

Feldenkrais® Legacy Forum: Transformation of Trainings Group

Trainer Interviews

No identifying Trainer names

Question 1

What are the essential qualities and characteristics of the Feldenkrais® work without which it would not be Feldenkrais work?

- What needs to be carried forward as the essence of this work?
- What distinguishes the Feldenkrais work from other professions?
What is the key thing that is still unique?
What is the gem that makes this worth being a named method?
- What are the “essential pillars” that guide us, no matter who we are working with, or in what environment/situation?
- What is essential to the Feldenkrais “way of working”?

Themes for Question 1

These common themes were identified by the Transformation of Trainings Group in their reading of the Trainer’s interview transcripts.

Integrating the Whole Self

- Integrating
- Exploring Functional Movement

Learning

- Questions
- Approach to Learning
- Correction and Learning
- One’s Own Experience, Self Inquiry

Movement

- The Doorway to Learning
- Interaction
- The Skeleton

Self-image

- The Importance of Self-image

Sensory Awareness

- Sensory Awareness
- Listening

Common themes followed by verbatim quotes from the Interviews

Integrating the Whole Self

- **Integrating**

We start with the constellation, with the pattern, with the whole.

We are always taking in the whole of a situation or person – the whole pattern of how they organize themselves. So, any attempt to talk about the work in terms of this or that part is not the method.

We needed to learn how to feel our entire self in every action and movement.

It is a systemic approach, never focusing on one part.

We know the Feldenkrais Method® is concerned with a dynamic interaction between our nervous systems, skeleton, and environment. Again, if you look at a lot of other modalities out there, they are focusing on one of those. Very few modalities focus on all four.

We are dealing, not just with what happens in some place, but how the way we move is related to how the whole person is moving.

So I would stack these together as nobody has all of these.
[emphasis on awareness; focus on function; deep listening; and learning through experience that gives authority to the student]

The process of integration, of being able to make _____ differentiate, and then make the distinction. Differentiated parts into a functioning whole, is extremely unique.

I really don't know of another method that's out there and especially not one that works with the whole self through movement, with hands on work

I do not think there is any one thing that makes the Feldenkrais unique. I think it is the braiding together of many elements that meld together to form the Feldenkrais Method. Its power and depth come from the interaction between all these various aspects.

... the way we utilize awareness, combining it with movement, kinesthetic sensation, and dynamic action meld together to form the magic and transformative potential of the method.

... this braiding of sensation, movement, thinking, feeling – bringing in as many aspects of the person as we can, to have the learning be more complete and integrated.

The gem that makes it for me is that there is so many possibilities assisting the person to have some kind of [inaudible] that integrates – biologically, psychologically – into the nervous system.

- **Exploring functional movement**

There is always this pattern that connects through functional use of ourself and also bringing the person to feel themselves.

Function before structure is a key concept.

We don't do things to people; we sense what the people need. What I try to tell the students is go slowly so that you can sense. And that you have to take the parts that are not joining a particular function and add them so that the person is integrated, at least in some kind of an activity. And then it's not little pieces.

His intention was not to improve a specific action, unlike what most people believe they are practicing he was orienting on the fundamental way in which skill is coordinated.

Learning

- **Questions**

The art of being a Feldenkrais practitioner is the art of being able to ask questions.

The most interesting element of the Feldenkrais Method is that it directs a person's attention back into their self and through the process of asking questions, which means engaging ... into the world of curiosity, it asks the person to become self-referential and to then find the potential existing within themselves.

I think that is part of what he must have meant by self-education – being able to doubt the way he learned in his Talmudic education and then turn that doubt into a question that can be asked and explored with no prejudice either for the authoritative statement or anything else. That is how you discover what is most efficient and effective in your own actions.

But I guess if you were really going to advertise the Feldenkrais training you would say, “This training is going to surprise you every day with something you cannot explain and you are going to have to open your mind to questions and descriptions and explanations and ideas that you have never crossed paths with. It does not matter what you are familiar with, it is going to be something you cannot put into that box”.

- **Approach to Learning**

It's very clear that this was a method of inquiry – not a method in a series, or not a series of techniques of doing.

Feldenkrais is very fond of saying, – nobody remembers how they learn to talk, because the processes were not conscious. It was not a study. It was what he also called an organic process. Organic learning. We need to be able to engage with people at that level of their learning.

This is an essential quality of our work, I think, which is that it's based in learning. That's the context through which our explorations, our interactions take place.

The idea that one can go on improving is inherent in our work...

It's how we're learning, and how the method is based on learning and how to learn. And how the learning takes place in training programs with all of the variety of approaches to learning – hands on work, the movements we do in ourselves, the conceptualization of the work, the discussions, the reading, the indoctrination of questioning, not taking things at face value, being able to see multiple points of view. Yes, it's quite a labyrinth, isn't it.

I would start with learning to learn, and the fact that we have an educational model. Many systems that are working physically are more [oriented to/closer to] a model of healer/patient. However, we are specifically oriented by an educational model. And furthermore, as the

process evolves, we empower the person, giving them the tools they need to work with themselves and eventually making ourselves unnecessary.

Ultimately, we are going for independence from the teacher. The plan is to not have someone in our Functional Integration® practice keep coming to us forever, but to pass along the tools they need to take care of themselves and help themselves when they are in trouble rather than always having to run to a professional there is that one step of having things you can do to help yourself and then there is the additional step of really being able to create yourself.

The degree to which we, I think, have delved into and studied habit formation and its deconstruction and reconstruction is not something I see other systems delving into or talking about very much.

Moshe always talked about the ability to generalize any activity and I think that is unique in our work, that part of learning can generalize to any activity.

... something very fundamental that, in a very concrete way, is essential for understanding the method and for using it, applying it. This is that nearly every Awareness Through Movement® lesson is an exemplar of synergistic neuromuscular relationships.

In other words, how our system, how we as human beings, can optimize our organization, our ability to function.

... is that the Feldenkrais Method is concrete. It's not abstract. It's something that's felt in the moment, through movement. It's not something we wonder about, or dream about, or think about, or hope for.

His intention was not to improve a specific action, unlike what most people believe they are practicing. He was orienting on the fundamental way in which skill is coordinated, some of which he had to discover.

... is that it needs to be personal.

So I would start with learning to learn, and the fact that we have an educational model. Many systems that are working physically are more [oriented to/closer to] a model of healer/patient. However, we are specifically oriented by an educational model. And furthermore, as the

process evolves, we empower the person, giving them the tools they need to work with themselves and eventually making ourselves unnecessary.

So, psychotherapy is about the separation, the essential boundary between therapist and client. In physical therapy, there's the notion of fixing and doing to another person. And these are ideas that are anathema to the kind of relationship that we create in FI.

... which I think would be very helpful to us, is defining what are our terms. What are the terms that are important to the method that we believe that every practitioner – our common language.

- **Correction and Learning**

We are a learning modality.... we are not corrective but are trying to create conditions for people to find their own solutions.

The education of the kinesthetic sense was a primary goal. Dr. Feldenkrais said in his talk 'to correct is not correct' that we correct people by improving their sensations so they can become self-correcting and self-reliant.

One thing that distinguishes it is that (1) that we're concerned with the domain of learning, and (2) that we understand that correction interferes with learning. That correction interferes with learning and that premature objectification of the desires of the teacher or the teacher's perspective on the curriculum, or content, will also interfere with the learning.

It is not formative. That means although there is a direction to the learning it does not begin with 'this is where you should end up'. That non-formativeness is fundamentally empowering, and gives authority, to the student ... it is trust in the wisdom of the student to find their way and do not superimpose your concept of correct breathing or posture or movement upon them, but give them hints.

