

AN OPEN LETTER TO MODULE 7 STUDENTS (and beyond)
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REFLECTIONS ON THE BOWEN LEARNING CURVE

Congratulations! Your months of study and practice have brought you to this point of preparing for your Module 7 assessment. In support of your effort, I would like to offer some reflections to you about the learning curve I observe that is common to most of us in Bowenwork.

Every one of us learning this wonderful work is in the same process, no matter how long we've been involved. We are all in various stages of understanding the brilliance that Tom Bowen brought to the world. His approach to stimulating the body/mind to heal is unique. It is simple on the surface, yet profound and subtle in its application. Amazing results can be seen from the very beginning, yet becoming adept in this work takes many years.

At the beginning of our Bowen training, we all feel overwhelmed. We palpate a lot to find every location. We practice, and gradually we become more confident. We use some procedures a lot and avoid others. We usually do way too much on every client. We finally force ourselves to brave the procedures we are uncertain of, and little by little, we gain comfort with numerous procedures. Then we REALLY do too much on every client!

In the beginning, our moves are tentative. They are either too hard (most common), or the challenge is not yet understood and the move is too soft (less common). Slack is not yet fully understood, so taking the skin off the muscle is incorrectly done with pressure, instead of with feather touch.

As we proceed through the modules, we work out misunderstandings. We may review the previous modules with our instructor alongside the same classmates, yet are amazed to find that each of us has a different recollection of what we heard and how to interpret our notes! So we correct misinterpretations. We learn how to take slack with skin only. We palpate less tentatively as we go along, though we still might be carelessly pushing in on bones instead of palpating gently around them. We memorize the procedures and gain more understanding of them. We enjoy some great successes with clients, and think, "Wow, I'm getting it now!". Then our moves might speed up and our pressure might become harder as we shoot through. We pay less attention to the nuance of each move, to the subtle responses of the tissues. As our confidence grows, our moves often go DOWN in quality. And at this stage, we usually still do too much in every treatment.

As our understanding grows about Bowen's unique perspective for stimulating healing rather than "doing it" to our clients, our moves become more accurate. We realize that precision in the angle of challenge means we can use less pressure, and that the tissue will respond more. We can palpate softly and minimally to find each location, avoiding pressure on bones, for we are more familiar with the wide range of bodies. We develop the mental concentration to superglue our fingers to any skin surface, even on tight bodies and through clothing. We can perform a necessarily deep move without discomfort to the client, for we know how to reach challenge without invading the muscle. We stop doing so much, and listen more. We deepen our respect for the ability of the body to heal itself with only a little encouragement.

It is the rare student who reaches this level of understanding by Module 7, in my observation.

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And it is even rare in those who have passed assessment. Yet as we study and review and refine, our sensitivity continues to increase.

After many years, we finally hear what Ossie and Elaine and our instructors were telling us all along. We feel the difference between "doing" a move and "releasing" a move. We realize the immense power in Low Back moves 1 & 2 or Upper Back moves 1 - 4 to stimulate the entire healing process, and recognize times, as Tom Bowen did, when the body says, "That's all for the day". We let go of treatment plans. We stop diagnosing out loud. We acknowledge the body's wisdom in whatever it is doing, and so let it guide us. We release the agenda to make it feel better immediately, and allow the natural process of reconnection and true healing to unfold over a period of days, weeks, or months. We let go of our desire to be the healer. We learn to "trust the technique", as Ossie has said from the very beginning. We are ALL still students in this process.

TAKING MODULE 7

In Module 7, you will undoubtedly hear your assessing instructor use different wordings or descriptions than you've heard before. Inevitably, students show consternation when they hear something new. "That isn't the way I learned it!", they cry. They are aghast, wondering if their Module 6 instructor "taught them wrong".

Similarly, a long-term Bowen practitioner may attend Module 7 after years out of the loop. They accuse, "You've changed the work!". They are certain that they've practiced the work exactly as taught, even though the instructors observe that each has come up with their own personal deviations. Or practitioners observe, correctly, that a change WAS made in how we teach a procedure, and suspect a devious design at work.

Well, I will speak from my own experience through 12 years of practicing exclusively Bowen. When most of us "older" instructors were students, our only teachers were Ossie and Elaine. We went to the same classes year after year, and discovered much later, to our great surprise, that our work showed huge variations and differences of understanding. We had built entirely different mental constructs about reasons for procedures, why moves were done, how to do them, etc., based on our backgrounds and our areas of expertise. And we went through the same emotions as the students above: "You've changed it! That isn't the way you taught it before!"

Yes, of course we observed some changes, as Os and Elaine explored ways to make our work more accurate and effective. As any dedicated teachers will do, they experimented with many different wordings and approaches to procedures in their efforts to transmit Bowen's work, to get the results they wanted to see in our hands and in our practice of the work. But their changes to fine points of procedures were minor compared to the extreme variations we managed to create on our own!

Each of our differences start in the interpretations of the words we hear. We can't get away from it -- our varied interpretations are inevitable, because we learn by applying new information to what we already know. But what we "know" limits our learning. We have to learn THROUGH and PAST our assumptions. The only way to do that is to keep studying, challenging ourselves to hear with fresh ears and observe with zen-like Beginner's Mind. There is no short cut. It is the perfect reflection of Bowen's work. Do a little, let it process. Do a little more, let it gradually unfold.

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So when you hear your Module 7 instructor describe the procedure in a new way, you might have a light bulb moment, "Well, now I get it!", and wonder why your last instructor was so dim that they hadn't described it that way themselves. Or a student might say, "I've NEVER heard that before!", and the Module 6 instructor is shocked, exclaiming, "I taught them that very thing!" Believe me, it isn't easy for a Mod. 6 instructor to sit back calmly during their students' Module 7, as they WILL hear questions asked of the 7 instructor that they have addressed in class, and they WILL see their students make mistakes they have never made before.

Be assured, we instructors remember how it was in the beginning of learning this work, so the mistakes we see are not really surprising. Yet it is really helpful for the Module 6 instructor to observe their students in Module 7. While we get to practice being released from our egos, and empathizing with our students, most of all we can observe the learning curve with fresh eyes so we can evolve as instructors.

We can't shortcut the learning curve -- it takes as long as it takes for all of us. We instructors continue to clarify differences in our understandings whenever we meet with Os and Elaine. We have to challenge ourselves to keep learning past OUR assumptions. We continue to improve our own work, year after year. We do the best we can to teach what we've been taught.

So please relax as much as you can about Module 7. Prepare, and then release your expectation, whether of "having it down pat" or "being a failure". Of course it is awkward to do the work while being assessed. My advice: receive some Bowenwork ahead of time, arrive well rested, bring a positive attitude and don't forget your sense of humor. If you are already adept enough at the procedures to pass Module 7, you will still gain insights about assumptions you made along the way, make corrections anew, and boost your understanding of Bowen's unique work. If you do not pass Module 7 the first time, you will gain understanding and make corrections for success the next time. Either way, if you continue to travel the learning curve, you will expand your horizons on the Magical Mystery Tour of Bowenwork.