

Introduction

On three separate afternoons late in the summer of 1976 I interviewed Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais. Twice in San Francisco and once on the majestic Mann Ranch west of Ukiah in Northern California. I and a few others met with Dr. Feldenkrais^{and talked with him} at first about his involvement in the Martial Arts and then later on of things of a more general nature. Moshe is masterful story-teller whose ability to recreate incidents from his life certainly places him in the tradition of the great Jewish story-tellers.

Moshe the man was born in Russia shortly after the turn of the century. Barely a teenager, he emigrated to Palestine. There, as has been true for the entirety of his life, Moshe's universe was a series of meetings with remarkable people and involvement in extraordinary events. He was a member and leader of the Haggadah, a secret Jewish defense society. Out of necessity he developed a self-defense system employing a unique approach: he photographed many peoples instinctive reactions to various forms of attack. From the similarities (one could almost say universals) Moshe was able to design defensive techniques which were continuations of involuntary responses. Since they were extensions of spontaneous movements they were easy to learn and retain and did, in fact, prove effective.

Leaving Palestine, Moshe went to study engineering and physics in the Paris of the late 20's and early 30's. While a student Moshe chanced to meet Professor Kano, Minister of Education for Japan and also the founder of Judo. It was an auspicious meeting. The story Moshe relates of that first encounter and what followed from

one of the most fascinating I've ever heard. Suffice it to say that Professor Kano decided that Moshe Feldenkrais was the man to establish Judo in the West. Feldenkrais was specially trained by the highest ranking Judo teachers from Japan. In 1932 Moshe opened the doors to his first Dojo, or training hall. Judo was in large part responsible for the re-appraisal by the West of things Eastern.

Date?

But Feldenkrais was also a student and he was fortunate to have been able to study and then later be associated with some of the giants of 20th Century math and Physics including Professor F. Joilot-Curie.

Others...?

There was one event that was eventually to change Feldenkrais' life and consequently the lives of so many others, including myself: the injury to his knees while playing soccer. The injury remained as a persistent nuisance. During WWII Dr. Feldenkrais was employed by the British Secret Service to do submarine research, work which began to be jeopardized by the frailty of his knees. His work made it necessary that he he often set out to sea and the pitching to and fro of the ship wreaked havoc with his knees. Finally he sought the best medical help then available and the diagnosis was always the same: surgery with a 50-50 chance that he would need a walking cane for the remainder of his life. He put off the operation and researched volumes on anatomy, physiology, etc., in the hopes of finding some clue which would allow him to avoid surgery. He found nothig specific. So with the meticulousness of the scientific researcher he set about to learn how to heal himself. He spent months manipulating his own knees and noting every result. Finally, he did affect a restoration of functional

ability to his knees. He was satisfied and soon forgot about his knees until one day he misjudged a curb and abruptly jarred his knees re-injuring them. From this incident Feldenkrais realized that it is not enough to just "fix" something, but that one must also change the overall functioning and use of one's self. One must learn "correct," i.e., optimal, functioning so as to prevent injury or re-injury.

In the process of teaching himself the "how", things became very interesting if not a bit perplexing. Faced with the incontrovertible facts of his own investigations, Moshe was not unlike the physicists of this century who in their work had to confront experimental evidence which confounded established theories and popular notions. It's never easy to confront something new and yet not reach out for a ready-made paradigm or comfortable speculative metaphysics to explain it. Luckily, for us all, Moshe Feldenkrais persisted against incredible social and professional pressures to pursue and to discover an immense body of knowledge about the body.

The man's method: he "teaches", he does not "cure". Diseases are seen as "deviations" and result from organismic misuse resulting from mis-education.

The human organism has but one body with which to express itself. The body consists of the nervous system(it's "core"), the viscera and muscles plus systems in league to protect and serve the nervous system(this is called the "envelope"), and the world of the individual from culture to gravity(the "environment"). This ensemble is the minimum requirement for the conception of a dynamic human being.

Human beings and probably dolphins have the unique ability to learn, possess curiosity, and are not context bound or "wired-in" to set environments. Learning implies the ability to learn patterns detrimental as well as beneficial to our well-being. Learning to learn is at once an exalted function and also an antidote to hubris. Learning to learn means we must be open to others, to the world, vulnerable and susceptible to error if we are to realize true human awareness and ^{experience} real self expression. Conditioning is learning ossified at survival levels. Feldenkrais has much to teach us about how to learn to learn, and thereby free us of our conditioning.