We're not trying to correct someone. We're trying to add more choice to how someone does something and what they do. We're teaching choice and so not imposing the right way.

... construct an environment that facilitates people to do all the things I have mentioned. In other words, not to criticize but to leave open, to not

judge but to encourage a diversity of learning and the methods by which people learn.

The fact that we are not corrective but are trying to create conditions for people to find their own solutions. That is something that sets us apart certainly from certain other methods.

There are lots of great modalities out there, but I do not see them operating in so many dimensions and levels.

- **One's Own Experience, Self Inquiry**

It needs to be personal. It needs to be about, for somebody who's engaged in the method as a means of self-inquiry, about getting to know oneself.

... put all your ideas aside and just pay attention to your experience.

We really do believe in the wisdom in the human being and in the nervous system. And that the work of the teacher or practitioner is to evoke that, speak to, encourage and water that more than show them where their shoulder should be or what they need to do to achieve something.

To understand that each person is a very much an individual and you're not doing something that's formulaic or technique bound.

We do whatever it takes to create a context whereby someone can learn something.

Movement

- **The Doorway to Learning.**

He [Moshe] lists, I think, nine conditions [*Awareness Through Movement* book page 33] why movement would be a better way to approach self-education than other kinds of methodologies.

We start with action – we start with movement. And in Moshe's model of feeling, acting, sensing, and thinking, there are approaches that start with each of these aspects of our experience. One of the things that lets me know when somebody comes to see me, whether their questions and what they like help with, fit with the purview of the method – Can I address it in the domain of action?

Of course, the domain of action linked to sensation, in particular. the work is about changing how we act by changing our perception of our action.

The most essential thing is that the Feldenkrais Method is concrete. It's not abstract. It's something that's felt in the moment, through movement.

So, how through movement do I provide a context where, through movement, they start to feel a different degree of [what they're interested in]?

... is that the Feldenkrais Method is concrete. It's not abstract. It's something that's felt in the moment, through movement. It's not something we wonder about, or dream about, or think about, or hope for. We might hope for things.

- **Interaction**

The Feldenkrais Method is concerned with a dynamic interaction between our nervous systems, skeleton, and environment.

The method is not biomechanics and muscles. It is the totality of how these things are woven together.

... create the conditions in which they can both learn more about how they use themselves in any domain – thinking, feeling sensing, any domain – and at the same time get a glimpse of possibilities they had never considered, never tried. So opening up this field for people of what could be possible for them.

It is acting with your entire self with all your emotions and sensations and thinking.

I think the Feldenkrais Method teaches us to perceive patterns of movement or patterns of anything in the world around us, which means we are always taking in the whole of a situation or person – the whole pattern of how they organize themselves. So, any attempt to talk about the work in terms of this or that part is not the method.

- **The Skeleton**

Dr. Feldenkrais gave a talk on what is the difference between his method and any others ... he chose the work with the skeleton as the difference.

The way we work with the skeleton I think is also very unique because we indicate, through our contact with the skeleton, possible pathways or organization and movement. We are not aligning or manipulating, we are connecting.

Self-image

- **The Importance of Self-image**

His [Moshe] idea of self-image helps us stand apart.

“We act in accordance with our self-image and it is that which in turn governs the outcome of our every activity.” [Moshe’s first sentence in *Awareness Through Movement*]

Unless we understand completely and fully that we are dealing with the way a person has acquired their self-image and help a person refine that self-image into a way that they can manifest and bring forward their own life – not the life they acquired but their own life – then in some sense it is not the work. It is not about flexibility. It is not about learning patterns of behavior. In a sense it is not even about Awareness Through Movement. It is about the process by which a person engages and learns to experience and bring forth their own curiosity about what their life could become.

That is very important work. Again, this is something a corrective system will never uncover the fact a person uses themselves in a certain way because of this unconscious self-image, really not sensing the bones and not knowing they can move in these different ways and there are all these possibilities.

... a person uses themselves in a certain way because of this unconscious self-image.

... our work profoundly influences the image we have of ourselves.

More than just about anything Moshe was mostly concerned with the freedom of the human being. Awareness was a vehicle toward freedom, but the actual direction was how does a human being become freer of their past and able to express their true nature, their true humanity, when we are also these conditioned beings who have learned all these patterns of thought, ethics, movement, breath, emotion, relationship etc.

... helping people like themselves more. I use the Feldenkrais Method as the means to do it.

Sensory Awareness

- **Sensory Awareness**

It's asking what is there regardless of whether it's FI or ATM, and I think that it's exactly what I've been trying to articulate – this notion of the primacy of sensory experience. Of non-objectified sensory experience!

The somatic basis of awareness.

The primacy of belief in the capacity of every nervous system to learn and improve. That nervous systems, all nervous systems, are seeking to optimize their viability. Every nervous system is available to learn and seeks to learn things that will directly impact or improve any area where there's difficulty.

Your sensory understanding of the movement determines what a child can learn. Your self-organization determines what a child can learn.

In terms of this full pattern, one of the biggest things he [Moshe] emphasized when he was training us is that we needed to learn how to feel our entire self in every action and movement.

... put all your ideas aside and just pay attention to your experience.

One other thing which has to do with going back to this idea of systems in the sensory aspect is that the method is fundamentally about navigation, about how feedback works.

- **Listening**

Deep listening, whether you are a practitioner or receiving a lesson or are on the floor for a movement lesson, the atmosphere comes from everyone deeply listening. So, again, another term for awareness.

... if you're talking about FI, the distinction is enormous. Because FI is founded upon the notion of interacting with other person in such a way that you join them – you join them in a seamless way.

I would say the first essential quality would be listening. That it's a quality of being able to listen. Absolutely through our hands. But being in the presence of another person, and listening to how they talk and speak, the kind of language they use that describe themselves.

TRANSCRIPTS

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So first question.

What are the essential qualities and characteristics of the Feldenkrais work without which it would not be Feldenkrais work?

TRAINER: I think the Feldenkrais Method teaches us to perceive patterns of movement or patterns of anything in the world around us, which means we are always taking in the whole of a situation or person – the whole pattern of how they organize themselves. So any attempt to talk about the work in terms of this or that part is not the method.

In terms of my own teaching, my own way in which I was influenced by Dr. Feldenkrais, I very much think in terms of principles. That is why I sent you a list of some of the principles he emphasized.

In terms of this full pattern, one of the biggest things he emphasized when he was training us is that we needed to learn how to feel our entire self in every action and movement.

We had an Amherst study group recently with some senior people, Trainer candidates, and senior assistants. My umpteenth deep dive into the material. And I kept talking about this principle. It is the entire self. He is trying to create the conditions for us to feel that.

One of the men did a Google search and found that Feldenkrais said that around seventy times in the beginning of year one.

This can also be talked about as the way in which we make this movement from exclusive attention to inclusive attention. That is another way of saying the same thing. Exclusive is to focus on a problem or part. Inclusive is to include as much as we possibly can. That means myself, you, the environment, my sensation, my self-observing capacities in action. You could say meditation in action.

So that is one of my favorite principles that really makes us different. Other modalities set up a kind of proscribed way we should function and then try behavior modification in a way, so to behave or move like this.

We are not corrective. We are a learning modality.

So that is another thing maybe – the fact that we are not corrective but are trying to create conditions for people to find their own solutions. That is something that sets us apart certainly from certain other methods.

The other thing that really comes to mind for me is that without the principles it would not be the method. How we use the principles is important to hold its integrity. I think there could be more engagement with that, for students to think about these principles and how to use them.

The scale of our method also came to mind when I was thinking about this. We know the Feldenkrais Method is concerned with a dynamic interaction between our nervous systems, skeleton, and environment. Again, if you look at a lot of other modalities out there, they are focusing on one of those. Very few modalities focus on all four.

