the hidden world of the brain and to suggest the need for change there, so this is how movement is the meeting ground between awareness and not being aware of habitual movement. So movement is like the agent or the mediator which you trust will go inside, then you may get the sub-conscious to respond. You do not know how it is going to respond, you cannot calculate it, you can just notice it if you do the process. Your awareness taught you that this is the process one has learnt in nature, it will take you to progress. Babies learn without awareness, babies learn through process of curiosity, trying many variations, feeling them, assessing them, considering the feedback if it is good, if it serves their intention and in this way they draw their conclusions, their habits. Moshe taught us, if we follow this process of creating habit unconsciously, we can consciously repeat the same pattern of learning and then we get such strong results, such efficient results. When we do the process the same way humans learn in nature, it gives us the best results. We cannot know what will be the result of a process, but if we go through the dynamics that were in nature, we could decipher through awareness which result will always be better for our well-being. For instance, babies do not adopt things that are difficult or hard for them, and then when we go gently in the ATM there we will get good results. If we do it with ambition or we do too much then nothing will stay, not for a long time anyhow.

It is interesting that Moshe referred to an FI which he gave without awareness. He said that one FI changed his whole approach to the method, all his way of thinking. In this FI, he had a person that he knew for some time. Moshe was tired and did not know what to do, he told the person to sit on the chair, he had a fantastic chair, a Swedish Akerblom chair. He used to say that just sitting on it for half an hour made you feel better. So the person was sitting and Moshe was standing, putting his hand over the head trying to move it. Moshe was falling asleep, every now and then he felt his head was dropping down, he was tired, he did something with the head and tried it again. He made a decision within himself that he would not want to see this person again, he did not know what to do with him, and for this lesson he would not take money, which was a big thing for Moshe. When Moshe finished, he was frustrated and bored, this person got up and said "Moshe, today that was the best lesson you ever gave me! I feel so good!" and that is where the openness of Moshe lays, his ability to be aware every moment, he did not just dismiss the surprise but he investigated it, why? Why was this lesson so good? When he was not trying to do a good thing it was the best thing? He came up with the idea that his ambition and his preconceived ideas what needs to be done to do the best are in the way. His head dropped during the lesson, being too tired to think he did whatever he had in him, what he accumulated during the years, not everyone has that! Then his intuition and knowledge worked the best. And he said that from that day on he changed his way of working, he gave himself the permission not to try hard to be aware and to know everything and to calculate and to strive for what is better, but allowed himself to forget what he knew and trust his intuition. Actually in order to move away from his conscious ambition he needed to fall asleep, nothing else would shift him out of that urge. So, after that he could do it consciously, he could detach himself from direct planning.

You can see that he wastes a lot of time at the beginning of a lesson, trying this and that, not knowing, allowing himself not to know, allowing things to form in some layer of him, that is not the conscious preconceived sharp idea of what to do. So this is an interesting aspect about awareness. Very interesting. He talks about it in Amherst, he told us this, of course, when we were studying with him. I had this specific Amherst tape during my training in Italy, one woman, she was very bright, a perfectionist, learning everything with the desire to know all about the method. Hearing Moshe saying that, she got up and said: "I don't know if I can learn this method." She could not have respect for falling asleep during the lesson. She could not take it, maybe by now she thinks about it differently. Some people call it intuition, and of course intuition does not just come from the air, it comes in areas, where you investigate

original thinking, you struggle with questions, you invest in them, then you accumulate your awareness. I tell people that the force of their personality, what they radiate is the moments they have accumulated of their own original thinking. Their being aware. So, awareness also serves a weakness. Moshe used to say that one does not grow up learning by oneself. The dependency period is so long. It takes a whole year to stand up on one's own feet and 20 years until youngsters become independent. Some people need more, and there is always somebody there, even if they do not tell you what to do, youngsters do not like to be told what to do, but somebody is there, who can put things in place if something bad happens, somebody knows, somebody is looking, it is part of the learning, we need that witness, there is the biological necessity of a teacher. Now awareness is as if we set an observer to ourselves, we are both the learner and the observer, so with awareness you can learn by yourself.