Implicit in sensing, in expressing ourselves emotionally or intellectually is the notion of movement. They are inextricably interconnected and to change one is to change them all. We form our self-image with our kinesthetic experience, with moving in the world, by making distinctions about what is us and what is world. Re-exploring, re-arranging and re-learning basic movement patterns so as to obtain efficient, reversible actions in such simple everyday events as sitting, standing, walking, speaking, breathing can have profound and lasting effects on the entirety of our lives. Vitality wasted in the inefficient use of our bodies, can now be used to express ourselves, to learn, to enjoy.

Our upright posture (Feldenkrais prefers "acture" as it is more dynamic) affords us the unique human perspective and also our special relationship to gravity. To override gravitational conditioning, the individual and group lessons are usually done in a horizontal position. At the conclusion of the lesson when the person returns

to the upright, his relationship to gravity has surprisnly changed, it weighs on him less.

The individual lesson, Functional Integration, is the subtle and usually painless moving of another's body in a deliberate, directed way so as to establish, re-establish, or improve the individual's psycho-motor functioning. The group lessons, Awareness Through Movement, allow the individual to explore for oneself his or her own possibilities. Here it is important to note that no one demonstrates "correct" movements, fore Feldenkrais believes models are a tyranny, an idolatry, and a real impediment to learning. The lessons consist of following verbal indications and are to be carried out slowly and in a non-strenuous manner so as to allow for maximum sensitivity to the prescribed movement. Both the individual and group lessons are not designed to ^{directly} increase flexibility but to increase ^{each} person's awareness and enhance his understanding of himself. Flexibility is the prize for gaining awareness.

Feldenkrais makes no claims to sole possession of the one and true way. He does see himself along with Freud, Reich, F.M. Alexander, Rolf and others as being a large contributor to the new somatic approach to human understanding.

Who's Who and What's What in the Interview

Interviewers: D is Dennis Leri; C is Chuck Alston, student of Tai-Chi and a Neuro-biology student at Stanford; A is Anna Johnson, Mime and Feldenkrais Trainee; R is Robert Volberg, associate of Robert Masters and another Feldenkrais Trainee

F is, of course, Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais

People and terms:

Kano is Professor Kano, Minister of Education for Japan and O-Sensei, or founder, of Judo. Judo: Ju- is gentleness and -do is way, so Judo is the "Way of Gentleness". Koizumi, is G. Koizumi, Sensei (teacher) Judo Eighth Dan and "Father of Judo" in the West. Dan: means step and is designated by a black-belt; so, to get ones first degree black-belt, or Dan, is to only take the first step and is the beginning and not ^{the end} of practice. "Ki" and "Chi" are terms from Japanese and Chinese, translating roughly as "spirit" and are applied to many human endeavors, especially in the Martial Arts. Aikido, Kendo, and Karate are other Martial Arts in the tradition of the Samurai.

Etc.:

When reading this interview keep in mind that Moshe Feldenkrais himself attained a very high degree of proficiency in Judo and wrote several books on the subject with Kano and Koizumi's blessings. So his variance with the currently accepted mystification of Eastern terminology should not be taken lightly.

Feldenkrais Interview.

- D. I'd like to talk about Ki, Chi, and all that.
- F. They're the same thing. About K, and Chi you'd better ask Chinese or Japanese people because they talk about that. I can only tell you that at an international congress of Judo black-belts comprising about 500 members including myself, that on the fifth day Koizumi suddenly says, "Now I'm going to talk to you about the most important principal in Judo training, the Saika-tanden." Some call it Chi or whatever you like, but it's Saika-tanden in Japanese. "But Feldenkrais, come here," and he said, "I believe he will talk to you about that more sensibly in a way which you'll understand something which I feel and know, but which I cannot explain." And he let me explain that for the people then. The thing is this, most people talk about that as if it is a mysterious kind of thing in the lower abdomen with all sorts of metaphysical things. I have no connection with that. It's a useless thing. You write that and they'll say, "Ah, what's he know, he's only a scientist."
- C. But this is only a semantic difference isn't it?
- F. Oh no. A semantic difference? No. Ghosts are a semantic difference? If you are afraid of ghosts, you are afraid of ghosts, and you will never go into a haunted house.
- C. Yes, but you must know from your practice something, the importance of what they call in the language 'tanden'.
- F. Of course I know.
- C. And their description of it, while it may be...
- F. My description of it is only in movement. I am not concerned

with any of the other things.