We all have our favorite. I myself really really love the nervous system aspect of things and what we can offer in terms of working with people in especially neurological situations.

Other people are in love with biomechanics. Fine. They give a little more importance maybe to muscles or skeleton.

Then others may be more like how are your emotions: how do you act in the world.

So we all may have a favorite in there, but that is not the method. The method is not biomechanics and muscles. It is the totality of how these things are woven together.

I just pulled my Doidge [book] off the shelf again. I think I need to re-read it. I think Norman Doidge did a really good job of explicating some of the principles and also pointing out how they are not utilized in other methods.

This dynamic interaction between the muscles, skeleton and nervous system means the scale of our method is, I think, just tremendously large. There are lots of great modalities out there, but I do not see them operating in so many dimensions and levels. Dr. Feldenkrais offered us so many possible ways to put it together.

We know, through all the things he studied – the principles he took from martial arts, from child development...He made it a synthesis. So I think it is a very very big method.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Like when he [Moshe] finally got a chance to meet Karl Pribram and talk with him about what he was doing. He [Moshe] said for twenty years he had not been able to talk with someone like that about these things. That was Karl Pribram. Dr. Feldenkrais did not have a chance to meet Esther Thelen but her experiments with infant motor development and her thinking around Dynamic Systems Theory were consistent, more or less, with this. And then she [Esther] became a Feldenkrais practitioner. It would have been great if they all could have gotten together to talk about these larger ways of considering how we are as humans internally and externally.

TRAINER: It is a systemic approach, never focusing on one part. Obviously, he was encyclopedic. His knowledge was more vast than most of us can hope for in this lifetime, but he also saved us a bit of time so that we do not have to read a hundred books on acupuncture right this minute maybe. I saw his library in his house. I wish I had looked at it a bit longer, but I saw it.

So, this very non-linear, non-reductionistic approach to experimentation really and to providing conditions. Of course the fact that the conditions are provided for people's learning to not correct but create the conditions in which they can both learn more about how they use themselves in any domain – thinking, feeling, sensing, any domain – and at the same time get a glimpse of possibilities they had never considered, never tried. So opening up this field for people of what could be possible for them.

I think his idea of self-image helps us stand apart. That is very important work. Again, this is something a corrective system will never uncover – the fact a person uses themselves in a certain way because of this unconscious self-image – really not sensing the bones and not knowing they can move in these different ways and there are all these possibilities.

One of my favorites is the clavicle. Especially nowadays people walk around with this box on their chests while there are these hinges here that are actually our shoulders. A big gap. One of my students was asked to close her eyes and show how big her mouth was and she showed something that was one-third the size of her mouth and her voice is one-tenth of what it could be.

There are so many fascinating things that we discover like that.

INTERVIEWER: You reminded me that it was only recently that I learned there is not a direct connection between the brain and the skeleton. It is an inferred connection that goes through all the bridgework between the neurological system and the tendons, muscles, and ligaments. And then it reaches the skeleton.

TRAINER: What you said about people not having a clear kind of skeletal consciousness is because we do not have a direct connection to that bony part of us so we are filling in those remarkable pathways between.

At one point in Amherst, Dr. Feldenkrais gave a talk on what is the difference between his method and any others. He said they all have something to offer, or they would not exist, and then at that moment he chose the work with the skeleton as the difference.

Certainly in Functional Integration that is really clear. You could say a chiropractor and osteopath work with bones. But while we do work with the skeleton, we make the connection with the nervous system because the person becomes aware of what they are feeling and moving. The way we work with the skeleton, I think, is also very unique because we indicate, through our contact with the skeleton, possible pathways or organization and movement. We are not aligning or manipulating, we are connecting.

So, there is always this pattern that connects through functional use of ourselves and also bringing the person to feel themselves.

This way that we educate sensation is very unique in this method. When writing notes for today I was thinking about, for instance, when I used to teach workshops for PTs and OTs on applications of the Feldenkrais Method to pediatric populations. I was thinking about the write-up and that they know so much about development. They know a lot of about brain development and stages of development. They study it. They know a tremendous amount.

That is not what I am going to bring them. I am going to bring them things like your sensory understanding of the movement determines what a child can learn. Your self-organization determines what a child can learn. These are just two ideas in our method.

INTERVIEWER: Beautiful. Yes.

TRAINER: They know in their head that this is crawling... I remember one of them saying, "Oh, I cannot believe how much handling time you had with that child." But I was not handling him. I was connecting myself with his self, my breathing, my sensation, my image, my perception, my helping him to feel himself and all those magical things we do that, in a child's case, allow that child to progress along the learning process. So our self-organization, how we use ourselves when we touch people. Without that it is not the method.

Obviously it is not just one thing. Was I supposed to name one thing here?

INTERVIEWER: Art of asking questions. It is like the gem that is so unique that it is the essential. It is hard. That is why we are doing the interviews, to get some of the people who had the most experience. What are the things that are coming out through you that we need to hold on to and how do we create more of this. Does that make sense?

TRAINER: It will be interesting to see the body of interviews because I am sure everyone, like I said, has their favorite principles. When _____ and I started the study group, for me I did not want to see the business of foreground/background, which is part of the inclusive attention and the entire self, get lost. I feel like it could easily get lost. To me that was top of the top. That was the most important thing to me personally. But I am a sensory type and learn through the experience. Not everybody can do that so then you feed them a lot of intellectual stuff and hope that someday they learn to feel themselves.

But the education of the kinesthetic sense was a primary goal. Dr. Feldenkrais said in his talk 'to correct is not correct' that we correct people by improving their sensations so they can become self-correcting and self-reliant.

He also said that the Functional Integration lessons were given just to help people get to a point where they could attend the groups. So he really saw the group work as being where people needed to spend their time and FI was only in the more serious cases where they were not ready for it.

INTERVIEWER: Question One.

What are the essential qualities and characteristics of the Feldenkrais work without which it would not be Feldenkrais work? What needs to be carried forward as the essence of this work?

TRAINER: That is such a big topic. I think the most interesting element of the Feldenkrais Method is that it directs a person's attention back into their self and through the process of asking questions, which means engaging the pre-frontal cortex into the world of curiosity, it asks the person to become self-referential and to find the potential existing within themselves that they do not know that they do not know.

That whole is essential to the method. I think the art of being a Feldenkrais practitioner is the art of being able to ask questions. The more specific we are in our ability to ask questions, the more specific a person is in their ability to attend to themselves, become aware of themselves and actually begin to change and modulate how they experience themselves moment by moment in daily life.

The question with the Feldenkrais Method is always the question of what is health. A really good definition of health is the ability to meet uncertainty in such a way that we can thrive. That takes us to something so essential to the method, which is Moshe's very first sentence in the *Awareness Through Movement* book, "We act in accordance with our self-image and it is that which in turn governs the outcome of our every activity."

Unless we understand completely and fully that we are dealing with the way a person has acquired their self-image and help a person refine that self-image into a way that they can manifest and bring forward their own life – not the life they acquired but their own life – then in some sense it is not the work.

It is not about flexibility. It is not about learning patterns of behavior. In a sense it is not even about Awareness Through Movement. It is about the process by which a person engages and learns to experience and bring forth their own curiosity about what their life could become.

I would say those things are essential to the method. I cannot think of anything else that comes to mind. To me that is bedrock material.

INTERVIEWER:

What are the essential qualities and characteristics of the Feldenkrais work without which it would not be Feldenkrais work?

TRAINER: Thinking about it, I think the uniqueness lives in a combination of different experiences.

First, it develops multiple abilities. In practice, no one can see what others are doing in terms of ATM. So, the idea that one can go on improving is inherent in our work, insofar as the focus is on the building blocks of movement. Moshe always talked about the ability to generalize any activity. I think that is unique in our work, that part of learning can generalize to any activity.