There is another quote by Moshe, I was very astonished, I tell you, during the whole training, I felt that it pulled me so much higher than my capacity to think, it opened the world to me in a way that I was not sure I would get it, but one day he said one sentence and I took a deep breath of relief. He said: *"To be able to give a good FI is like being a mother, who instinctively knows what the baby needs, there is just awareness there, the baby cannot say and the mother just feels it instinctively, she knows if he is too much pressed, or too tight, or he needs to be lifted, or whatever, she is even aware of any small hint"*. After being experienced, these things come more spontaneously; the awareness reaches a stage when you do not need it anymore. Knowledge happens by itself, you do not need to decipher it and work it out stage by stage according to the protocol.

Another thing Moshe said about the whole process of the teacher improvising the FI, which is the highest possible dance between two people, when one person makes himself available to another one, thinks for him, feels for him, tries out for him, lending all his experience; Moshe said: "in this FI 80% is intuition and 20% is knowledge." Only 20% are knowledge, awareness, 80%, is intuition which is for me an indirect awareness, processed knowledge reaching intuition, a stage that will appear spontaneously when you need it. You do not hold it, you do not need to remember it, and it is not an academic control. At the end of the San Francisco training, one day, Moshe asked the people standing near the blackboard to write what they think is the main essence of the method. People said many things, many people were impressed by the gentleness, and movements are effortless, gradual, people talked about interactions, integration. There were many things written there, but Moshe voted for exploration, the attitude of EXPLORATION, an open-end search, you need to reach into the not knowing, you need to allow yourself to be ignorant, you still use everything that you know, it is the totality of awareness and not being aware, awareness and not being locked about it, being open and see where it leads all the time, to look for what makes a connection, what is the formula here, what is the idea. So that is what he wrote on the blackboard: the essence of his method is the exploration attitude that makes it successful. Today, I see in the method many more values, where awareness is just one of the means, one of the instruments to get to the core. The aim is to always awaken the nervous system, the brain, the mind, the core of the person to shake him from his or her compromises and to re-invent something better, not to be stagnant, to have the urge to improve, and for this you need all the time to explore and to decipher and to try different things and feel them, and evaluate them and try others, and even if you find something good it is not forever. The search to make progress goes on all the time, on and on and on, to love the process of solving problems, improving, updating, upgrading and one of your instruments is awareness, a major one. That is how I see awareness today.

So we go to the second question, which is: "What environment nourishes awareness?"

I call the environment that nourishes awareness a greenhouse condition. It should not be threatening, not goal oriented, not frustrating, not judgmental, no fear of failure. It should be really supportive, supportive and still challenging. It is not just comfortable, doing nothing. It should have curiosity underneath and some challenge, but really give you the time, the leisure to feel and find out for yourself, and this is really the style that we use during the work. I have a personal issue with that when I developed the Bones for Life program where I need sometime to go to a more dynamic style and still have organic learning happen. I have some solutions there to make it easy and safe.

Moshe used to say that if you are tense or try hard, you are unable to discover something new. You have no ability to discover what is better, you are bound to do what you trust yourself doing all your life, and you just repeat the habit. So in order to go beyond the habit it needs to be comfortable, because otherwise you just learn how to be frustrated. That is how some people are. I find it is the hardest thing to explain to people and to really reach that style. It takes a long time in ATM to attain this attitude, because we are in a society where the mentality is very ambitious and we think that we are a good person if we put out there all that we can, and we interpret that doing the best is doing the most that you can, harder, quicker, farer and we need to change the content of that intention and say o.k. better is more sensitive, more efficient, more exploring, more aware, putting other values there.

We need to promote other values, and this is the way I see Moshe as the heart of the conscious revolution that took place all over the world. Some people did it in philosophy and in talking. We are doing it through movement, actually through what the spiritual leaders say.

By the way, another thing about awareness, Moshe enjoyed making a distinction between awareness and consciousness. He put it down as a riddle in San Francisco and never wanted to reveal immediately what is the difference. He allowed people to ponder on it for two months, what is the difference? What is higher: awareness or consciousness? Finally, he graded it so that awareness is higher than consciousness. Actually, it might be a thing of agreement, but that is how he considered it, he said consciousness is if I am not asleep I am conscious that I am awake, but it does not mean that I really know what I am doing, how I am doing it, what is going on and what are my considerations, awareness is really getting a fuller picture, conscious is a lower level for him. When people asked him what the difference was, he used to say o.k. take my next public workshop on the weekend and you will know.

