Short Biography of Moshé Feldenkrais, 1904-1984

Jillian Beacon

Moshe Feldenkrais was born in 1904 in what is now the Ukraine, growing up in a Hassidic Jewish family. He spent his early childhood in Belarus but immigrated to Palestine at 14 years old. Feldenkrais developed an interest in martial arts and began developing self-defense techniques based on Jiu Jitsu that he taught to others. He wrote a small book about his ideas on martials arts. As a young adult he moved to Paris where he became and Engineer and completed a Doctorate in Physics at the Sorbonne (Université de Paris). He completed his doctorate under Irène Joliot-Curie, and in her labs alongside Frederic Joliot-Curie Feldenkrais was involved in the earliest nuclear fission experiments. He helped to build the particle accelerator which was used to split the atoms in their lab. During his time in Paris he met the preeminent Judo master of Japan, Jeno Kando, who had traveled to Paris hoping to find someone to help spread Judo to the west. He was impressed by Feldenkrais' martial arts book and took him on as a student. Feldenkrais became one of the first Europeans to achieve a black belt in Judo, and he financed his Ph.D. by teaching martial arts to his colleagues and friends.

It became very dangerous for Jewish people in Paris when WWII broke out, and Feldenkrais was forced to flee. He managed to escape to Scotland where he worked on sonar technology and German U-boat detection. An important detail of his life is that he severely injured the meniscus of one of his knees playing soccer as a young man. This injury was extremely disabling to him; when this injury flared-up he became incapacitated and stayed in bed for days at a time. Walking on slippery submarine surfaces aggravated this injury. When consulting a physician, they told him there was a fifty percent chance the surgery would be successful, and that he may always walk with a limp. He opted not to have the surgery and instead decided he was going to attempt to find his own solution. He became fascinated by an experience he had wherein he noticed he was able to fully put weight on his injured knee at a time when he had badly injured his good leg. He realized that this meant that the human nervous system had the ability to modulate pain signals and adapt them depending on changing internal or external conditions. He devoted much of his time to exploring new ways of walking, using slow movements, often lying down, so he could sense small details of how his whole self was organized to move more comfortably and fluidly. These personal explorations of movement would eventually evolve to become the basis of Feldenkrais' approach called Awareness through Movement. Feldenkrais developed hundreds of Awareness through Movement lessons over the course of his life that provide contexts for helping individuals develop greater sensory acuity for their movement. After the war, Feldenkrais moved to Israel and became the country's first State Engineer. However, he continued devoting a great deal of time to developing his ideas on movement learning. Feldenkrais realized the great potential of his ideas as he began to observe how profoundly his method was helping his students. He soon abandoned his career in physics to devote himself to developing his ideas on movement education further, and then to teaching them to a new generation of practitioners. He wrote several books throughout his lifetime, including *Awareness through Movement, Body and Mature Behavior, Body Awareness as Healing Therapy: The Case of Nora, The Potent Self* and*, The Elusive Obvious.*

Biography
Dr. Jillian Beacon, Ph.D. *Human Kinetics*
M.Dip. *Piano Pedagogy,* M.A. Music
B.Mus, Integrated Studies, piano performance and composition

Jillian Beacon is a pianist, researcher, and a Guild-Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner™. She completed a Ph.D. in Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa and is an affiliated member of the Music and Health Research Institute. Her research explores mathematical approaches for measuring the effects of somatic training on pianists' coordination patterns. Jillian holds a Master's degree in piano pedagogy from the University of Ottawa, and a Bachelor of Music in Integrated Studies from the University of Calgary with majors in piano performance and composition. She is a practitioner, researcher, and lecturer at the University of Ottawa Musicians' Wellness Centre.