I think our work is non-judgmental and there is a lot of curiosity about learning about ourselves. In an old copy of *The Case of Nora*, on the cover, it said 'Experiments in the Laboratory of the Self.'

I think of our work that way when I am teaching.

So, our work profoundly influences the image we have of ourselves. I interacted recently with some young children. They do something and they say, "I did it by myself".

So even at an early age that is something that builds an image that we have of ourselves.

Our work is all about our ability to do by ourselves. We do work with groups but in the personal it is that way.

The work gets inside of us and that is unique in the sense that each act, everything else afterward... you can get into Feldenkrais, but you cannot get out of it in a way. There is always a subtle kinesthetic sense of reducing effort in what I do and what my students do. At the same time, it is acting with your entire self with all your emotions and sensations and thinking.

In a sense, with all those factors, our work is about learning. Moshe said once that the work is like life itself. In that sense it is completely unique.

INTERVIEWER: That dovetails into what you would feel needs to be carried forward as the essence of this work? Is there a key thing that makes it unique? Is there a gem that makes the work what it is, the essential pillar or pillars that guide us no matter who we are working with or in what environment or situation?

TRAINER: From a teacher's point of view, it is to construct an environment that facilitates people to do all the things I have mentioned. In other words, not to criticize but to leave open. Not to judge but to encourage a diversity of learning and the methods by which people learn.

It can mean the rich language that you use when teaching ATM, sensory language, that is not just one sense but involves all the senses.

There are a lot of things a teacher can continue to encourage and to move from the particular to the general, to remind people it is not the level of the movement that we are really interested in. It is our ability to be with ourselves.

INTERVIEWER: Our first question is
What are the essential qualities and characteristics of the Feldenkrais work without which it would not be Feldenkrais work?

TRAINER: First, I guess the most essential is in Moshe's canon, so to speak, either in his trainings in San Francisco or Amherst or in the other documents that we have, or in the Alexander Yanai material. I would say that is fundamental. Without it we probably, as a group, would not have a unified opinion about what we are doing and how movement affects personal development and how it is the foundation of personal development.

As far as what he is teaching, not just that he taught it but what is going on – in a funny way – I actually do not think it has ever been brought together.

We had a man in one of our trainings who was studying old Middle Eastern languages. He could read Sumerian or the Stone of Hammurabi [the first written law document], which is in Paris and is about 5000 years old. He could read it, so he was a real nerd. He said that if you want to look at the archeology of the Feldenkrais Method you need to look at the original material. When you do archeology, you dig out the bones and the arrowheads and everything, and then you interpret it. So, the first thing is you look at the original. The interpretations can cover a wide range, as you know.

So, those show up in the Feldenkrais world in journals and advertising and things like that.

I do not think we have ever drawn the essentials together. I think we all have different opinions about what it is. Many of them have a common ground, but I have run into many different thoughts or interpretations of what Moshe is doing.

One essence would be that is about how movement grounds us as people. We can look at his books and he will tell us about what happens in self-education, whatever that means. That is a big field of study. He lists nine conditions why movement would be a better way to approach self-education than other types of methodologies. So it would be wise to orient on those and in particular that the movement expresses the person and how they live in and imagine living in the world.

Another essential, besides his own material, would be what do we mean, or what might he have meant, by self-image and how that influences our actions in the world.

He created or synthesized a different type of practicing that is not widespread. I do not think it is really understood how radical it is. If you go to your local gym, martial arts place, yoga place or even in learning languages – everything – there is a certain approach to practice that usually involves repetition and effort. He had a thought about both of those that was not the same as everybody else's opinion.

So those I find really essential.

Then, for me personally, something essential about his work which is not usually mentioned is that it relates to biology. We could order it and understand it within the field of biology, which is what he tried to do at the level that was available to him in his time in psychology, neuroscience, biomechanics, and things like that. He oriented himself in a lot of background literature, which most of us do not know, some that he mentions and some he does not. Those ideas flowed into his unique way of practicing.

His intention was not to improve a specific action, unlike what most people believe they are practicing. I was just reading a book about introduction to movement science. It is for sports students, but they are orienting on specific skills that they practice, and

Moshe was not doing that. He was orienting on the fundamental way in which skill is coordinated, some of which he had to discover because theories that are not in place were not there when he was teaching. He had to discover through his own experience and then find a way to give understanding to it, rather than just relying on intuition and experience.

Also, he was looking at our experience of organizing movement in our development timeline. It was in one way or the other about our biography of ourselves and how movement plays a role from the very beginning to the very end of our lives. A lot of things come out of that.

I have noticed a tendency in the Feldenkrais advertising community. I do not know whether it is everyone else, but the people who promote their workshops in FGNA and also in Europe tend to resort to metaphors that are commonly accepted, like ‘this will make your body pain-free’ and ‘your joints more mobile’.

Then there are a number of other things he flatly rejected as a way of approaching ourselves that he called mythologies, and things like that. So it is grounded in science, but it is not done the way science is done. You could say it is an experiment but not in the way that scientific experiment works. It is more like where the original idea for an experiment comes from, which is to notice a phenomenon and then explore it before you decide what it is. It is not grounded in theory; it results in theory. I think that is an essential of his idea, and in philosophy that is called phenomenology – put all your ideas aside and just pay attention to your experience.

Those are essential methods. Of course, as an engineer, it is very clearly grounded in biomechanics, as was his self-defense work.

There is no way around that.

INTERVIEWER: So what needs to be carried forward as the essence of the work?

TRAINER: I tell a story, about the best lesson I got from Moshe in San Francisco. I had asked him a question and he was in the mood to answer. Sometimes he ignored questions, I finally figured out, when you asked a question you had not thought of yourself. But if you asked about something you had obviously been engaged with, then he engaged with you on it. So he said sit down and told me his answer.

I do not remember the question, but his answer was “Okay, great, right.” I got about four steps starting to walk away and heard, “_____, you are a fool”. Which is not considered nice nowadays, but for Moshe that was fairly mild feedback. I turned, not really insulted but puzzled, and said, “Why?” And he said, “You didn’t ask me a question about my answer”.

I think that is a fundamental lesson in Moshe's work. And that needs to be carried forward. The point is that he was a Talmudic trained person. That whole system relies on some belief in what the truth is as interpreted by masters of that belief. Your job as a scholar is to doubt and ask penetrating questions about the answers.

I think that needs to be an essence of passing it along. I am concerned, to tell you the truth, that people think Moshe's methods are the techniques you can learn. There are many thousands of pages in Alexander Yanai. The method is the techniques. But the techniques are the result of his method which is to doubt authoritative statements about who people are and how they move and all that, even of the Feldenkrais Trainers, and to examine it yourself. That is, ask the question about the statement of fact and find a way to find out for yourself.

I think that is part of what he must have meant by self-education – being able to doubt the way he learned in his Talmudic education and then turn that doubt into a question that can be asked and explored with no prejudice either for the authoritative statement or anything else. That is how you discover what is most efficient and effective in your own actions.

The techniques then are the result of that attitude and that is important to maintain.

INTERVIEWER: So, first question.

What are the essential qualities and characteristics of the Feldenkrais work without which it would not be Feldenkrais work?

TRAINER: Well, certainly that it is awareness and somatically based, in that there is a bodily movement, context. One of the features I think is really important that does not get enough air time is, in the words of Yochanon, a very long term student of Moshe's and teacher of the work – it is not formative. That means although there is a direction to the learning, it does not begin with 'this is where you should end up'. So it is not formative in that sense. There is certainly directionality of orientation.