C. But does it not come to the same thing?

F. No, it doesn't because you see in the one if you've got chi many people would try to do as you and fail & say " Oh, I could never get Chi." To get Chi, you have to get moral courage, you have to be connected to the higher spheres of things. Therefore, you find that this is an impediment to learning. (To Chuck) Have you Chi?

C. I could not say that.

F. Oh, therefore if you can't say, that's what I'm talking about. You can work 20 years and you don't show it. You're not sure if you have it or you don't. Because if it's a mysterious quantity then you must deserve it, you must be born in China or be part of ... what..? How can you get Chi if it's a metaphysical thing that nobody knows? Either you've got it or you ain't got it. If you've got it, you've got it. You ain't got it, you ain't got it. How can you get it? You can't because if you've got it, you've got it. (Laughter) It's almost like est. (More laughter)

D. But what you're talking about is different...

F. Yes.

D. And that's what I want to know about.

F. In movement I can show you what chi is, on you or anybody else. Can you see that my notions on breathing are different from anything you heard before and you will ever hear. You can see it, you can test it, on yourself, there is a marked difference between the one and the other, provided that you can make the

contrast.

D. In martial arts training...

F. Yes..

D. They talk about focusing on one's center a couple of inches below the belly button and a couple of inches or so inside...

F. Well, I don't know that it's a few inches here or there. A point a few inches here and a few inches there, if you go there you will find that it's full of shit. Literally. (Laughter) The idea of Chi is preposterous. How can you get it if it's a point in your stomach? What would you do with the point? What can you do with it? What change will it make to you? The point from which you get some mysterious kind of super-power, the point described properly is the duodenum and is literally full of shit. That's the point of Chi.

D. About the concept of self-defense in general...

F. Self-preservation.

D. Yes, in Body and Mature Behavior you discuss fear as the only instinct that inhibits motion. You explain there the anatomy and physiology of fear and how it can become posturally conditioned thus providing the basis for neurotic behavior. You also give a view of a way to unburden us of this conditioning and the habitual and unnecessary fear with all their consequences.

F. Yes. Yes, ^{first of} well, all that is actually in Kano. I'm sure that I meet Kano's view on that as closely as you can put it in the European language. Kano and Koizumi were always in agreement with me in our conversations and about what I had written. The

more I talked with them, the more we were agreed that that's the way we could understand it properly.

- D. So let's talk about Chi again. What is it to you?
- F. To me Chi is not a thing and not a spirit and not a anything, but the way the body is organized to function and that way in which it functions best. This means that it can with its particular weight, ^{it's brain,} the muscles that it has, ^{produce} the greatest amount of work. And this is possible in one particular organization of the body and that particular organization turns out to be around the thing we are talking. It's a complex appreciation of how a human body is made, how it functions. The head must not be involved in the movement, but must be free, whatever the movement is, to move anywhere. The lower abdomen must be in such a state that it can do all the things it needs to do without disturbing the head. The rest of the body and the arms are not used to produce strength. And that is the truth. Once you get that, if you do, you get the Judo throws, the most difficult ones and you can throw the heaviest person. But to the people who are keen on mysterious things of Ki's and Chi's and consider that something which you have or don't have, this is a complete come-down and they are not interested. They don't want to listen to it. They don't want it to be like that.
- R. It sounds like F.M. Alexander's concept of "use" would be more useful than the concept of Chi.
- F. Oh no, that's not true because his "use" is a limited use. With his "use" you can't throw anybody, you can't even throw yourself.
- R. That's true.

