

# CURIOSITY, COURAGE, PRESENCE

## Interview with Russell Delman - Lewes 1993

I started with Moshe when I was very young. I began training when I was only twenty-three. My background had been in psychology as an undergraduate. It was a time - late sixties, early seventies - when human potential psychology was getting popular and people were beginning to make mind-body connections or acknowledging the unity of mind and body. I was investigating some of these methods like gestalt therapy, yoga meditation, Reichian work, while I was still in college. I graduated college young - I was about twenty. I had worked in drug rehabilitation leading group therapy, being a counsellor, applying some of my psychological training.

When I started with Moshe I was teaching yoga and leading gestalt therapy groups. I was a young man living in San Francisco and didn't really have an established profession or anything - I was too young. A friend of mine whom I respected a lot had mentioned that Feldenkrais was kind of 'leading edge', that he was ahead of what everyone was doing. When I found out that he was doing a training programme in San Francisco, without knowing anything more about the work, I decided to do the training. I went into the training not knowing what I was going to be doing, not knowing that there was touch work. It really was a leap of faith.

*So how long were you into the course before you started to make any sense of what was going on?*

Any sense is a bit vague ... But let me say it took me a while to understand the work wasn't about movement in the sense that it wasn't about learning these moves. I could learn the moves pretty easily. I was very agile and athletic but it **took me a while to realise there was something much deeper going on here**. It wasn't until three quarters through my first year that I realised this was not just a movement system that I was going to master very easily. It had to do with very deep thought, biological thought, evolutionary thought, psychological thought, and that it touched on so many things. I was getting that inkling but not in terms of putting anything together ... It wasn't until midway through my second year that I got hooked on the work. And I'm still establishing more and more connections as to what the work is about.

*What was the spread of work like? Was it mainly ATM or mainly Functional Integration?*

We started both from the beginning. After the first week I think we started doing Functional Integration so that division never really existed on the San Francisco training. This was Moshe's first large training. Before this he had his thirteen Israeli trainees. They would meet for an hour or two a day, I guess five days a week, over a number of years. These were people who had been going to his ATM classes for a while. They didn't do any ATM in their training. San Francisco was the first training that had a large group (sixty-five people) and he had to organise information in a very different way. He didn't give lectures to the Israeli group. My training was the first where he had to put together a training programme in that form. It was as much an invention, a novelty for him as for us. Being the type of learner and thinker he was, he was experimenting and working with it ... giving us a lot of theoretical information that he never gave his original group. And working very much with ATM, FI, FI, ATM all day long. We used to meet for eleven weeks in a row. The first year I think it was eleven, then ten and I think it ended up being nine. It was quite a long process.

*Was that deliberately changed for Amherst? That it would be shorter?*

Yes. They made it shorter. Since Moshe's death we have been really starting experimenting with different forms.

*We've been bouncing round the idea of "Let's do it in one year". What would that be like?*

I think that would be actually impossible! In terms of the type of learning that goes on, it's like saying "Well, babies roll, they crawl ... they do this then they walk. Why don't we just teach them it all in the first couple of months so that they don't have to spend so much time on their bellies. Let's get them walking sooner." It's really like that. **We need time to digest. We need time to grow. We need a certain amount of time for maturation.** I can imagine a course being taught in many different ways but I can't imagine it being done in less than three years. Four years seems like a pretty good amount of time to me.

*Moshe's definition of a healthy person was being someone who could translate their dreams into reality. How far do you think you've got down that road?*

I would say that I've been very blessed with opportunities in my life so far. Through the combination of some initiative of my own and circumstances, I've been able to live a number of my dreams ... travelling around the world a couple of times, working in India, having a child, having a long relationship with my wife. Those were old dreams of mine that I got to manifest. Functioning as a teacher, as a guide for other people in meaningful work ... those were old dreams. So I've

had many dreams manifest and the nature of being a dreamer is that they're endless. I can say that some have manifested ... some are manifesting and some are yet to manifest. I'm excited about the future because the visions keep growing. **The vision of what's possible keeps growing and that's great** ... so I'm certainly not doing everything I'm dreaming.

*What about Feldenkrais himself? Did he walk the talk?*

Did he walk and talk the talk? I think in many ways he did and in some ways I would say he didn't. It's hard to know what another person's real dreams are. It's hard to separate within one's own self what are the ego-level dreams and what's the core dream and how to distinguish those things. What's really coming from myself and what's coming from a kind of more superficial level of my self image. Moshe used to talk about having his work on Telstar and having millions and millions of people doing ATM at the same time. I'm not sure which level that was at. Whether that was his dream for humanity, which I can imagine it being, or was it his ego need, which was quite strong, it's hard to say ... I think his dream was establishing a work that would survive. From his point of view, most of the kinds of work that we see around the world that get compared to Feldenkrais work - other therapeutic systems or psychotherapeutic systems - don't have the depth to be around fifty and a hundred years from now. He believed that his work does have that longevity and I would agree with him. We have a solid grounding in both art and science, in biological and evolutionary understanding of human development. That his work got started and that it's taking off and growing ten years after his death now and it's growing exponentially in terms of numbers of trainings, levels of interest. I think that dream has really been manifesting. But it's hard to say what his personal dreams were. I really don't have a sense of that.