That non-normativeness also – and this gets into what I think is somewhat unique in the work – is fundamentally empowering and gives authority to the student, rather than the expert telling the student how they should be. It is often transgressed by Feldenkrais himself and many of us, but ideologically it is trust in the wisdom of the student to find their way and do not superimpose your concept of correct breathing or posture or movement upon them but give them hints.

So that ideological stance is very key.

Function before structure is a key concept.

Deep listening, whether you are a practitioner or receiving a lesson or are on the floor for a movement lesson, the atmosphere comes from everyone deeply listening. So, again, another term for awareness.

INTERVIEWER: What needs to be carried forward as the essence of this work relative to what you just said in terms of what distinguishes the Feldenkrais work from other professions? Or what is that key thing that is still unique, or the gem within the method itself?

TRAINER: It is a little bit tricky, because we want to avoid arrogance, which is very easy to step into when one is trying to define their differences. I have been in the work for many decades and followed some of the history of somatic learning before that. Clearly Moshe was very ahead of his time. Clearly, he had insights that were revolutionary. And in the last twenty/thirty years the world has caught up to a significant amount of what he brought that was really unique forty years ago.

So we need to acknowledge that, not kind of hide from it but celebrate that as a success of the work. It is a success that we supported a shift of consciousness that is happening in the world today and we were ahead of the curve on that. That is a celebration in my opinion.

When I was looking at this question I was going, well, the emphasis on awareness. There are other traditions that emphasize awareness. That is one of the things that needs to go forward. That is a gem. It is not unique.

The somatic basis of awareness needs again to go forward. It is key to our work and key to learning. We can name six, seven, eight other systems that are based in awareness of the body.

Function first. There are some systems that really speak about function, not quite as eloquently, I think, as Moshe or we do.

So I would stack these together as nobody has all of these.

The use of visualization as well as movement is an under-appreciated key aspect of the work. In my personal evolution of the work I believe I have been taking it in the directions of imagining how Moshe might have gone in had he lived longer. I think he was starting to work with visualization, and he intuited the power of it, and was still emerging.

You know, there was an evolution to him, from the judo teacher, very body based. He was a worker in Tel Aviv, very strong physically. So evolving from a very body-based

human being to a science-based that did not care so much for the etheric or the spiritual, except in another part of his life which was a little bit quiet in the background.

As he aged, and as he went through his difficulties, he was much more willing, less defensive about sounding weird or spiritual or “lala” or something like that. He was less concerned about offending the scientific community and giving more weight to the language he previously hated, like ‘energy moving’ and all that.

I watched that change in him just in the ten years that I knew him.

INTERVIEWER: At the end, was he not interested in acupuncture?

TRAINER: He had an interest for a long time in Japanese culture. There was a very famous healer in Japan that he met through Mia Segal who worked with energy. He watched his students help a rose to bloom behind some glass. He told the story, “I don’t know what they do, shiatsu, kiatsu, but something happened”.

I am always confused whether it was Noguchi or someone else, but he was telling Feldenkrais, “Why do you work a whole half hour with a person? Just go five minutes and finish it”.

His last public lesson, which I am sure you have seen on the video at Amherst where he is lying on a table and feeling the warmth of his hands away from his body and his knee. He was still ambivalent, “Whether you call it healing energy or I don’t know what you call it, but something happens”. You know, like that. So he still had his very rooted, scientist quarrelling with this other aspect of himself.

Okay, back to your question.

I want to stand up for the empowerment of the student as key. This is somewhat rare, even in very mellow kind offerings there is usually the sense that the teacher knows what I should be and will somehow mold me into that. We can fall into that but ideologically we really do believe in the wisdom in the human being and in the nervous system. And that the work of the teacher or practitioner is to evoke that, speak to, encourage, and water that – more than show them where their shoulder should be or what they need to do to achieve something.

That is tricky. Certainly, at the end of lessons I might go, “Now feel your length”. I am certainly guiding people in certain directions. But I am not giving them this is the correct way and if you are not there you are somehow off.

Those are really key points and, in a way, I want to stand up most for that non-authoritativeness, because, in my opinion, more than just about anything Moshe was mostly concerned with the freedom of the human being. Awareness was a vehicle toward

freedom, but the actual direction was how does a human being become freer of their past and able to express their true nature, their true humanity, when we are also these conditioned beings who have learned all these patterns of thought, ethics, movement, breath, emotion, relationship etc.

We have all these patterns within us. Is it even possible for a human being, ordinary folks like us, to step out of that deep conditioning. I think that was the edge he was working with. At least that is my interpretation of it.

Wonderful. Finding that true source within each person and working from that.

INTERVIEWER: Let's begin with the questions that are the focus of this interview. The first one is ***“What are the essential qualities and characteristics of the Feldenkrais work, without which it would not be Feldenkrais work?”***

TRAINER: So what distinguishes this Feldenkrais work from other professions? or what is the key thing that is still unique about it, and the gem that makes this worth being named a method? What would we carry forward as the essence of this work?

I'm not sure that genie ever fit in a bottle, you know. There are a few things that come to mind. I think one of the aspects is that it's something that would be – It's pretty hard to distill down to one thing.

There are a few things. I think the first thing is we start with action. We start with movement. And in Moshe's model of feeling, acting, sensing, and thinking, there are approaches that start with each of these aspects of our experience. One of the things that lets me know when somebody comes to see me is whether their questions and what they like help with fit with the purview of the method – Can I address it in the domain of action?

Of course, the domain of action linked to sensation. So, the thinking about the sensory motor loop and that the way that we affect it. It's the way that we, not as teachers but also as students – can affect our behavior; the way we find changes is by changing, altering, modifying the sensory side. Meaning that the work is about changing how we act by changing our perception of our action.

And then, and then, it gets really complicated – to think beyond that.

Let me think, like a few other attributes, is that we start with the constellation, with the pattern, with the whole.

So I think the Feldenkrais Method is perceptually or sensory oriented. As a method, it is systematic in that we have a methodology for proceeding. As an approach it is systemic, and that we are dealing, not just with what happens in some place, but how the way we move is related to how the whole person is moving. Certainly, biomechanically.

I think that brings us back to one of the roots of the method. The idea from Kano's work with Judo is that we are made to move and made to move easily and efficiently. And so what we're looking for is to turn our thoughts and feelings into action. An efficient and effective way means understanding and respecting our physical design.

I think one of the things that's unique about the method is this. The way I would say it is that the nervous system and the muscles and the skeleton, all evolved together. Understanding how they fit together, and how they work together – in the moment and systemically – is really important.

And one other thing which has to do with going back to this idea of systems in the sensory aspect is that the method is fundamentally about navigation, about how feedback works. So, having said that, I would say that the Feldenkrais Method is fundamentally cybernetic, meaning that it has to do with feedback, and how feedback systems work. I'll stop there, because I could just keep going.

INTERVIEWER: *What are the essential qualities and characteristics of the Feldenkrais work without which it would not be Feldenkrais work?*

TRAINER: Oh, there's so many. I can say that Dr. Feldenkrais was an extremely thoughtful man and had many different explanations for every single thing that he did, that he thought, that he included in his method. I think what stands out for me are quite a number of them.

But perhaps first and foremost is that it needs to be personal. It needs to be about somebody who's engaged in the method as a means of self-inquiry, about getting to know oneself.

It needs to be honest, and it needs to be personal. It's not a question of, obviously, you're doing mechanical things.

In our practice with our clients and with our students, it needs also to be very personal. And by that I don't mean prying into their lives, or crossing boundaries, and going where we're not wanted to go and I don't mean just sexually, certainly not sexually, but I also mean in terms of emotionally, cognitively. There's plenty of ways to contact people that are extremely personal where their consent is all but explicit. And those who

somebody tells you can touch them you feel now. And I guess that's what I'm trying to say is to understand that each person is very much an individual and you're not doing something that's formulaic or technique bound.