- F. So that's "use". My way of presenting Chi was acceptable to Koizumi, a man whose movement was superb and effective until the age of 80 being able to throw people five times his weight. He was pleased to feel that Chi is not a mysterious thing.
- D. I'm sure. Many people will be pleased to hear that.
- F. Yes, and learn to do it.
- D. Could you say something about equilibrium in the martial arts?
- F. Oh yes. The equilibrium of the martial arts is a very funny one. I can tell you that my mother is a frail little woman and when she was 84 years old she lifted me, with my weight, on her hip for a hip throw and it looked completely fake because it was just unbelievable. Because my mother is the kind of... probably inherited from me some sort of mind like that. When she saw people doing judo throws she said, "I can do it." And it took her about 10 minutes and she learned to do it. And everybody looked because it seemed that she was really going to collapse taking on a weight like my own. She lifted my legs completely in the air, with the greatest ease, not making even the slightest effort of breath. She loves to do it. How do you do that? You say, oh, it's done with Ki. With Chi. Now if I give you anything you want buy some Chi and Ki and do it. Get some Ki and Chi from anybody you like and do it. Now the trick is this, the people who can do it say they have Chi. That's kind-of like... that's to me exactly like saying my mother inherited from me, that kind of stuff. It is putting the horses behind the cart.
- D. We were talking about equilibrium...
- F. Well, so the equilibrium in the martial arts is a very peculiar, a very strange one. It must allow your movement to be faster.

You should be able to recover your equilibrium, your balance faster than the opponent and find any fault in his balance and take advantage of that. Now how do you make your recovery faster than his? He's a human being and you're a human being. Your loss of balance must be recovered faster than his otherwise you cannot control, you cannot do anything to him. Now again, the general consensus is this: you do that because when you have Chi or Ki you can do it. Now I say, fuck yourself. You can't do it unless you can do it. But to get it you have to learn to organize yourself so that you can recover your balance faster than the opponent and how do you do that? Have you ever seen an eighth Dan work with ordinary people or even a second or third Dan?

D. Yes.

F. He destroys them. And how does he do it? Do you see what happens?

D. You can't even see it.

F. You can't even see it. Why is that? The lower Dan attacks and nothing happens. The attacker may be vigorous and strong and nothing happens. Why? Because the eighth Dan recovers his balance first and at the moment the other one attacks him he is in complete control of his body and he changes and recovers his balance so fast that when the other one makes the slightest movement, he can take advantage of it. The reaction time of people is approximately the same. The reaction time of the nervous system is similar from one person to another, within quite narrow limits, unless the person is ill-formed, otherwise you couldn't play tennis or drive a car. Therefore, what can

be done is only a way of linking that part of you which sees and hears and listens and feels. Your way of moving your legs and pelvis in order to be co-ordinated must have no waste of energy, no waste of work, no waste of push between the head and the spine and the pelvis. So that again shows you that there is an organization of skeleton and head and the link between them is so organized so that you can move fast. And when your organization is superior, then the reaction time is of no consequence. The reaction time is the same for you as for him, but you organize yourself and recover your balance faster than he can and therefore beat him. And in Judo that thing is really done. When the body is organized so that you can move better and faster than your opponent, it's not a question of competing with him. Kano showed there were at least ten distinct grades of quality. Because a Mifuni (one of the early and highest ranking Judoka) would never be beaten by a fifth Dan. It's inconceivable. A Mifuni would take a fifth Dan and just throw him and not compete with him. And by the way, if you want to experience that... (demonstration throw on Chuck). So you see, to me Ki, like everything I do, is a concrete thing which can be taught and learned and which is common to every human being provided the man is willing and he is a normal person, means he has no real defects. But even with the defects, he can learn to do it. (To Chuck) You can feel that what I did was not pushing with a lot of strength, but somehow using your skeleton. The way you stand.

- C. First you demonstrated putting too much into it, then too little, and then something in between. I could feel it.

- F. You can feel it and that's the kind of thing I consider to be Ki. That I can teach anybody. But if it is taught ^{to you} in a limited way, you will do it only in that situation. To transfer your learning to other things is a long job.
- D. So you are not saying that there is nothing to the concept of Ki, but that it's unnecessary.
- F. I think that organization is necessary. Otherwise you can't do it. But it is not a thing which... look, if Ki were a spiritual quantity the way the psychic people may think, then suppose I have plenty of Ki, and I want to bestow you the Ki, I somehow transfer to you some of the power, then you can do anything. You see? That's the idea.. I think that that idea is complete nonsense. But people like Kano have taught Mifunis and Nagoakas and Yokohamas and all sorts of extraordinary people ^{who} were looked upon as god-like. That I can understand, and that I can teach you.

Feldenkrais Interview Part 2

D. What happens to produce quantitatively better neuro-muscular change in the organization of the individual? And what does it mean to someone?

F. The question of what happens and how to produce the change in the neuro-muscular organization of the person and what does it mean, is a very difficult problem and nobody really...

