

Written for the German Feldenkrais Journal (Feldenkrasi Zeit) with the theme of Pausing

## **Pausing to Reflect on Pausing**

By Elizabeth Beringer

**To Begin:** Scanning. In my early teaching I taught an extended scan in the beginning of most ATMs. As time passed I found this became at times quite boring. Boring? I felt that I “should” be doing long scans. I am not sure where this idea came from. In fact, when I thought about it I realized that although I could remember clearly being led through some elegant scans by Moshe, they were rare. Once I let go of the idea that an extended scan was essential to an ATM, my creativity and curiosity could lead.<sup>1</sup> I probed the scan and introduced lots of variety. Over time I saw how many different functions a scan can serve, and gradually the idea I had of the scan morphed and dissolved into the lesson as a whole.

The scan can function as a kind of apprenticeship of attention. In the very private moment when the student turns his or her gaze to themselves, they are accompanied. The teacher inserts himself or herself into this very personal and individual process by directing and therefore interfering with the movement of attention; altering rhythm, pointing out new details, shifting foreground and background etc. This process continues through the lesson and thus is not necessarily defined by lying on the back as its form.

The scan in the beginning of the lesson functions also as a transition, between whatever was before and the state change needed to turn our gaze inward and engage in learning. It then becomes a ritual to collect oneself and arrive in the present. This is especially useful in classes where people rush in from work or traffic or some other activity that has their attention elsewhere than on themselves.

How did the scan become synonymous with lying down, mainly on the back? In fact all the scanning processes can start in movement—establishing references, the apprenticeship of attention, the act of arriving in the present. Expanding scanning processes help the insights of the work seep into more and more areas of our life.

**Moving:** Ideally there are pauses laced through the entire lesson. When we are engaged in a moving investigation, the rhythm of movement is constantly changing. The arm returns to the floor, all effort relinquished, and is lifted again as if for the first time. We roll, pause, go back a little on the scent of an elusive sensation, pause, and proceed again slowly. “Learning to learn” is learning to insert gaps in movement

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Dennis Leri for actively discouraging the training staff from compulsively doing extended scans all the time in the trainings.

where awareness can grow. Moving slowly is in itself a pause, a rest, an arriving again into the present moment.

**Resting:** Years ago one of my regular ATM students told me she came to the classes for the rests. That in resting, somewhere deep into the ATM, she rested her whole being in way she couldn't at any other time in her life. That's big. There is a moment when the feeling in the room shifts. There is a stillness that appears, discernable in contrast with the busy resting earlier in the lesson. Resting then becomes a destination in and of itself.

**Integration:** Moshe suggested that going for a walk or sleeping were both effective ways to integrate a lesson. Both function as kinds of pauses. Over the past decade scientists have corroborated Moshe's insight about sleep and integration. What we tend to call integration inside the Feldenkrais community is close to what the scientific community refers to as consolidation. This term is used to refer to the process of new learning being stored and remembered. (Integration is a richer concept, but there is an overlap). We know that in the first stage of learning a task, the cerebral cortex is very active, especially areas associated with increased attention. However, hours after the initial learning, activity can be observed in the hippocampus and cerebellar areas as what is learned is stored in a less conscious way.

Studies have shown that this consolidation process is facilitated by a period of sleep within 12 hours of the new learning. And the more REM sleep the rest includes, the more effective the process (REM sleep is the period of sleep associated with dreaming). Individuals who spent more time dreaming (measured by the REM periods) did proportionally better on the tests the next day<sup>2</sup>.

Have you noticed that when teaching an ATM series over a period of days, many students begin the next day more able than when they stopped the day before? This is consolidation/integration in action. How does this actually work, this unconscious elaboration and integration of new learning? Perhaps the wild logic of dreaming helps create the space for the impossible to become possible!

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I drop my daughter off at school. I have a plan. I will go and work on e-mail in a nearby coffee shop. I'm driving toward my destination. I love going to this coffee shop. But something is not right. I am not settled with myself. I pull over to the side

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<sup>2</sup> There is a lot of complexity in the consolidation process. There is variety between different types of modalities: sensory motor, visual etc. For more detail, a good overview is an article published in *Neuron*, "Sleep-Dependent Learning and Memory Consolidation," Matthew P. Walker, Robert Stickgold, Volume 44, Issue 1, September 2004.

of the busy Southern California road to pause and sort it out. My upper back is sore; when I project myself working on the computer it only feels more sore. I decide to alter my plan and go for a walk on the nearby beach instead. It's windy and the wind sings to me. The sky is full of pelicans. I leave with a long back and a light heart.

I am teaching an early hands-on practice in one of my trainings. The students are moving the shoulder on the side, for the first time. The project is to find the easiest pathway either forward or backward for the person they are moving. Anne and Margaret call me over, wanting my feedback. Anne is in the role of "practitioner." She starts carefully and slowly. As she continues she gains speed and moves the shoulder confidently forward and a bit down. Margaret want to feel me do it. moves I put my hands on Margaret's shoulder. I listen and find the same starting angle as Anne, but I stop much sooner, I feel a catch. Pausing and listening I find if I change direction at this juncture I can continue the easy gliding movement. Anne tries again. Can she feel the catch? Yes, if she moves more slowly. So what happens there? Anne starts again, moving in the same path as before just slower. Her partner shifts her legs, unconsciously communicating, "That's not it." I tell Anne to pause when she feels the catch, give up the idea of a particular direction and look around with her hands. Now she can feel it, the change in direction. "I didn't realize the shoulder could change direction like that while it was moving!" she says.

I drop my daughter off at school. It's a week or two later. I am planning on heading back to the beach. I'm on the trail of the great walk the week before. I'm thinking about the wind. As I drive towards the beach my head is buzzing with the flies of all the tasks needing to be finished. I pause in the beach's parking lot. I realize if I walk I will probably spend the whole walk imagining doing these urgent tasks. I have been writing one difficult letter over and over in my mind. The idea of acting on the tasks elicits relief, while the beach starts to look less fun. I change direction and go to the coffee shop, (very close) and find great pleasure in making progress and quieting the buzzing flies through some action.

When we pause, here we can find and exercise choice.