INTERVIEWER: So what needs to be carried forward as the essence of this work?

TRAINER: Well, again, another thing that Feldenkrais said, that stuck out to me in particular, that has guided me all these years, is that it's very clear that this was a method of inquiry. Not a method in a series, or not a series of techniques of doing. The Awareness Through Movement lessons, of course, are choreographed because you need to have fairly defined structure if you're working with a group of people. But even there, he broke his scripts all over the place when he saw different things happening in a room full of people. When they're recorded, or when they're online the possibility of doing that is diminished somewhat. But when it comes to Functional Integration, the idea that touch is exploratory, that questions are being asked, that responses are being carefully felt and listened to sensorially – through touch, through eyes, and certainly through ears, when people are sighing, or making words as the case may be.

All of those things are clues. Now, I was just thinking about that earlier this morning, quite a bit earlier this morning. Somebody put a thread up in one of our groups, one of our Feldenkrais forums. "Is the Feldenkrais Method, improvisational?"

And my answer to that was Yes. But it takes a long time to become competent, well versed enough in the contents, if you will, of a method. In ways of conducting inquiry, in ways of responding to the response to one's questions that one poses with one's hands, or one's voice. So the spontaneous nature of it grows and takes time. Just as it does for everybody in their mother tongue. You know we were red, blue, ball, see Jimmy run – see whatever, this, that, the other thing. I mean that's how we learn to read. But in terms of speaking, Feldenkrais is very fond of saying nobody remembers how they learn to talk, because the processes were not conscious. It was not a study.

It was what he also called an organic process. Organic learning. We need to be able to engage with people at that level of their learning. That takes time to feel, and to learn and to understand and to make personal between each of the people that we work with. There can be a tendency to reduce things to their – to what are seen as elements and elements only. And to make out of a process of communication and a process of inquiry – to make instead a series of techniques and protocols. Moshe was very clear, adamantly clear, and often vociferously clear, that his work – he called his work a method and not a technique.

For that reason, he took as his model the idea of having a methodology making inquiry.

INTERVIEWER: *What are the essential qualities and characteristics of the Feldenkrais work, without which it would not be the Feldenkrais work?*

TRAINER: This reminds me of a question that a public relations person might ask me, in terms of promoting the work. So, part of me thinks who is the audience that I'm talking to about answering this question. I think if I answered the way I would answer to the public, I don't think that would be new for any of us as practitioners. We all would have pretty much, I think, the same sense of what's important in the work, or essential to it in some way.

And to say how it would not be the work. Well, that's a tricky question too. Because Moshe once said that the only principle in the Feldenkrais Method is that there's no principles. That we do whatever it takes to create a context whereby someone can learn something. So that's a pretty broad definition of the Feldenkrais Method then.

While people might say one of the essential things is the gentle quality of touch, Moshe could be pretty firm in his touch. I know people who had lessons with him who felt beaten up afterwards.

I would say the first essential quality would be listening. That it is a quality of being able to listen. Absolutely through our hands. But being in the presence of another person, and listening to how they talk and speak, the kind of language they use that describes themselves.

Listening to how they present themselves – which may be congruent, or maybe incongruent with what they say about themselves. It may be congruent or incongruent with what I feel in someone. For example, I've worked with people who present as someone who's very confident. But then they'll tell me how much they lack confidence, how insecure they are.

You know the funny thing about distinguishing our work, cause if I talk about the method, of the characteristics of the Feldenkrais work, there are many things that we do that exist in other modalities and other domains.

And really what it comes down to for me is the practitioner, not the method.

I kind of say it as a joke, but it's not a joke. I'd rather go to a good Rolfer or chiropractor than a bad Feldenkrais practitioner. I've gone to people who do other modalities who have qualities of what I would think initially, Oh, it's more related to the Feldenkrais Method. Like how they listen, what they do like that.

I'm trying to think what would make it not the Feldenkrais Method. Well, I guess I've seen examples of that where it becomes more therapy. And not that – I think therapies are great, I've done a great deal of it myself.

But that the focus of it becomes more therapeutic. Here I'm making a distinction between, and this is an essential quality of our work, I think, that it's based in learning. That's the context through which our explorations, our interactions take place. Even in a learning context, there's often a teacher and a student. That implies a certain hierarchy – which in a therapist is a patient, it implies a hierarchy too.

But good therapy is learning. But I've seen so much therapy that's not based on learning. It's based on diagnosis. It's based on the analysis of things.

Here's the most essential thing, as I talk now, is that the Feldenkrais Method is concrete. It's not abstract. It's something that's felt in the moment, through movement. It's not something we wonder about, or dream about, or think about, or hope for. We might hope for things.

But then our job as Practitioners, I think, is to provide a concrete experience to reflect on and to answer questions that people might have of that nature. Like someone who, like I said before, looks confident but is insecure.

So, how through movement do I provide a context where, through movement, they start to feel a different degree of confidence? And that to me is essential – because many other modalities go off into abstract things.

Here's another thing that's essential is – that we're not trying to correct someone. We're trying to add more choice to how someone does something and what they do. So, depending on the context they're in, their structure, their mood, who they're with, they would choose to act one way or another way. I think that's essential.

So that comes down again that we're teaching choice and so not imposing the right way. Qualities of listening are important. Let me think.

I think what's essential to us as practitioners is a willingness to continue to learn. That sounds like a nice thing, but that's not so easy. I'm not talking about taking advanced trainings. I'm talking about dealing with the things in ourselves, our personal work that needs to keep developing.

Now look! Someone could be a practitioner and not listen well, and not reflect on themselves very much. And focus more on the correct way of doing something and still be successful and good. So, they'd still fall within the parameters of what we might call the Feldenkrais Method.

But I'm thinking more in terms of ideals. So, when we say essential, I think of something that's an ideal quality.

Along with the lines of the context of learning is that it's a constant process of inquiry – that we're finding out that we don't know.

I sometimes joke with my students, or with new practitioners, or even experienced practitioners. I say what happens when a new practitioner or a trainee gets stuck? They look like this. And they look like a deer in the headlights – they're panicked.

Here's what it looks like, at least for me, someone who's more experienced, when they get stuck. We go, I'll try this, I'll try this. The same feeling still exists – doesn't go away! I still have that same moment of aooah, But I'm able to move on and not linger in.

Again, it's an ability to move forward to, and not fall victim to my own thoughts or feelings about something, and keep going forward with the interaction.

There's something, and this is essential for me, and I teach it in every context I'm in. I think that it's useful for practitioners as an idea as well.

I teach this idea of helping people like themselves more. I use the Feldenkrais Method as the means to do it. And what I tell practitioners is – look if I'm working with someone who I don't know what to do with them, or I'm intimidated by them for some reason – that just puts me in a conversation about myself that's very unpleasant.

But if I can shift that and think – how can I help this person like themselves more – it shifts everything completely. Instead of pulling away, I'm moving towards the person like that. I think that it's that idea of liking ourselves more probably underlies almost any other modality, that if someone is in the helping professions to help people. What? Well, yeah, have less pain, get better and improve function. All that's important.

But in the end, it's like Oh, I like myself more. I think that that's my idea, that is for me the most essential quality that we can bring to a lesson. It doesn't mean that I have something specific to do in the FI, let's say. But what it means is it's a shift in attitude towards someone, to be with them in a certain way. I think that's important.

INTERVIEWER: *What are the essential qualities and characteristics of the Feldenkrais work without which it would not be Feldenkrais work?*

TRAINER: The essential characteristics of the Feldenkrais Method.
One – The concept of integration. And learning. And awareness. That's three.