D. Understands?

F. Understands... yes, many people do. Certainly Piaget and others that talk about learning have inquired and found what it is. But you can't examine the brain so you don't know what goes on there, you can only judge on outward things. Now in Judo or in Karate or Aikido, the problem is simple. The problem is only whether you have a good teacher or a bad teacher. A good teacher prepares you. For instance, if a man is to become a first-degree black-belt ^{the teacher} he will give him 3 opponents, lower grade belts, and if he defeats them efficiently, not mucking about for three hours, he will put him against a brown-belt. Not one of the best, but a brown belt, and if he can beat him too, then there is no hesitation of grading him. And then an incredible thing happens. Once he's been graded, from the first time he puts on his black-belt he can beat any of those with whom he had competition in one quarter of the former time and regularly do it. Now with the public acknowledgment of having made the grade he has grown in his own eyes. He has self-assurance and now has greater liberty to judge his ability to beat opponents. He doesn't compete any more with those he's had experience, but he beats them and so is certainly a higher grade.

F. Now if the teacher is good he brings the person to a level of skill and self-assurance so that when he puts him to the test, he has a great chance of succeeding. The bad teacher will just put ^{him} to the trial, in a contest, and if he is beaten by a blue-belt or green-belt it will take him another year or two before he can win a contest again with the same low grades.

D. Because his self-esteem is down?

F. Because he is doubting his movement now. Therefore he is stiff, he is not free to move, his movements become much slower, much jerkier, too late, always hesitating, "Should I do it? Shouldn't I do it?", "Is it a good time? I don't want to fail again." He loses only because he was beaten before. They knocked out of him the idea that he can win, and this is not a simple thing, the idea to win. You find that his movement becomes clumsy, that he misses opportunities, just because he is not free to look at his adversary. To beat somebody by skill you must see when it can be done and when it can't be done. Skill doesn't mean that you force your head through the wall. Therefore a good teacher once he has tested the man successfully will the next few days teach him many things because he is now free to learn them. He will make sure he is never beaten by an inferior man. And how can he be sure? The teacher will take a strong man and will tell this ^{new black-} chap, "Play with him and teach him how to escape from a hold. This means he will hold you and you will teach him how to get out." Therefore he doesn't really hold the chap full strength and so the ^{chap} learns with somebody of whom he is really afraid. He becomes acquainted with him and sees, "I could really get out, because in teaching him I could see things which I couldn't see before." Next time he tells the fellow to hold

him seriously and he will still get out. The teacher after the student has done that can go away, ^{turn his moustache} and say to himself, "I will make a Judo man out of him." Many of them become so beautiful to watch after they've been graded. Within the following week or two, they will beat people that have always beat them before. Those of the same grade who beat him before, now can't do it. Now that is a new learning. He improves his skill to the point that in a year or 9 months, the teacher can present him another trial choosing the opponents for him with the likelihood that his skill will be effective and that he will beat them. For the others there will be no harm because they are supposed to be beaten by a higher grade. And to him it does an immense power of good. Therefore you see that Kano was a very learned and clever man to have organized the thing like that. The real Judo man can fight every real grade in the Kodokan. He is a master in his grade and he doesn't have to compete with people below his grade, he just beats them. But he can also teach them and will let himself be thrown in order to teach them because he knows he has nothing to defend. His honor is safe. So if your question is a particular question about Judo or Aikido, then you have your full answer, but if you want to know about mathematics, there again it depends on the teacher. If the teacher is clever and he has taught you say, matrices, he will present you a problem, which knowing what you have accomplished and how you learn, that you are likely to solve. The solution will necessitate you being quiet, reposed, relying on your skill of thinking. If he presents you with a problem above your head, you will fail and you will find that the

next year you will probably be of the worst in the class and a year later you will give it up altogether. You will say you are no mathematician. If you have a teacher who wants you to learn, then you learn and grow and grow all the time. If you have a teacher who wants to show what a good teacher he is, he ruins most of the people, only the one or two who find actually that the ^{professor} is not much of a mathematician or teacher may succeed, in spite of the bad teaching. But the rest of the class will be a poor class of mathematicians. They won't be mathematicians. Now that holds with ^everything, all sorts of teaching. You can talk about the levels in the neurological way, in the way they've been described by J. Hughlins Jackson. The spine can do all or nothing. No gradation. You need other centers which will make this less jerky. The levels above are hierarchially ordered so that once a level of refined gradation is achieved it will not stay there because even better gradations, even richer... are possible ...

