Embodied Lives is a collection of writings by thirty practitioners of Amerta Movement, a rich body of movement and awareness practices developed by Suprapto (Prapto) Suryodarmo of Java, Indonesia, over many decades. One of the book's three editors, Margit Galanter, is my longtime friend, Feldenkrais colleague, and co-explorer in the fields of dance and somatics. Many of the book's contributors are also Feldenkrais practitioners, which raises some interesting questions. What might Amerta movement provide the curious and investigative Feldenkrais practitioner? What are complimentary qualities, practices, or theories of Amerta that might enhance our Feldenkrais practices? Do Prapto and his Amerta "dialoguers" provide language and insight that might help us articulate our own experience in movement and in the Method?

Reading **Embodied Lives** is like stumbling upon a distant relative of whom I was previously unaware, but who resembles me in an uncanny way. The book's affect is inspiring, invigorating my internal dialogue about my Feldenkrais work, and refreshing my practice. Most touching to me is the excellent quality of the writing about phenomenological experiences of the self in movement, and the subtle complexities of inter-relationship. The diverse contributors to **Embodied Lives** describe these "un-describables" thoughtfully and eloquently.

"Amerta movement may be seen as cultivating an embodied approach to life through the practice of movement as a skilled art,"[1] the editors explain in the introduction. The Feldenkrais Method shares this general intention with Amerta, along with some practical and theoretical similarities. As in Feldenkrais, Amerta practitioners develop awareness in an exploratory space of non-judgment and patient discovery. Awareness in Amerta is thought to shine a light on hidden or unconscious patterns of being and doing that hinder our growth. The development of awareness is what is seen to shift these patterns. Key here is that in Amerta, one practices awareness while moving, as in our work. Observe the description one Amerta practitioner (who happens to *not* be a Feldenkrais practitioner) makes of a class she teaches:

> *I asked the group members to lift one foot—noticing how they did it and whether they still had a sense of the ground—then to put that foot down—how did it arrive on the ground? I asked them to notice if they followed the foot with the whole body. Did they bring their whole being to the new place… maybe facing a different direction? Being in a new place means being closer or further away from, for example, walls, windows, the others. Did their eyes follow the movement? Or the movement follow their eyes? What did they see, and how did it feel? What did they sense?*[2]

This language is very familiar to us. But there is more, and what comes from the voices of these unique individuals—an archaeologist, a filmmaker, a play therapist with a specialty in autism, a movement therapist in an underprivileged community in Eastern Germany, a Javanese musician, and others—are colors and aspects of awareness as both phenomena and practice that can contribute layers of understanding and articulated thought to our already rich theoretical legacy in Feldenkrais. Consider this contribution from an archaeologist-Amerta practitioner:

> *Whatever the focus of my attention, the aim is to maintain an awareness of both subject and object. Through a process of continuous self-reflexive investigation, a dialogue develops between 'subject' — myself as mover-in-the-environment, and object of my research in the environment — an 'environment-with-mover' that includes me as an active participant. I am reading both myself and my context; surveying 'inner' and 'outer' landscapes — but as different views on a continuum rather than as separate places.*[3]

The writer is providing us a lucid entry into his very internal process of awareness. It is something he does, and something he observes; something he practices and something that happens, as a phenomenon, within him. I can

imagine myself seeking out this quote when I'm searching for how I might describe what I'm doing with my attention during Functional Integration. The scanning of my own sensory experience while attending to the movements of my client is not merely a "me and her" kind of experience, but a "continuum" of awareness that includes my sensing her sensing me sensing her. I cannot arrive at that continuum of awareness without the internal "dialogue" the writer describes.

The idea of *presence* appears in the writings of **Embodied Lives** often. This is a word that many of us in Feldenkrais use to describe something elusive but, I believe, finite—"being present" as product, or a state to arrive upon, after practicing awareness. What if presence were a practice in itself? From Margit Galanter's own essay:

> *Presence is not just something to have or achieve, but rather is a continual process of presenc*ing *that can shift in relation to varied elements as they arise, including being present within one's own center. In this way, presencing is a medium and a filter; both. The practices of Amerta can take years to integrate, and over time I have slowly developed in my ability to experience a greater range of qualities of presencing. Through movement and attention, I can broaden my focus while simultaneously attuning to both the subtle elements of the environment and the spaces and movements between. I can be less self-conscious in my own actions, and come from a 'dialogue view'. This encompassing perspective has helped me tremendously in my work as a movement artist, practitioner, student, and teacher. It brings forth a vividness of experience and has an effect in my artistic practices, vocation, and daily life.*[4]

It seems that "presencing" might be another way of describing awareness, but I feel that Galanter is making a pointed distinction here. Perhaps awareness is a

process, but “presencing” is a meta-process that provides us insight into qualities, textures and movements of awareness. As in many of the named practices and ideas in Amerta movement, *presence* and *awareness* have specificity and dimensions of meaning that might provide useful distinctions for us in our own work. And as I write about these terms, I notice my own limitations of understanding that can only be remedied by practice—lived experience—with these ideas.