As a musician, researcher and a Feldenkrais Practitioner, Jillian brings a rare cross-over of intersecting fields. She enjoys applying her knowledge in the fields of motor learning, somatic practices, and music performance to help musicians of all ages and abilities develop embodied strategies for maintaining lifelong, healthy and joyful music practice. Jillian's interest in somatic methods and human kinetics (kinesiology) stems from personal struggles with playing-related musculoskeletal pain that began early on in her undergraduate studies. Although she explored many forms of treatment and therapy, her condition seriously impeded her ability to perform throughout her degree, resulting in the deferral of performance exams and complete cessation of playing for a six-month period. In 2013 she began studying with Feldenkrais Practitioners, including Nancy Parker and pianist Alan Fraser. Jillian's experiences with the Feldenkrais Method prompted her to explore a personal practice of Awareness Through Movement lessons which have helped her return to playing with improved technique, enhanced comfort, and effective tools for managing chronic pain. Jillian applies her knowledge of the Feldenkrais Method to help musicians learn to sense and feel themselves while playing so they may experience more freedom and comfort in movement and enhanced expression and sensitivity in their performances. She also draws on her knowledge of functional anatomy and motor learning theories to help students restructure their practice habits to learn music more efficiently while minimizing strain on their musculoskeletal system.

Awareness Through Movement® Lessons: How to Participate for Maximum Benefit

The movement sequences we do in a Feldenkrais class are called Awareness Through Movement® lessons. Awareness Through Movement® works by creating a context for you to improve your sensory acuity of details in how your movement is organized throughout your body. Repeated practice of Awareness Through Movement® can lead to changes in how the nervous system communicates with your muscles to facilitate easier, lighter, and more comfortable movement. Over time you may notice reduction in softening of muscular tension, reduction of musculoskeletal pain, more fluid movement, improved balance, easier breathing, and even psychological benefits, such as reduced anxiety or improved sense of calmness.

Following these guidelines (adapted from those provided from the Feldenkrais Institute of New York City) will help you get the most benefit from each Awareness Through Movement® lesson.

1. DO ONLY WHAT IS EASY: Make each movement easy and comfortable. Do not strain or stretch. Doing only what is easy will facilitate your ability to pay attention to the quality of your movement.
2. MAKE EACH MOVEMENT SMALL: Small movements, done slowly and with attention, enable your body to improve most effectively. Large movements, done with effort, reduce your ability to heal and improve.
3. GO SLOWLY: Do each movement slowly. This will give you time to sense and feel what you are doing, so that you can easily detect and reduce unnecessary effort and strain.
4. PAUSE BETWEEN EACH MOVEMENT: Pause between each movement. Do not repeat the movements quickly, one after another. When you pause and relax completely for a moment after each movement it allows the activity in the brain to quiet and helps the nervous system process and integrate the new sensory input to inform future action.
5. REDUCE UNNECESSARY EFFORT: Small, slow, and easy movements allow you to detect the unnecessary effort in your body. With reduced effort, your movement will automatically improve. Less is more.
6. DON'T TRY TO “GET IT RIGHT”: Your improvement will be greater and quicker if you focus on cultivating a deep attentiveness to your movement. The quality of attention you bring to the movement facilitates the change. It is not the correctness of the movement that makes the difference. When you try to get it right, you are more likely to use habitual movement patterns or to use unnecessary effort.
7. TAKE RESTS: Fatigue causes unnecessary and inefficient effort in your movement, interfering with your ability to heal and improve. If at any time during a lesson you feel a need to rest, simply pause until you are ready to continue.
8. AVOID PAIN AND DISCOMFORT: You should never experience discomfort or pain while doing Awareness Through Movement. Only do the small amount that feels comfortable and easy. If you experience pain or discomfort, use even less effort and make each movement even smaller and slower, or try doing the movements in your imagination.
9. USE YOUR KINESTHETIC IMAGINATION: When you visualize doing a movement, your brain sends essentially the same message to your muscles as when you are actually moving. To use your imagination, close your eyes and imagine doing the movements with ease and with as much kinesthetic detail as you can.
10. CONTINUE YOUR PROGRESS: By doing Awareness Through Movement often, you will initiate a process of steady improvement. You can also maximize the benefits by periodically recalling the movements of a recent lesson, including your feelings and sensations.