D. Is it ever lost?

M. What?

D. Once you have achieved a certain level, is it ever lost?

M. Oh, yes.

D. It can be lost.

M. Oh, yes, always. That chap that has won a Dan. You present him the same day people with inferior grades that are stronger better and heavier than him and if they beat him and if he is beaten four times running he will go away from the club and will never finish his training. He will think he is no bloody good. Any trauma, any task put to you or by yourself above your ability will destroy you.

D. I didn't mean to interrupt what you were saying about Jackson.

F. In Jackson you have... in the nervous system.. he talks about levels of development. For instance, remember I told you about crawling. You crawl a certain way until the paladin has exhausted it's ability to do. By that time , a higher part of the brain, the striated body, begins to function, takes over and then the movement becomes a different level.

D. Bi-lateral?

M. Not only bi-lateral, but contra-lateral. Which means right hand and left leg move together and so on. While the previous ones were ipsi-lateral, which means always on the same side - right hand, right leg, right side - which is primitive. Even now our reflexes work on the same side, while our voluntary movements are crossed. The left brain works the right side. So there it is. You find actually, in the nervous system, it's the growth of higher and higher... evolutionarily higher centers which take over a job and they make it finer with more gradations, more personal, different with a greater skill, richer varieties.... but always slower... than the primitive movement. If you slip on a banana skin, you right yourself immediately. Now who righted you? The most primitive all-or-nothing system. Only afterwards do you realize it was a banana skin. So the neuro-muscular levels, the hierarchies, are there in everything. In what ever anybody is doing it as clear cut as with a good teacher in Judo, Kendo, Aikido or..mathematics and physics.

D. In your answer to my question about quantitative change in the nervous system you said nobody knows so...

- M. So how can you make that change? Everybody subjectively feels that there is change...
- D. That's my next question. Subjectively, in my life, from the work in the class I feel a change. So qualitatively...
- M. What is the quality?
- D. Are there hierarchies of quality?
- M. Yes, this means that you can now decide yourself what level a thing is; what is more fundamental, what is detail. And with that you have risen to a higher level. If you can in mathematics know that this is just a detail, this is a problem, if you can distinguish between the problem and the background you can solve 50 problems.
- D. A problem. The problem of living ethically. It's been said that ethics is the limiting of possibilities.
- M. Of course, you eliminate the things that are not ethical.
- D. Right....
- M. Therefore, you restrict yourself to a much limited range of things to do.
- D. It seems to me, from our work and in Buddhism, in Zen, first you must be able to distinguish possibilities, perceive more possibilities to make a choice.
- M. But then it's not ethics.
- D. Then it's not ethics?
- M. The ethics is that there are possibilities you have to rule out because they are unethical. Zen is not an ethical teaching. It has nothing to do with it. They are two different disciplines. You can't approach one with the tests of the other. You can't, for instance, examine mathematics with ethics. They have nothing to do with one another. Zen is not an ethical

teaching. It is a teaching.. of what..? It doesn't try to make you ethical.

A. True.

M. You will become ethical afterwards, because when you have the power and clarity of vision you will see that a human being cannot live alone without others and therefore you will become ethical. But the initial thing is not teaching you ethics.

(Following this was a short discussion of the work of Krishnamurti with which Dr. Feldenkrais stated he was familiar. He said that while Krishnamurti's writings and talks were very beautiful, Krishnamurti had never been able to teach without teaching, that while Krishnamurti asks us to give up teachers and models, he is there, and ^{so} a teacher and model by default. I remarked:)

D. It is very frustrating.

M. Now I present only a situation. And I never tell you, "I do like that.", or, "You do like this". I never tell you this is better done this way. It is from the situation that you learn and decide. But I do give you the means to make it in a short while. Otherwise you may spend years to do that like I myself did. And then by the time you spend the years you'll find like myself, that "alright, I have a lot of knowledge but this is only worthwhile if young people can learn it and improve their own lives." To mine it makes little difference now.

D. To mine it makes a lot of difference.

A. Yes.

M. To everybodys. To mine it would have made a lot of difference

if I had a teacher like myself 20, 30, 50 years ago.