The third question is a very personal thing: "How did you begin to notice yourself in awareness through studying and practicing the Feldenkrais Method?"

I will surprise you by saying that I think I had been studying with Moshe many years and I was not yet aware. One insight I got while I was teaching in USA, one of the first years '72 or '73 a participant took the lessons in video, that was a new thing then, and I never saw myself in a video before. Actually I had two moments of insight on that day. I was working on one woman as an example, on her head as she was sitting on a chair, she had a headache and I was working to free the neck and involve the back, and I was talking and explaining my way of thinking since it was a demonstration, I tried to tell them the little I knew of what I was doing. It is not as in Feldenkrais training, they were not a group of Feldenkrais people, some psychologists. In our training we were told not to speak when doing an FI, so I was talking and all the time I felt guilty, I thought "I am wasting, I am spoiling the lesson for this person, I am taking advantage of her, sacrificing explaining everything." To my surprise, she got up from the chair, she felt so good, her headache had done and she was standing upright. I needed to reflect on what would be if we could involve the non-verbal communication of the

FI to the nervous system along with clear verbal explanations and involve the human awareness of the person as well.

And actually Moshe talked more and more along the years during the FI. When he taught us, he assured us that what we could do for people was through our hands and not through words. Words can be a trap. Even now, I still have the habit of not breathing a word, I do talk when I teach, but if I am with one person, I am silent, but now I know that it helps, it helps to add this awareness.

I had another moment of insight during this specific workshop. I saw myself in the video, we were all sitting on the floor, this was the style of the advanced workshops, and I saw myself sitting all bent over, crouching, rounded back, my neck terribly arched in, and my head projected forward. "Goodness" I thought, is that me after all these years of Feldenkrais, I come to teach and this is how I sit? I must say that all the years that I studied with Moshe I avoided any attempt to directly correct something in my posture. We need to provide the organism with the choices and it will correct itself, and then it will improve. I really did not try to judge, did not dare to interfere but seeing that picture, it did something to me. Afterwards, I exchanged a few lessons with an Alexander teacher. They go directly to the final product; they do not do anything for cultivate it as we do. I could make good use of their ideas, because my body was trained to apply options. For unprepared people it could be artificial. I started to add this part of awareness to look at posture and some shortcuts to secure weight bearing alignment in my program for the bones, because there posture is a crucial necessity. Of course, after a process of movement, that will bring you an upgraded posture and how you can own it in a way that will not be an artificial correction but something organic. For me, it was some awareness from another direction.

You asked "*how did I learn*" – "*how did you begin to notice yourself in a state of awareness through studying and practicing the Feldenkrais method?*" I was helped a lot in the United States; I was teaching at the Esalen Institute, it is a growth center for all kind of workshops, a development center. I would come there once a year for a month, I would teach during a weekend and during a whole week and the rest of the month I just took workshops and did things I never knew existed in my life. It developed me a lot, it completed something for me, and I could start to notice when I was worried, when I listened to the hidden game inside me, to my fears, to my considerations, which were usually so well covered. It really helped me a lot and helped me to understand other people. I remember one workshop with EST which is now called Forum; I began to be aware of other aspects of my personality a real revelation. Then Moshe took this workshop too and enjoyed it. Werner Erhard the leader wanted to establish for Moshe an institute in the United States but Moshe refused. He probably wanted to do things in his own way. More than anything else, what has been building my awareness was the many years I studied with Moshe and taught his method. I attended the lessons in Alexander Yanai for 8 years before he did our training. ATM was sheer miracle for me; I did not know how he created an improvement at the end of every lesson. I could follow the process, some processes I wrote down, and I could do it again and see with other people that it worked, but I had no clue why it worked. It was after the training of the FI that I started to have the insight of the connections and the perspective of integration realizing how the reciprocal connections do the family therapy to the whole organism. The awareness comes in layers. Until today, each lesson I teach I lie first on the floor, I do it for my own pleasure and I discover new clues. The awareness just unfolds, more and more and more and this is great. It is never boring.

(Transcribed and edited by Josette Osser)