Adapted from The Feldenkrais Institute of NY

How can the Feldenkrais Method® help musicians?
Jillian Beacon, Ph.D. Human Kinetics

1. **Helps to tune the mind-body instrument by improving proprioception.**
    a. Small differences in sound, timing, tempo, articulation, dynamics, etc. are at the core of musical expression.
    b. Improving your ability to discern smaller and smaller differences in your own sensation of space and movement improves your ability to modulate small differences in your movement required for expressive playing.
    c. Deepening your understanding of the link between your movements and the musical sounds you create enhances the quality of your performance!

2. **Increases awareness habitual "self-image" in movement.**
    a. When we become aware of our habitual ways of internally representing our moving selves we become sensitive to new possibilities of organizing movement that may be more potent and comfortable.
    b. Moving according to the habitual "self-image" feels familiar and safe. Learning the psychological and sensorial difference between "familiarity" of movement and "ease" of movement helps expand the possibilities for adaptive and comfortable movement.
    c. Rigidity of patterns is replaced with flexibility and adaptability, (i.e., choice).

3. **Helps recalibrate the relationships between nociception (pain) and proprioception (how your brain knows where you are in space).**
    a. When pain increases, proprioception decreases.
    b. We move less when we are in pain, and our neurological "self-image" becomes less detailed.
    c. Enhancing proprioception can disrupt neurological patterns related to pain and increase comfort.

4. **Helps develop an embodied understanding of pain as a complex and dynamic neural pattern.**
    a. Pain is not just a symptom of tissue damage.
    b. Acute pain and chronic pain are neurologically different.
        i. Chronic pain is almost always accompanied by "central sensitization". The nervous system sends a larger pain response than required because it is in a heightened state of arousal.
    c. Neurological pain networks are closely tied to the limbic system, (emotional processing).
    d. Feldenkrais works from the body up instead of the mind down.

5. **Challenges our inner critic to quiet down so we can nurture playing, curious learning without fear of judgement or failure.**
    a. Feldenkrais can teach you to observe your movement with curiosity instead of criticism.
    b. Often our observations of movement come along with a value judgement that comments on our self-worth. You are good enough.
    c. Fear of judgement from ourselves and others interferes with learning. The tools to learn and improve are already inside you.
    d. How might this idea change your inner dialogue with yourself in the practice room?

6. **Gives you permission to go slow and notice.**
    a. Slow movement helps our brain forge new neural movement pathways and allows us to sense detail in timing, degree of effort, orientation, and other qualities of our movement.
    b. We often rush to learn our music without stopping to sense and feel the details that would make it easier to play!
    c. How might this idea influence how you practice?

7. **Develops your trust in your own ability to learn and solve problems (self-efficacy).**
    a. Research shows that therapeutic interventions which encourage individuals to learn about themselves and participate in decision-making during their treatment are more effective in the long-term.
    b. Our culture teaches us to believe that someone else has the answer. Although we should never be afraid to ask for help and support, it can also be liberating to re-acknowledge the wealth of internal resources at our disposal for learning about ourselves and finding our own paths forward in wellness.
    c. How might this idea change how you practice and prepare for your weekly lesson with your teacher?

Tips for Reconnecting with Your "Embodied Self" During Performance or Practice

1. Improvise regularly as a means of linking your moving self with musical sound production.

2. Avoid very difficult passages or highly habituated passages right after doing *Awareness through Movement* or receiving Feldenkrais *Functional Integration.*

3. When trying to improve highly habituated passages that you have already repeated and can perform with a high degree of automaticity.
    - Change tempo, especially go slower.
    - Explore different expressive possibilities in phrasing.
    - Change rhythm/articulation.
    - Play it inverted or in reverse.
    - Imagine yourself playing it first.
    - Shift where the weight is balanced over the pelvis or feet.
    - Shift where you are directing your eyes.
    - Play the eyes closed.
    - Walk or stand as you play.
    - Sit on a roller or a ball.
    - Lie on the floor regularly (take floor practice breaks).
    - Do *Awareness through Movement* lessons multiple times a week.
    - Find moments to reconnect with embodied self during performance/rehearsals.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the *Feldenkrais Method*® of Somatic Education?
The *Feldenkrais Method* is a form of somatic education that uses gentle movement and directed attention to improve movement and enhance human functioning. With this Method, you can increase your range of motion, improve your flexibility and coordination, and rediscover your innate capacity for graceful, efficient movement.