A. It may still take me 20, 30, 40 years.

M. No, no. You don't mean it. You will see that it will take

much less than that. A few years of those learning situations and you will begin to think and see for yourself things that you didn't see before.

You are on the horse. You will see that it

won't take you more than 4 or 5 years before you can do,

write, think, and invent your own situations & also be able

to adjust to every particular situation in a very clear and

effective way.

D. There are a lot of traditions and schools around which pur-

port to teach, but in fact don't. (I was thinking about the

ineffectiveness of many disciplines and Moshe was responding to

successful methods which don't teach, but which set up

situations where people learn).

F. Now in Zen you find the same thing. You go to learn from a

master and you join his group or his family. You learn from

him, you take his classes. Then there comes a moment where the

master lets you take the class. When does he decide that?

D. When you are almost ready

F. When you are ready. What do you mean, "...you are ready.."?

That means you suddenly stop being a pupil and become an

assistant to a guru. So you have risen to that level. How

does he judge that? He sees that is by your ability, in a

moments notice, to perceive what is right, what is wrong in

other people's action. Just like when I give a lesson and

suddenly you have a different, more precise, clearer and

easier way of seeing things around you or that you didn't

see before at all. For example, in that kind of rolling

we did. With the same movement and the same coaching one does something more in keeping with the spirit of the teaching, while in another you see only the external modes of the teaching. In him you don't find the real essence and to him you have to teach every detail.

A. But how do you know...some people can do something very well, but in order to be a transmitter of that...

M. But what is very well? How do you judge that it is well?

A. Well, I'm looking at the idea of someone being able to roll smoothly.

M.. But he didn't know that he was smoother, he just rolled. It was I who told them, " Look at the difference, this one is rolling noiselessly and the other bumps the floor. Actually, they were gentle bumps, you could hardly hear them, he nearly rolled but not perfectly. Now who called attention to that. The teacher. Why is he the teacher? Because he can see differences where other people can't. That is a higher level of perceiving.

D. In my perception of our work and it martial arts where it's not so clearly stated, we are learnig to change our frame of reference to ourselves - so that when we lie on the floor & are asked to put our hands above our heads, it's with arms extended parallel to the body on the floor above the head and not arms perpendicular to the body raised towards the ceiling, which would be using the room^{as} a frame of reference. In Aikido I realized that while rolling I could have the room moving relative to me and not me relative to the room. It seems that there comes a point in the learning apprenticeship that turns

into an autonomy, an independence, a living within one's own referential sphere...

- M. Oh yes. In the beginning when you roll, you actually interrupt the contact with the environment while rolling. When you go down with the head you close your eyes and you don't see unless and until you come back on your feet. Therefore, during that time of rolling you don't know whether the room is upside down, where you are, or what your position relative to the room is. Now through practicing rolling, first slowly and then faster, you are able to roll so that there is no danger and you are not involved in preserving yourself. You roll with skill. Then you'll find that you begin to see the room where it is. So while rolling you can actually see the ceiling, you can see the floor, you are still in contact with the floor, you can feel where it is. So if you wish, you can move ^{the} eyes with your head or keep the head fixed on a point. Therefore, you can have the ceiling rolling with you or the other way around. You can carry the reference with you or without you. You can refer to your body or to the room, it's your choice. You can see it either way. Just like when you look at - you know that picture in gestalt - where they show you 2 faces or a vase and in looking at that many times you can see at will the one or the other. And in fact, at one moment you can see them both.
- D. Many people don't believe that, yet as an artist I know that to be true.
- F. Of course. That is a better level of perception. You have the choice of interpreting what you see, the way that suits you, the way you want it. But at the beginning you can see that one moment it appears as a vase and the next moment 2 faces and you

M.
I
will
include
that
picture.

have no say in it. It appears when it wants as either the faces or the vase. You see, it has to do with the way your eyes move relative to yourself and how you interpret the movement of the eyes. Now if you look at the black first and not at the white in the middle you see the faces and not the vase. That's actually what makes the click. It doesn't matter what else you do, it depends whether you look at the white or at the black. If you see black you see the faces and are actually looking at the periphery. Now if you look at the middle and look what the boundary of the white is, then you see the vase.