But there's much more to it than that. It's how we're learning, and how the Method is based on learning and how to learn. And how the learning takes place in training programs with all the variety of approaches to learning: hands on work; the movements we do in ourselves; the conceptualization of the work; the discussions; the reading; the indoctrination of questioning; not taking things at face value; being able to see multiple points of view. Yes, it's quite a labyrinth, isn't it.

Interviewer. Yes. What needs to be carried forward as the essence of this work?

What needs to be carried forward – to survive you mean?

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Is there a key thing that is still unique that makes Feldenkrais distinctive from other professions?

TRAINER: Well, I think the process of integration, of being able to make – to differentiate, and then make the distinction. Differentiated parts into a functioning whole is extremely unique.

I really don't know of another method that's out there and especially not one that works with the whole self through movement, with hands on work.

INTERVIEWER: Question One.

What are the essential qualities and characteristics of the Feldenkrais work without which it would not be Feldenkrais work?

What needs to be carried forward as the essence of this work?

What distinguishes the Feldenkrais work from other professions?

What is the key thing that is still unique?

What is the gem that makes this worth being a named method?

What are the “essential pillars” that guide us, no matter who we are working with, or in what environment/situation?

What is essential to the Feldenkrais “way of working”?

TRAINER: To my mind all the points under that question are essentially the same question, so I will just answer them all at the same time. It is just different ways of going into the same thing.

So first I would say that I do not think there is any one thing that makes the Feldenkrais Method unique. I think it is the braiding together of many elements that meld together to form the Feldenkrais Method. Its power and depth come from the interaction between all these various aspects.

I think if you look at any one aspect of the Feldenkrais Method you will probably find some other system that is utilizing, or at least claiming to use, that element. In many cases the other system may be using the particular aspect in a slightly different way than we do in the practice of the Feldenkrais Method.

So, I would start with ‘learning to learn’, and the fact that we have ‘an educational model’. Many systems that are working physically are more oriented to or closer to a model of healer/patient. However, we are specifically oriented by an educational model. And furthermore, as the process evolves, we empower the person, giving them the tools they need to work with themselves and eventually making ourselves unnecessary.

I think there are two levels to that process.

#1. The first level is people learn to do ATM® and starting to have resources to take care of themselves better, things like that.

#2. Then the second step, which not everybody makes, is the ability to improvise and apply the method in all the different situations we find ourselves in life. Those who are struggling with pain — things like that — not only have resources that they learned from their teacher but to start to be able to make sentences and paragraphs themselves in the language of the method; to work with themselves somatically; and have more agency there.

The first thing is really powerful by itself, but the second element is where the method just takes off for you. I will give an example of that.

A couple of years ago a former Functional Integration® student of mine called. I had not spoken to him for at least twenty-five years. He said, “I was just thinking about you so much because I was in my backyard taking out a tree trunk. It was a lot of really heavy work and all along the way I was using elements of the method in how I rested, how I took care of myself and how I listened to myself and my limitations. And I got the trunk out and I felt great afterwards.” He had not been in touch with me all those years, but he said to me, “I use it every day in my life”.

Now, that is the potential. We do not always reach that potential with everybody but that is the powerful empowerment potential that the method has.

So, that is what I would say for element #1.

Obviously, part of that, and a really important part that is very trendy now, is the element of mindfulness. We did not call it mindfulness. We talked about awareness, which we perhaps take in a slightly broader and different direction, but they are greatly overlapping and it is a wonderful thing that this has taken off in the popular imagination at this time.

So I think in the method we are not only utilizing and cultivating the practice of awareness, but having done it for many decades we have a sophistication in the way we utilize awareness, combining it with movement. Kinesthetic sensation and dynamic action meld together to form the magic and transformative potential of the method.

That would be the second step.

I would say another unique element is the incredible variety of Awareness Through Movement lessons that we have access to. First we have what Moshe left us, and from there with decades of practice behind us, many practitioners are also able to generate their own lessons. So now there is this incredible variety of ATM lessons that can be utilized for learning and can give new perspectives on the same situations. I do not know of any other system that has that kind of variety. The system goes from the incredible subtlety of just using the imagination to large dynamic movements and everything sideways and in between.

Of course, all these things overlap, but another element is that ultimately, we are going for independence from the teacher. The plan is to not have someone in our Functional Integration practice keep coming to us forever, but to pass along the tools they need to take care of themselves and help themselves when they are in trouble rather than always having to run to a professional.

So ultimately, back to the first point, they will start to generate for themselves self-care and awareness experiments as they are in different environments, as they get older, get hopefully better and as they evolve.

I would say next in the list is this braiding of sensation, movement, thinking, feeling – bringing in as many aspects of the person as we can, to have the learning be more complete and integrated. The way an ATM lesson can come from different perspectives on the same thing. So, to look from behind or underneath, to use different metaphors and different language so that the tapestry that is created can be very rich and multi-dimensional.

There is our relationship to habits and the sophistication we have over many years of developing the method in terms of deconstructing habits. Habits that are either explicit, that people are aware of, or ones they are not aware of. There are all kinds of tricks and processes to help people develop new and healthier habits. The degree to which we, I think, have delved into and studied habit formation and its deconstruction and reconstruction is not something I see other systems delving into or talking about very much, even though it can of course just happen in all kinds of ways. There are so many different roads into that.

Coming back to my first “learning to learn” point, is just to say again that there is one step of having things you can do to help yourself and then there is the additional step of really being able to create yourself.

For practitioners I think this means the ability to improvise around what we have been given and inherited from the Method and then make it our own enough that we can tailor it for an individual. That happens organically in Functional Integration and sometimes for some people, less so, in Awareness Through Movement, but it is the same process.

We want to be able to take a lesson and respond to the group we have in front of us. It can be the same lesson. It can be a group of 85 year olds sitting in chairs or a group of teenagers sitting on the floor and everything in between – people with pain, with serious injuries, athletes. It is the same lesson but taught in a different way for each of these different groups.

I think that is an area which could be developed further and articulated more clearly in the method because there seems to be a line where people think that if you do not teach the lesson the way Moshe taught it fifty, sixty, seventy years ago that somehow, we are violating some holy standard. I think that can hold us back.

You do not start changing things or improvising right away. You get a solid basis in the method and understanding it first, which then brings us into the teaching element.

So that is what I have to weave together to make this beautiful tapestry of Feldenkrais practice.

INTERVIEWER: So the first question is

What are the essential qualities and characteristics of the Feldenkrais work without which it would not be Feldenkrais work?

If there were three things that just floated to the surface for you to make sure that in a training what needs to be carried forward as the essence of the work.

TRAINER: I’ve been obliged to do a few trainings now. Hybrid because of Covid. I don’t like it. I disagree with people that you can teach Functional Integration on a Zoom thing – unless you’re psychic. I know one person who’s psychic and so I would trust her FI lessons on Zoom. Anyone else I don’t.

I always think that we don’t do things to people; we sense what the people need. What I try to tell the students is go slowly so that you can sense.

And that you have to take the parts that are not joining a particular function and add them so that the person is integrated, at least in some kind of an activity.

And then it's not little pieces. You have to find whatever numbers of pieces that you can put together to make some kind of a function that integrates the problem or the difficulties that the person is either complaining about – or that you notice would help them function better.

INTERVIEWER: Is there is some part of that, which we're getting closer to, that distinguishes the Feldenkrais work, so to speak, the sensing or the not non-doing but the sensing the empathy, from other professions?

TRAINER: I think most of the other professions like medicine, and like a dietary thing – they have all done so much scientific stuff on taking things apart that they get stuck in the parts. I think modern medicine does more and more, or like physics.

Maybe 40-50 years where people thought of holistic things. Oh, we still screw up, like for environmental projects. We do something to a river, forgetting about the animals or the fish, or like that.