By expanding the self-image through movement sequences, the Method enables you to include more of yourself in your movements. Students become aware of their habitual neuromuscular patterns and rigidities, and learn to move in new ways.

Who Benefits from the *Feldenkrais Method*?
Everyone can benefit from the Method. The *Feldenkrais Method* helps those experiencing chronic or acute pain of the back, neck, shoulders, hips, legs, or knees, as well as healthy individuals who wish to enhance their movement abilities. The Method has been very helpful in dealing with central nervous system conditions such as multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, and stroke. Musicians, actors, and artists can extend their abilities and enhance their creativity. Seniors enjoy using it to retain or regain their ability to move without strain or discomfort.

What Happens in a *Feldenkrais Method* Session?
In group *Awareness Through Movement*® lessons, the *Feldenkrais*® teacher verbally leads you through a sequence of movements in basic positions: sitting or lying on the floor, standing or sitting in a chair. These precisely structured movement explorations involve thinking, sensing, moving, feeling, and imagining. By increasing awareness, you will learn to abandon habitual patterns of movement and develop new alternatives, resulting in improved flexibility and coordination. Many lessons are based on developmental movements and ordinary functional activities (reaching, standing, lying to sitting, looking behind yourself, etc.). Some are based on more abstract explorations of joint, muscle, and postural relationships. There are hundreds of ATM lessons, varying in difficulty and complexity, for all levels of movement ability. A lesson generally lasts from 30 to 60 minutes.

Private *Feldenkrais* lessons, called *Functional Integration*® lessons, are tailored to each student's individual learning needs. The teacher guides your movements through gentle non-invasive touching and words. The student is fully clothed, lying on a table, or in a sitting or standing position. At times, various props (pillows, rollers, blankets) are used in an effort to support the student, or to facilitate certain movements. The learning process is carried out without the use of any invasive or forceful procedure.

How Does the *Feldenkrais Method* Differ from Massage and Chiropractic?
While all of these practices touch people, the *Feldenkrais Method* is very different. In massage, the practitioner is working directly with the muscles, in chiropractic, with the bones. These are structural approaches that seek to affect change through changes in structure (muscles and spine). The *Feldenkrais Method* works with your ability to regulate and coordinate your movement, which means working with the nervous system and the whole person.

How are *Feldenkrais* Practitioners Trained?
All *Feldenkrais* practitioners must complete 740-800 hours of training over a 3 to 4 year period. Trainees participate in *Awareness Through Movement* and *Functional Integration* lessons, lectures, discussions, group process, and watch videos of Dr. Feldenkrais teaching. Newtonian mechanics, physics, neurophysiology, movement development, biology, and learning theories are presented in the training programs.

This list of Frequently Asked Questions was originally compiled by Richard Ehrman and the Feldenweb Committee, 1996.

Additional Resources

1. *Moving Through Music*
    - Dr. Jillian Beacon, Ph.D. Human Kinetics, *Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner*
    - Located in Ottawa, ON
    - Affiliate of the University of Ottawa *Music and Health Research Institute*
    - Email: movingthroughmusic@gmail.com
    - www.movingthroughmusic.com

2. *Feldenkrais Access*
    - https://www.feldenkraisaccess.com
    - You can make a free account on this website and access some free classes through the free lesson library. David Zemach-Bersin was the educational director of my NYC training program.

3. *The Feldenkrais Project*
    - https://feldenkraisproject.com/collections/
    - There are 50 free lessons on this website that progress from basics to more advanced.

4. Recommended Reading
    - Feldenkrais, M. (1981). *The elusive obvious.* Meta Publications.
    - Feldenkrais, M. (1985). *The potent self: A study of spontaneity and compulsion.* Somatic Resources and Frog Books.
    - Feldenkrais, M. (1990). *Awareness through movement.* Harper One. *(The lessons from today's workshop were adapted from lesson 4 and lesson 7 of this book).*
    - Van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind and body in the healing of trauma.* Penguin Books.