Ordinarily, what you see comes by itself. Suddenly, you become able to look at the middle, the white, and then the sides, the black periphery, ^{simultaneously} with a very rapid movement of the eyes and you can see either the one or the other or both. At the beginning people have a predilection and so see either faces or vase. See for yourself that you can actually at will by directing your attention either to the black as background or the white as background get whatever you wish. And when you know where to look, the change is instantaneous. It's not that you have to wait & it happens. You change it at will.

- D. In real life situations, for example in our training group, I feel part of the group, I feel like background. Somebody ^{new} comes in and they become foreground. I've been in situations where I've felt like I stuck out, popped out from the background, became foreground. But it seems some people can move in those situations and have the choice to be one or the other.
- M. Yeah well, the thing is, all properly organized functions of a high level are... for example, like reading. In reading a

program, what do you do? You look at the whole two pages and you don't read a thing. You can see at the utmost that it is in English and not some foreign language. You see the whole lot and you can't see the content. You can't read a thing. But now you want to read one line, one sentence and know what is in it. Then you have to abandon the whole page and direct your attention to the phrase and you read it. The phrase you can't read because you have to read letters. But the program can be read. You read letters, words and then whole phrases in one look. Once you have a phrase, in order to go on you must let it go back into the background and find the next phrase you want to read. You reach a higher level of skill when you can bring any part of the background into the foreground and let it go immediately back into the background. You get that skill of picking any detail out of the background, making it the foreground and leaving it as quickly as you pick it out and looking again to the background. That's how you can read and know what's in the 2 pages of the program. The skill is not looking at either the background or the foreground...

D. At the oscillation?

M. You see it's the process of taking it out of the background, putting it back and directing our attention ^{on} the background so that you can select those details that are important to you at this moment, and put them back.

D. At the origins of our consciousness we've learned to make distinctions about what is me and what is world. What's not me is world and what's not world is me. And this cleavage is problematic.

(at a seminar at the Monn Ranch)

- M. I was talking here, today about that. "I" feel myself omnipotent, in the world "I" am insignificant. In the great world what is a human being compared with the galaxies or with all of humanity the generations on the earth past and future? Each one is less than nothing, but in your subjective world the whole world is for you. If you die there won't be a sun. If you die there won't be galaxies. So there it is, it's the same thing. You as detail, the world as background. You must be able to live together. You move yourself in and out of the background. Integrating your insignificance with your omnipotence frees you at that moment of both because you can conceive them together. Therefore, the whole thing doesn't matter, just the thing you are doing. And it's not what you do that's important, it's how you do.
- D. It seems, to follow that out, that in making distinctions between what's me and what's world as I become more distinct. I can...
- M. When you become more distinct, then you are more integrated in the world. If you become, I don't know, a Nobel Prize winner in Physics, it means that you have in Physics involved yourself so much that everybody else is indebted to you and knows you whether they know your name or not. You have left part of yourself in Physics. Look, anybody who becomes famous in his job has actually become intimately integrated with the public otherwise nobody cares whether he did something or he didn't. It's only because his work is important to you and to us all that he becomes famous. The higher the skill, the more background and detail become one and seem the same thing. You can move them in and out depending on your wish. Again,

in reading, with a higher level of integration, you can actually see the content without reading the words. And when you've gotten what's interesting, it stops being interesting and so you let it slip back into the background and go on. Therefore, with all the skills, it's always that ability of contacting yourself and the outside and making that so fluent that you don't feel that you are doing a thing. You feel that you are doing nothing because the quality of our brains ability to handle material is so smooth and rapid that you can do almost anything without being aware of the mechanism of doing it. When that fails in somebody, it's only then that you become aware of how much learning, how much skill, how much training was required without the person even knowing.

This concluded the interview, but Moshe's discoveries stemming from his investigations of what happens when functioning fails and how it can be restored to a level even better than before can be read about in his books. They are Body and Mature Behavior, Awareness Through Movement, Judo, and Higher Judo.

Moshe resides most of the year in Tel Aviv, Israel. During the summer of 1977 he will be in San Francisco to conduct his Professional Training Workshop, and he will also present some classes and talks for the public. Humanistic Psychology Inst. of San Francisco can be contacted for details. The greatest pleasure of the interview came for me when after shutting off the tape machine, Feldenkrais demonstraed a Judo throw on me. The throw was executed so deftly and so precisely that before I knew it I had flown 10 or 15 feet. Luckily, from Aikido training I knew how to fall. But I felt even more fortunate to have experienced what we had been talking about.