Witnessing is a word that many of us may have intersected with in other modalities—Authentic Movement and some Buddhist practices, for example—but is not used widely in teaching our work. Consider this passage from **Embodied Lives**:

> *For me, receiving starts with stopping. I stop ‘doing’, whether that’s thinking or sensing or attending to something, and let myself be quiet, I can begin to receive myself. I might notice a tension in my shoulders or behind my eyes or an emotion; but I settle, feel my feet touching the floor, and I wait. Gradually I find that I have a softer and quieter feeling of empty receptiveness and connection. My focus broadens and I am aware of other sounds such as the movement of trees in the wind outside, the quality of the light or the texture of the carpet. I become aware of what I am already receiving and am in connection with it. I am not alone, I am part of the place and it bears witness to me as I am its witness.*[5]

The word “witness” here implies a compassionate, neutral view, and is arrived upon through awareness and the movement of attention through the body. *Witness* is also used by others in the book to describe the compassionate, neutral observation of oneself in action, alone and with others. This non-judgemental, clear-eyed witness in and of oneself may then turn its gaze on another in neutrality. Thus, my trope offered above—“my sensing her sensing me sensing her”—could be reframed as: “I sense myself breathing and touching;

I observe myself sensing with non-judgment and clarity; there is one in me who is the observer—I'll call her a witness; my witness observes my breathing and your breathing, my movement and your movement; I experience you and me in compassion and non-judgment."

I don't believe the concept of *witnessing* is new to our experience in Feldenkrais, but perhaps the application of clear language—language borrowed from Amerta and other modalities—will help us to deepen our understanding of this natural process, to practice with more neutrality, and to teach our trainees with better tools. Prapto proposes the intention and the practice, clearly and colorfully, in the form of questions for us to explore:

> *How can I be an involved witness, how can I bring together the qualities of actor and audience within my breathing Being-in-Creation?*[6]
>
> *How can we be alive in the changing and still riding the changing without losing ourselves?*[7]

I am already exploring these questions more consciously in my teaching, pleased to be reminded of values I cherish, but find it difficult to juggle in the practical world of a Feldenkrais practice.

While our work shares much with Amerta movement, of course, the differences between us are many. Our method, while it lives happily in a zone outside of traditional science, bears the mark of our scientist-founder in its form, its (often) orderly process, and it relative purposefulness. Amerta, on the other hand, is creative process, more open-ended than our work. The movement practice is generally "non-designed and non-arranged"[8]. While Amerta shares our interest in the phenomenology of nature (sensing, observing, measuring what is there), Prapto, Amerta's creator, evocatively layers imagery and metaphor from nature (e.g., *blossoming* and *gardening*) to deepen and organize the multiplicity of experiential phenomena one encounters while practicing, and, it seems, to inspire his students. In fact, practice very often happens in the out of doors.[9] While doing Amerta movement, practitioners are interacting with their

spiritual and cultural selves—and those of others—in addition to their bodily sensations, actions and the environment. While both Feldenkrais and Amerta aim for a kind of whole scale liberation, we (in Feldenkrais) focus on sensation and action as the vehicle. Amerta movers practice with a wider focus.

It may be through this wider focus that Prapto developed his thoughts and practices about *inter-independence*. Contributors to **Embodied Lives** return to this concept often, and describe the profound way that orienting toward *inter-independence* helps them in their work as somatic educators and therapists.

dependence ~ independence ~ inter-dependence ~ inter-independence[10]

Moving beyond even the traditional Buddhist model of inter-dependence in human relationships, Prapto highlights a kind of lively play amongst these conditions with his term *inter-independence*:

> *…meaning a relation that* relies *on but does not* lie *on and that can* stand *on its own, balancing and moving the tumbling as a dynamic in responsiveness. … The* inter-independency *is supported by an attitude of non-identification and curiosity towards life, seeking to support the* blossoming *of a person.*[11]

Inter-independence contains concepts that are familiar to us, but, again, beg for development, improved language and continued practice in Feldenkrais. Another contributor describes:

> Inter-independence *is imbued with implicit dialogue, sharing space in a garden, in which all beings are conversing from their own flow of action. This is an interactivity where one dances from one's own mobile axis, sensing oneself and the other aspects present, be they people or atmosphere.*[12]

Lastly, in referring to the above formula:

> *Although this can be read as a progression leading to a goal (it can also be that), it is also important to allow that there is no judgment of any state, just recognition of which condition is in action, hence opening a space of movement and change in relation to self, other and to the environment of meeting."*[13]

I am challenged by the knowledge and experience of these mover-practitioners to apply myself with more rigor to my own best intentions in my Feldenkrais practice. How can I best create an environment in my ATM classes for inter-independence to flourish? Can I identify students who are "dependent" or "independent" in condition, and provide for each the learning tools they need for their own personal growth, while remaining compassionate and unambitious to change them? How does thinking in these terms help me help them?

Other questions arise. When is it time, when teaching ATM or FI, to widen my focus, be more receptive, and do a bit more following, even when it may lead me off plan? When is it useful to return to my plan? What am I listening to or listening for during teaching to help me to navigate these questions?

How does creating space for my inner witness provide me safety in the flux of a lesson? Can I recognize the judgments that invade the non-judgmental space, and how can relate to them non-aggressively? What is the affect on my relationship with my client while I'm navigating this space?

The many testimonials in **Embodied Lives** of practitioners finding new aspects of success in their work as therapists, artists and movement teachers through practicing Amerta movement, are quite inspiring. We have similar stories in our own field, which come out through the great work of this publication and others. I hope, upon reading Embodied Lives, some Feldenkrais practitioners will be moved to edit a similar volume of writings by our

colleagues. Meanwhile, **Embodied Lives** offers a great deal for us to think about.

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[1] Bloom, Katya, Margit, Galanter and Sandra Reeve, eds. *Embodied Lives: Reflections on the Influence of Suprapto Suryodarmo and Amerta Movement*. Devon: Triarchy Press, 2014. Print. P. 1
[2] Ibid. P. 11
[3] Ibid. p. 23
[4] Ibid. p. 104
[5] Ibid. pp. 176-7
[6] Ibid. p. 310
[7] Ibid. p. 311
[8] Ibid. p. 62
[9] Interview with Margit Galanter, May 12, 2015
[10] Bloom, p. 159
[11] Ibid. p. 81
[12] Ibid. p.110
[13] Ibid.