



Dr. Moshé Feldenkrais – His Life and Work

Three Things I Learned from Moshé Feldenkrais that Influence Me Daily

By Anat Baniel

Towards the end of Dr. Feldenkrais' life, he needed help while traveling internationally. His brother asked me if I could accompany him. I was in my early 20's, in a Clinical Psychology Graduate program, and working for the Israeli Army as a psychologist to support myself. Yet, I somehow always managed to say yes and go on the road with my amazing teacher.

While in airplanes, taxi cabs, restaurants, friends' homes, or hotels, Dr. Feldenkrais and I spent hours in conversation. Many of these conversations are still very vivid in my mind and in my heart. And they remain a source of learning and inspiration for me today.

In addition, the many hours, days, and months that I worked and taught side by side with Dr. Feldenkrais, or as I called him—Moshé, or Moishale, for endearment—formed a deep, rich, and fascinating platform from which I had the good fortune to develop my work.

Below are three learning experiences with Dr. Feldenkrais that I would like to share with you.

1 - The Power of Awareness

As I was settling into the window seat of a plane about to take Dr. Feldenkrais and me from Zurich to NYC, I was looking forward to eight hours of downtime. I planned on reading cheap magazines, drinking red wine, watching a movie, and taking a short 'vacation' from the intensity of being in Dr. Feldenkrais' presence.

Just as I was ready to exhale and begin 'vegetating,' Dr. Feldenkrais said to me:

"Anat, awareness is not a reversible function. You have greatly evolved your capacity for awareness over the past few years. If you try to go back, you will get ill, and you will die."

He continued:

"Most people can live a long life and never develop their awareness beyond the age of two or three years old. They can live a pretty fine life that way—however, not fully alive or fully dead. Once you evolve and mature your awareness, when trying to go back, you will get ill and you will die."

That was the end of my planned 'vacation.' Instead, I spent much of the time on this plane ride immersed in a deep and interesting conversation with this remarkable man.

And I have learned that whenever I begin regressing and acting in ways that do not fully engage my awareness, I don't do well. When I act within my full capacity for awareness, I feel energized, empowered, and very useful to other people.



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I realized that developing the capacity for awareness, wakefulness, and thinking are at the heart of a happier more successful human life and that flexibility, power, and pain relief are the bonus, albeit, a great one.

[Learn more about Awareness and the other Essentials.](#)

2 - Reversible Goals

The very first child I ever worked with was a six-year old boy with Down syndrome. The boy was fearful of going up and down the stairs. When trying to work with him on the table, I couldn't get him to pay attention or keep him calm.

When I saw Dr. Feldenkrais after the first lesson I gave to this boy, I told him that I had no idea what to do with the boy. Dr. Feldenkrais asked to see how the boy moved up and down the stairs. So we walked outside the front door of his apartment, and I did my best imitation of the boy climbing up and down the stairs.

To which Moshé said: *“Oh, I can see what the difficulty is. If you lie down on the work table, I will show you what you can do with the boy.”*

Dr. Feldenkrais spent about 10 minutes demonstrating on me, showing me some things that I could do with the child to help him organize his spine in a way that would make him feel stable and safe.

The next time I saw the boy, I did what Dr. Feldenkrais had shown me, and the boy was totally attentive and quiet on the table for a full 30 minutes.

I was so pleased with myself. I called Dr. Feldenkrais that evening and thanked him for helping me so much. I told him how successful the lesson was. However, what I neglected to do was to ask him what to do next.

So when the boy came for his third lesson, I tried doing the exact same thing that I did in the second lesson. And it was roughly 50% successful.

So that evening I called Dr. Feldenkrais and said to him:

“Moshé, you are an amazing genius and an amazing teacher. But what about me?”

He replied by telling me the story of how it took him and the whole team at the *Marie Curie Radium Institute* to develop a gadget that would allow them to pour radioactive material from one container to another from a distance with great precision.

Then, he said to me:

Anat, if you want to be a good artisan, look to find the solutions and accomplish your goals right away, and you will probably do okay. You will be an okay practitioner.



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But if you want to be a true artist, if you want to be like Jascha Heifetz, the remarkable violin player, then know what your goal is but take all the time and all the detours that are necessary and that show up along the way. That way, you'll discover and develop the highest quality of artistic expression of your actions.

This approach to my goals has made every day of learning and developing my work fascinating, delightful, peppered with the miraculous, and always a satisfying path.

[Read about Flexible Goals.](#)

3 - The Power of Joining Another Person's Inner World

One day, at the end of the work day, as I accompanied Dr. Feldenkrais upstairs to his apartment, a woman I did not know was standing by the door waiting for him. She looked agitated and when she started talking, she sounded crazy to me.

Having a background in Clinical Psychology, it was pretty easy for me to recognize her behaviors, movements, and expressions as being deeply disturbed. I was not aware that I actually had a sense of judgment about her, separation from her, and probably some fear.

I became aware of my judgment and feelings when I saw how Dr. Feldenkrais related to her. *He was interested.* I was hoping he would send her on her way quickly, but instead, he invited her to come into his apartment.

He sat down with her, listened to her, and began asking her questions. I was surprised and amazed that he formulated his questions as if the two of them shared the exact same subjective reality.

I was still concerned that this woman's rambling would never end. And I couldn't figure out how Dr. Feldenkrais would ever get her to leave. But, within a few minutes, the woman calmed down and her speaking became more coherent. She was able to express a couple of coherent questions and requests to which Dr. Feldenkrais was able to respond and make her a promise regarding the future.

She was transformed in front of my eyes, and so was I.

From then on, I have not allowed another person's internal subjective reality to scare me, however different from mine and however differently expressed from what I'm used to.

Instead, I have discovered the delight and pleasure of connecting to another person on their turf and their world. This is something that I greatly enjoy doing with the children on the Autism spectrum, and all my clients, young or old.

[Read about a father's transformational experience with his autistic son.](#)

Each one of these experiences with Dr. Feldenkrais has been a true gift, in my life and in the lives of the people I work with.