

Context

The sky was turning an ominous purple/gray in the north as I made my way to the little house to give a first lesson. I could see the massive, dark, fast-moving thunderheads billowing up over the stand of tall pines that marked the entrance to the town park. At the foot of these trees ran a brook that was now more like a torrent. The water was running fast and high after the series of unusually frequent downpours that had already occurred this spring. There had been a major shift in the local weather patterns recently. Last spring a huge hickory tree had fallen, crushing our car and just scraping our house on its way down, felled by a severe windstorm that took down so many trees in the county that our insurance company, anticipating a repetition, immediately raised the local deductible amount for wind damage twelve-fold. The following month I had been caught on the street in Manhattan by one of those near-tornados that were devastating the stands of specimen trees in the city parks. Rendered literally unable to breathe by the gusts, I had had to seek refuge in the lobby of an apartment building until the winds abated, emerging to reclaim my luckily undamaged car and pick my way through the fallen debris in the streets to ford the flooded on-ramp to the West Side Highway and home.

So it was with some sense of relief that I entered the teaching space before this rain started. The student arrived unsoaked and unscathed as well, and the lesson began. First there was some discussion and explanation. This was a physically-based technique whose mechanism could be reasonably well explained in terms of well-established biological principles. No magic was involved here; everything had a material cause. I was careful to briefly but thoroughly ground the Technique in its scientific basis. It was just an overview, and not an overly analytical one at that, but something needed to be said, I thought, to supply her with an appropriate context in which to interpret the experience that she was about to have.

After a preliminary introduction to chair work, the table turn began. I had found that I got the best results with these beginners if I did mostly table work, presumably because it was less demanding and therefore easier for us both to pay more attention to our use. This student was no exception, and she in fact appeared particularly receptive and seemed to be experiencing quite a bit of release. About half-way through, the storm finally broke with a resounding crack of thunder. We could hear the rain as it began to furiously pelt the roof, but not the windows, for there was no obliquity to the rainfall – the whole thing appeared to be going on directly overhead. Our ambient light dimmed, intermittently illuminated by brilliantly white flashes of lightning that would suddenly plunge the designs covering the windows into high relief.

It was at this melodramatic juncture, with the storm flashing and crashing around us in our little room, conveying the impression that we were on a small ship being tossed about on a raging sea, that the student started to experience muscular twitches so pronounced as to cause one or more of her limbs to jerk noticeably at irregular intervals under my hands. A number of her predecessors this summer had also, I had noticed, had such fasciculations at a more subtle level, as their ambivalent muscles expressed rapidly fluctuating indecision about whether to release or resume their habitual contraction. It had happened to me when I first began to ride horses and my back muscles were called upon to maintain balance on a shifting seat. But this was a much more emphatic version, and the near-Transylvanian setting was imparting a much more exotic slant to the usual proceedings. It was no surprise, then, when this muscular activity quieted, the turn was over, and I had a chance to take my hands off the student and turn on the light in the by now rather dim room, to see more than the usual look of surprise and awe on her face.

During the subsequent brief chair work and the debriefing that followed, it became clear that she regarded me as some sort of wizard, in spite of my disclaimers. Although I had attempted to make the first lesson, which can be unsettling enough on its own, as down to earth as possible, the heavens had

conspired to turn it into a pyrotechnical event. In the end, though, it seemed that the heightened circumstances hadn't interfered with her experience at all, even if they had rendered it, shall we say, a bit more mysterious.