

Manipulation, Orientation, Timing

To learn how to learn—*again*—also means to understand what this form of awareness requires of us. In the waking state, when we act and engage in doing, we use **MANIPULATION**—we make, and we create. We orient ourselves to where we are, in space, and where we are going. And we have a sense of timing—an unfolding in time.

The word *manipulate* can be traced back to the act of joining and arranging with the hands. My imagination drifts toward Africa. Among all living beings, humans stand out in their ability to carry. In earlier times, it was primarily food that was carried, both in hunting and gathering...

Long before anyone bound the first bundle of grain, people had carried grass, twigs, and branches. "Knut tied a knot, and when Knut had tied the knot, the knot was tied." I can see the first woven bags, textiles, ornaments. What was once survival instinct has become craft. Think of the child's joy when tying their own shoelaces! To tie a knot that stays tied is to *splice*. I remember the *Blue Wing* book, where nature-based skills were signed and dated as earned. I never made it as far as the Scouts.



Mount Scopus – Hebrew University by CC BY-SA 3.0 [Länk\[+\]](#)

Scouts, originally, kept watch, observed, and survived—and my thoughts wander to Mount Scopus, the lookout point in Jerusalem,

where I lived for a year, with a breathtaking view over the Temple Mount in one direction and the Dead Sea in the other. The Hebrew name of the mountain implies not only observation but also expectation and hope. You could call that a *scoop*. It was from Mount Scopus that the Romans planned and launched their conquest of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

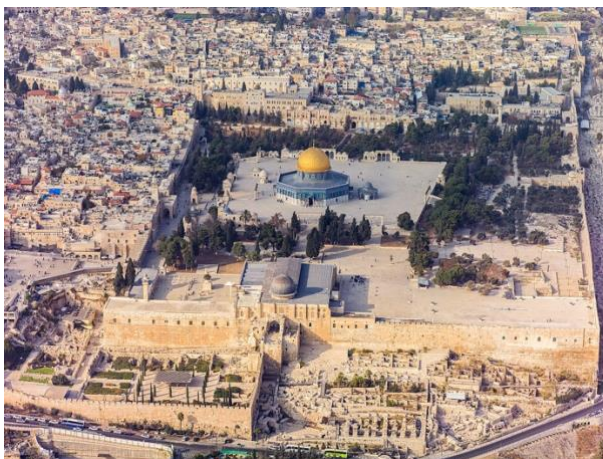


By Ray in Manila - Länk[+]

ORIENTATION was grounded in a view from above.

A Roman military unit was called a *manipulus*—a bundle of trained soldiers, if I understand correctly, held together and led by a commander—a unifier. A thousand years later, the Crusaders used the same hill. Today, the site hosts a university built in 1925, which is why I lived there in the early 1970s. Orientation in its true sense: the word means "east"—to turn toward the east, whether in prayer, toward the Temple in Jerusalem or Mecca.

East is distinct from right or left and, as we know, takes on a different meaning depending on whether one stands in Rome or in Beijing—at least when considering in which direction the Temple Mount lies.



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Recently, I visited the Museum of Architecture in Stockholm, where they were exhibiting proposals for reconstructing one of Stockholm's own lookout hills—Observatoriekullen, where the old observatory still stands. The building is 250 years old. This was once Sweden's national prime meridian, before such things became global. In the Meridian Room, what counted as Stockholm's local time was also long determined. From there, one overlooks Gunnar Asplund's public library, soon to be extended. One of the proposals is titled *Nosce te ipsum*, Latin for "Know thyself." The reason is that the library, this monument to public education from the 1930s, bears the Greek inscription

Gnothi se auton, originating from Delphi—KNOW YOURSELF.

I wonder how G. Asplund would have designed computer labs, had they existed 80 years ago. Ways of learning have changed since the first manipulations somewhere in Africa.

TIMING, on multiple levels, is a prerequisite for effectiveness.

In sports, timing is a given—as in music performance, or in simply bringing the spoon from soup bowl to mouth, in fact, in all coordinated and skilled activities, ultimately in all action. Timing is the ability to be here and now, and at the same time adaptable, in motion. Thought wanders forward in planning and backward in memory yet can also remain focused. In action, a human being is at rest in some parts and in motion in others.

These three concepts—MANIPULATION, ORIENTATION, and TIMING—are ingredients in every Feldenkrais lesson.

Moshe Feldenkrais uses them as a starting point in a talk he gave to students in Amherst in the early 1980s. We do not climb mountains to orient ourselves in lessons—on the contrary, we crawl down to the floor, to the safety of not falling. And yet we do not lose perspective; instead, we engage the cerebral cortex, at the very top of the skull, to guide and regulate ourselves during the lesson. Insightful” is a concept that corresponds closely to the lived experience of the lesson. We orient ourselves in relation to the floor, walls, objects, and fellow humans externally—and between head and pelvis internally.

Both self-manipulation and manipulation are involved.

To direct the gaze toward the moving hand to the right, while simultaneously allowing an elongation of the spine guided by awareness during a rotation of the pelvis to the left, may sound complex when written out. But when it is systematically presented, led, and clarified by the teacher, it is not difficult—on the contrary, “ridiculously simple,” as one of my students likes to say. And indeed, it is only a matter of being helped to differentiate what is essential. As well as keeping one’s emotions in check.

The various elementary units that form the basis of the technique used in individual lessons are referred to as *manipulons*.

Timing is present at the most essential level in not interfering with the flow of the breath—but also in carrying out the practice in a suitable way as the level of difficulty increases and more and more parts of the person move in different directions simultaneously.

We do not learn to conquer holy places in these lessons—though many experience a sense of the sacred through this inward-directed work.

Rather, it is a continual reconquest of the self in all its complexity.

By Eva Laser, March 20, 2007,

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