

With Honor to Yochanan Rywerant

Last Student, Last Touch, Last Joke

- Moti Nativ



Yochanan Rywerant began learning from Dr. Feldenkrais about the Method in 1952; I was then two years old. Many people learned from and followed Yochanan for decades. I was lucky to have the opportunity to become Yochanan's student and friend, during the last two years of his life.

From my first contact with the *Feldenkrais Method* in 1986, I had known about Yochanan Rywerant. Since 1994, while becoming an Israeli *Feldenkrais* practitioner, I heard interesting stories about him from my colleagues, but rarely encountered him.

After my retirement from my position with the government, I furthered my research about Dr. Feldenkrais, and wanted to interview Yochanan as a part of that research. We met in a coffee/book place near his home in Tel Aviv. I was surprised by his unique knowledge and was impressed with his attitude. After this first real meeting with Yochanan, I had no doubt that I wanted to learn from him. Unfortunately, his training had already started. After talking with Yochanan's assistants, I dared to call him and ask his permission to join the training. Yochanan refused to accept me, and said that I had missed too much material. After my second request and another refusal, I was about to let go. Then, I attended Yochanan's advanced training in December 2008, and met him few times more privately. Somehow he softened and before the beginning of the second year he sent me a "yes" through his assistants.

I was the last student to be accepted to his training.



Yochanan I will share with you my feelings about Yochanan and his teaching. After experiencing many great trainers of the *Feldenkrais Method*, I found in Yochanan the teaching that fits me. My first feeling was that Yochanan's style of teaching is very similar to those of Martial Arts teachers I had met. Yochanan was tough, stubborn, an example of dedication to the way and concepts of his own teacher, Dr. Feldenkrais. I asked myself why a master, 86 years old, never discusses himself, preferring to talk about "Feldenkrais". He would repeat and say many times every day, "Feldenkrais thought about this" or "you see, this is *Feldenkrais*".

For those who did not learn from Yochanan - Imagine an old guy, walking around the room from one student to another, nonstop, responding to questions, showing and explaining, over and over again. Not a young man - Never resting, even after teaching for hours, not taking a drink or going to the toilet.

Sometimes, Yochanan would come up to me, seemingly angry, and loudly say; maybe yelling at me, "why you do this", he would catch my hand powerfully to change my hold or direction. To me, these were acts of kindness and thoughtfulness. I thought that he was funny guy. I laughed, and promised him not to it again, and then he smiled, and walked away.

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No one slept, no one felt safe to arrive late in the morning or after breaks Yochanan always watched the door. If someone would get up during the demonstration or lecture, Yochanan would ask "where are you going?". He was aware on anything happening around him.

I liked very much when Yochanan would say "I'm curious". Apparently he was inquiring, even while he was performing a known manipulation (Manipulon in Yochanan's terminology). And then everyone could see the happiness on his face when the change happened - and as usual he would say "this is *Feldenkrais*".

Yochanan's approach to the method was much about physics and physiology; formulas, Newton's laws, expertise in anatomy. I would say very realistic and clear.

Maybe I could use the term "humble" about Yochanan, as he would often say, "It is not me, it is Dr. Feldenkrais and the laws of physics." But do not be mistaken - Yochanan cared and was aware of people's emotions - for instance, he listened carefully to the words people use trying to describe their feeling after a *Functional Integration*[®] Lesson, and would emphasize how it is difficult to express verbally those feelings.

I feel that I have touched upon and described Yochanan as *Feldenkrais* Trainer, though there is much more to say about his teaching.

I would like to say few words about his struggle, and his days in the hospital. I visited him, and also talked with his widow, Berta, and his students that spent much time with him, supporting as much they could. I remember that day I was with him and he wanted to change his position to sitting. He asked me to move his legs, which were covered with wounds. I lifted his legs as gentle as I could; I knew how painful it was for him. He did not say anything. After he was sitting, I sit on his bed besides him, supporting his back with my arm. Yochanan started eating his food, and after a while, he suddenly turned his head to me, and said, quiet aggressively, "you can take your hand of my back, and don't you see that I'm stable, I do not need support". Very much like him. At this moment I thought, this is good sign that he is recovering.



After some days, he was moved to intensive care. I was there that day. He was asleep, then I saw that he looks at me with weak smile on his face, and he raise his right hand toward me. I grabbed his hand, leaned close to him. And he asked quietly to help him turn onto his side. I pushed/pulled him a little on his side, asked the nurse to put some pillows behind him. Then I kept holding to his hand, I put my other hand on his chest lightly, followed his breathing, until he fell asleep. This was our last touch. Next time I visited, he was always asleep.

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Last thing about Yochanan, which I want to share with you, is about Yochanan's humor. I already told you that in my eyes he was very funny; I laughed a lot during the training. Yochanan had some old jokes, those we call here a joke with a long beard. On one of his "good" days in the hospital, he was annoyed by a patient in the same room that kept nonstop yelling because of pain. It was not the patient Yochanan was angry with. "How could it be that in the hospital people are crying for help and no one is paying attention?" Yochanan told me about this room in a hospital where one of the patients kept on crying and begging "Oh, I'm so thirsty. Oh I'm so thirsty". It was big disturbance to the others in the room. After some time, with no reply from the nursing team, one of the other patients, drags himself from bed, with great pain, walks slowly and brings to the crying guy a glass of water, and returns to rest. A while it was quiet, and then a cry "Oh, I was so thirsty. Oh I was so thirsty".

I say here goodbye to Yochanan Rywerant, a master teacher of the *Feldenkrais Method*.

Rest in peace Yochanan, and you and your way will not be forgotten,
Moti Nativ

Photos of Yochanan from his last training courtesy of Moti Nativ and Eva Laser.