*I remember you saying that towards his death, the direction that his work was moving had changed slightly.*

It's hard to make clear sense of that last ATM in Amherst working with some sort of irradiation. It's easy to make it a big thing or to try to diminish it as well. What I think is important for us is to know **that Moshe was a wonderful, exquisite creator, the best I know at seeing things from many points of view.** He did it so well and so spontaneously. He saw us in San Francisco as being mushy-headed in our thinking. We used the term "energy" every time we didn't understand something and we didn't have the patience to examine the situation more completely. His insistence, as a scientist, on more precise thinking was really needed by most of that group as well as the overall culture. I think what he saw was how dangerous it is when people get into a type of thinking that isn't strongly based in a kind of concreteness. I mean he was in Japan and he had seen phenomena with Noguchi's students, flowers opening and closing with the hand going near, things like this. As a man who was interested in so many things, he was of course interested in these demonstrations. I don't think he would argue against something like that, but I think he would definitely see it as so seductive as to stop people from really thinking and sensing themselves. You see ... that's one of the real problems in trainings. There are a lot of things that are "sexier", in other words more interesting at first for many people. For example, the emotional life has a lot more drama to it than paying attention to your elbow as you lift your arm. It does not mean that the emotional life is insignificant. It is very significant.

But if we emphasise the emotional responses during the first year of the training, we are going to get more people catharting, getting into all their feelings. They would get into their feelings anyway but we do not need to emphasise that. We want to bring them to another level. Not that the affect level is in any way unimportant. It is just that it is more appealing to a certain group of people.

The other big group of people love to think about things. So if you give them a lot of lectures, a lot of concepts, they will start thinking to where they cannot sense anything. It is the rare person who starts wanting to stay in sensation and finds it as entrancing and fascinating, as deep and enriching as either the emotional type folks, who go in this direction, or the thinking type folks, who go in that direction. It is a question of emphasis. **What are the directions that people will tend to go in to avoid doing the work?** It is the same thing if you start talking about energy and healing. That is great and interesting and sexy. But there is something important in bringing it back down to "How do you sit? Where are your sitting bones?"

*Is the next stage coming with the Feldenkrais work where people are saying "Ah, yes, we can do this with it, that with it, develop new concepts"?*

Do you mean new applications of the work in the world or new ways of thinking about the work?

*Are all the basic ideas of Feldenkrais Method there now?*

New language to describe it is being developed all the time. Moshe had a system but he did not really have a language to envelop that system. The work went much further than his language, which was based on his own education and life. The language we are now using is in some ways different from his own language. Many of the trainers are getting into a different type of language. Not that he did not, for example, speak in terms of applying understanding of systems theory to the work. He knew about that but it was earlier in the development of systems theory. We are using language to talk about things more clearly I think. More connected to things that are going on in the world ..

I think the work is so solid that as new ideas are worked with in mathematics and science generally - whether you are

looking at philosophy, art, science, as the languages develop many of them will apply to our work. Because **our work works! It's solid. We are just learning now how to speak about it and that is the exciting thing about it.** I don't know if there is an end product, if there's a "best way to talk about it".

*What qualities do you think make the difference between a practitioner who consistently does good work and an OK or average practitioner?*

How to pick out those qualities and sort through my memory of looking at people working? There is a quality in people, a curiosity, not just surface, of really wanting to know how something works ... how someone can be doing something the way they are doing it. With that curiosity there needs to be an acceptance of people. It is not as if you are curious so you can fix them, make them different. But

that you are really taking them in. **There needs to be a quality of presence, of here-ness, of being there with an open mind.** There are those people who cannot tolerate the anxiety of not knowing what is coming up. When they get into a situation, they say "I can do this lesson, I can do that lesson" to this person, not really feeling what that system is asking for. **The courage to stay with that "don't know" mind, the mind that doesn't "know it" yet and functioning out of that place is another significant characteristic.** At the other extreme are the people who don't force anything on a person but who do not know how to investigate. That is where interest, questioning, a kind of inquisitiveness, comes in.

**Curiosity, courage, inquisitiveness, presence ... these kinds of qualities are what really help practitioners to be consistent in their work**

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