So I think that holistic approach is for working with people. At least we do it both physically, and talking, and psychologically. Moshe was a great psychologist.

We don't talk about it, but I think you know he said that this would be like a psychology of the future, and maybe it is.

I think someone who is a psychologist in the new sense of the term, as in Feldenkrais, and has a good sense of anatomy and a good sense of what kind of foods people could eat in the whole kit and caboodle will make a great Feldenkrais practitioner.

Our limitation is that we don't know enough about some of the other modalities that we can recommend.

But we're pretty good on what we do recommend.

INTERVIEWER: Is there a key thing that is still that still makes it unique?

TRAINER: So what is the gem that makes this unique? The gem that makes it for me is that there is are so many possibilities assisting the person to have something that integrates – biologically, psychologically – into the nervous system.

INTERVIEWER: The nervous system. Yeah, so no matter who we're working with and no matter what environment we're in, in any situation, there is still that unique thing that guides us in terms of the nervous system.

TRAINER: The nervous system. I always reckon the function is to make things okay in this chaos; that essentially this thing out here is for sure a kind of crazy place – in every sense in the food we eat, how we talk, and how we walk, and how we care for each other. And everything in the Feldenkrais way is acknowledging that within the nervous system, and we're doing a certain part of how the nervous system helps people move better.

INTERVIEWER: So the first question is
What are the essential qualities and characteristics of the Feldenkrais work, without which it would not be Feldenkrais work?

TRAINER: I have three main headings:

- The development of proprioception.
- The sense of proprioception and the use of variations to get to the same movement and help to build a useful and efficient movement.
- And last is finding your way of moving instead of imitating.

So, in that sense, I have thought a lot, especially in my time as a Trainer. People always ask me, for example in the musical world, what is the difference between Feldenkrais and Alexander.

My thought is always, well, what is the difference? What makes it necessary to have one and not the other – they are not the same.

So I thought what you do not get in other things – that I know of, I do not know all of the things that are out there – is that without feeling yourself and developing the ability to sense, you cannot really have perception. To do that you have to slow down, you have to pay attention, you have to break up the movements. That is very important.

And instead of just teaching a movement, you teach a lot of variations on how to get there and how to get out of there. So, it really is a process.

Of course, you cannot do any of that... if you have proprioception you will have to find a way for yourself how to do something and not by imitation. If you are imitating, it is a very different kind of process.

I did Alexander [Technique] when I was very young. As I understand it, as it was then, it was that you cannot rely on your perception because your perception is faulty. So, you have to follow a certain kind of imitation.

Now I have a lot of respect for Alexander. I do not want to put it down. That is not my point at all. But you have to follow certain instructions.

I think what Feldenkrais says is to improve your perception, because it is the only thing you can rely on. Your own perception. For me... one definition of proprioception is it refers to the sensory information relayed from muscles, tendons, and skin that allows for the perception of the body in space. This feedback allows for more fine control of movement.

I would add that after you develop that fine control you can then allow the movement to happen. And it gets integrated and becomes your habit, the way you do it.

That would be my answer to that question. Proprioception, variation, and not imitation.

INTERVIEWER: Alexander talked about variations and inhibition and coming up with alternatives to your movement and your habit, in a very specific way. I saw a connection on that fundamental level.

TRAINER: Yes. I have a lot of respect for Alexander, and it helped a lot of people, no question about it. The strategies, the tools, are different. What you expect your students to be able to do is a little bit different.

That could bring us, I suppose, to question one – What are the distinguishing hallmarks of the Feldenkrais Approach?

We could talk about FI and ATM separately. But we don't. We would say that one thing that distinguishes it is that (1) that we're concerned with the domain of learning, and (2) that we understand that correction interferes with learning. That correction interferes with learning. And that premature objectification of the desires of the teacher or of the teacher's perspective on the curriculum or content will also interfere with the learning.

You know Moshe was constantly – it was stunning. But I was thinking the other day how, in the years of studying with him, I can count on my hands the number of times that he referred to anything anatomical.

Moshe never referred to anatomy, even though you can be confident that he knew anatomy, that he understood anatomy. But, in terms of communicating with his most serious dedicated students, he still never referred to it. And when someone did, they were chastised.

Why? Because that kind of objectification, that kind of segmentation, that kind of reductionism, he considered to not be an essential ingredient in what he was doing – and not an essential characteristic of the Feldenkrais Method.

He did say that when you do learn these things, you will know how to subsume them within what I'm teaching you. So that they're not a distraction. We have so much of that, I feel, of people believing that the answer to understanding this lesson, that lesson, and the understanding, the approach, to the FI is illuminated through anatomy.

What distinguishes the Feldenkrais Method from other professions?

But again, if you're talking about FI, the distinction is enormous. Because FI is founded upon the notion of interacting with the other person in such a way that you join them – you join them in a seamless way.

So, psychotherapy is about the separation, the essential boundary between therapist and client. In physical therapy, there's the notion of fixing and doing to another person. And these are ideas that are anathema to the kind of relationship that we create in FI.

What is the key thing that is still unique? I would say that's not good wording there. What does that mean? It seems to be saying once you have taken X away, what remains that's unique. I don't know how to read that question.

What is the key thing? You know, I think everything that is essential about the method is unique – and take those things away, and it's no longer the Feldenkrais Method to me.

What are the essentials? What is the gem that makes this worth being named the method? Well, this is tricky. Because a method isn't just a method because you name it a method. We really are not a method quite yet, I believe.

In the larger world, and in the academic world, the word method is acceptable, but it needs certain constituents.

One of those constituents, which I think would be very helpful to us, is defining what are our terms. What are the terms that are important to the method that we believe that every practitioner – our common language.

Every profession has a common language. Some of those common languages are so particular to that profession that hardly anybody else understands what people are talking about, except for the people in that profession. Ophthalmology is a little bit like that, for example. Early music lute players, or people that play instruments that haven't been around for 500 years. Then you get them together, the 500 or the 100 that exist in the world, and the rest of us wouldn't understand what they're talking about.

We do have certain things that I think we can clearly talk about and define. Even the notion that FI is dependent upon the practitioner's ability to join a student in movement – we could define that. We could define that – what do we mean when we use the word joining. What do we mean when we use the word difference? And I think if we did that, that would be a big step toward being able to use a capital M for Method.

What are the essential pillars that guide us in matter no matter who we're working with or in what environment or what situation? I would like to treat this question seriously. I think essential pillars, maybe essential terms might be nearly the same thing, not absolutely the same.

It's asking what is there regardless of whether it's FI or ATM, and I think that it's exactly what I've been trying to articulate – this notion of the primacy of sensory experience. Of non-objectified sensory experience!

The primacy of belief in the capacity of every nervous system to learn and improve. That nervous systems, all nervous systems, are seeking to optimize their viability. Every nervous system is available to learn and seeks to learn things that will directly impact or improve any area where there's difficulty.

I think that it's important to understand this is not just true of nervous systems. This is true of cells. Cells seek to optimize their viability, their circumstances and to use matter in the most conserving way possible. Energy in the most conserving way possible. So, once we understand that, we understand how to optimize our teaching of Awareness Through Movement and Functional Integration.

Again. I don't see what is essential to the Feldenkrais way of working. It looks like the same person wrote the same question in three different ways. Well, it can be rewritten in a way that is, I think, a little condensed.

I think there was something very fundamental that, in a very concrete way, is essential for understanding the method and for using it, applying it. This is that nearly every Awareness Through Movement lesson is an exemplar of synergistic neuromuscular relationships.

In other words, how our system, how we as human beings, can optimize our organization, our ability to function.

And I think that there is a gap in many practitioners understanding of these basic synergistic relationships, that are exploited in nearly every Awareness Through Movement lesson that Moshe ever constructed.