Moshe Feldenkrais

Foreword by Norman Doidge, MD

Somatic Resources

Berkeley, California

Praise for The Elusive Obvious

“Moshe Feldenkrais was a unique visionary, and a great philosopher of consciousness and human evolution. The Elusive Obvious is an outstanding presentation of his powerful ways of viewing and improving life.”

—Russell Delman, founder of The Embodied Life School

“Feldenkrais’s work is innovative, gentle, and often strikingly effective.”

—Andrew Weil, MD Integrative Medicine pioneer and author

“In The Elusive Obvious we encounter a compelling intelligence that is ahead of its time. It encourages us
to promote a more holistic view of human knowledge, capacity, and potency, a view of knowledge that
includes embodied attention and experience. Indeed, we learn that we can recover what eluded us.”

— Jennifer Kayle, professor of dance, University of Iowa

“The Elusive Obvious is Moshe Feldenkrais’s most accessible book and covers his most profound ideas and
the fundamental principles behind his method. It is an absolute must-read for anyone interested in the
processes of learning, healing, and self-improvement.”

— Marek Wyszynski, physical therapist, cofounder of The Feldenkrais Institute of New York

“Dr Feldenkrais was a seminal twentieth-century thinker. In the Awareness Through Movement system he
coached us to move better, hurt less, and have more choices. His teaching stresses a gentle and natural
framework for self-healing. The Elusive Obvious presents the scientific logic for his unique method.”

— Deborah Goldberg, MD, pain specialist

“Feldenkrais is not just pushing muscles around, but changing things in the brain itself.”

— Karl Pribram, MD, neuroscientist

“Feldenkrais is one of the best ways to get in touch with your body and to open it up to new and better
movements than you thought possible.”

— Hunter Pence, Major League Baseball player

“The Elusive Obvious brilliantly forecasts neuroscience research frameworks like embodied cognition,
dynamic systems theory, and enactivism, which all confirm Dr. Feldenkrais’s insights gained from study,
practice, and the sheer nerve to move against rivers of prevailing thought. Read this book for its
breathtaking, concise, and compassionate wisdom; read to find courageous mantras for your personal
practice; or read simply to walk alongside the endlessly hopeful, wise, and inquisitive mind of Dr. Moshe
Feldenkrais.”

— Andrew Belser, professor of movement, voice, and acting, Pennsylvania State University

“Feldenkrais has studied the body in movement with a precision that I have found nowhere else.”

— Peter Brook, OBE, theater and film director

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Foreword

There are books with titles that describe exactly what they are about in a self-evident way, like Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, and those with titles that opt to be evocative and reveal their meaning over the course of being read, like Oliver Sacks's *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. *The Elusive Obvious*, by Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, is, obviously, of the latter “evocative” category.

Trained in engineering, mathematics, and physics, there was a side of Moshe Feldenkrais that valued linear thinking and clarity of thought. But he had another side that wanted his listeners or readers to work things out for themselves. This was central to his practice. Feldenkrais's approach to helping people involved setting up situations where individuals could discover what they needed instead of him telling them what to do. As he says in this book, “I myself do not like predigested food.”

Fair enough; but people often do like to know what they are eating, digested or not. So allow me to say what I think this book is about, its importance, and a few words about why I, not a Feldenkrais practitioner, was asked to write this foreword.

The title, beautiful in its own way, points to a paradox of everyday life. It is a paradox that emerges from our habits and the unconscious way in which we normally perform everyday tasks and routines. As we repeat these activities, they become familiar, and soon everything about them seems obvious to us. The more we do these things, the more familiar and automatic (one might say less than fully conscious) they become, and soon, the less we notice or understand them. This raises a problem for us because most people think that the more we do something, the more we know about it. *The Elusive Obvious* suggests that we can easily come to understand least what we do most—if we do it without awareness. In this Feldenkrais anticipates the recent interest in “mindful” living, but he has unique and specific contributions to make about the role of “awareness” of movement and action in helping people break bad habits.

*The Elusive Obvious* explores many of the groundbreaking methods that Feldenkrais developed to
help people break free of this important paradox and find their way out of many of their bad habits and problematic ways of performing everyday activities. This book will be of value to anyone interested in his approach, with its focus on the relationship between movement, learning, emotions, and human development. Feldenkrais showed that many of our functional restrictions are actually caused by habit and learning. Written when he was in his mid-seventies, Feldenkrais’s intention in *The Elusive Obvious* was to offer a coherent and comprehensive statement of his theoretical point of view. Indeed, *The Elusive Obvious* offers Feldenkrais’s mature understanding of how to optimize the conditions for learning so as to maximize change, and shows how his ideas could be applied to ameliorate a range of human restrictions, difficulties, and challenges. Yet it is not a textbook, by any means. *The Elusive Obvious* is one of Feldenkrais’s most engaging books. Conversational in tone, his exploration of the paradox (that we understand least what we do most) is more of a leitmotif, in a book that also summarizes a number of Feldenkrais’s other brilliant insights, and also shows how he developed remarkable treatments for a number of brain problems.

I became acquainted with Feldenkrais’s method in the early 1990s, seeking help for what seemed to be a biomechanical issue brought about by—what else?—endless sitting, based on my chosen occupation. Feldenkrais sessions, called lessons, involve becoming aware of one’s own movements either in a group class (Awareness Through Movement), or through individual sessions with a practitioner (Functional Integration). In either mode, the client is guided through extremely gentle and subtle movements designed to stimulate both mental awareness and the nervous system. In the course of my individual sessions, I heard from my practitioner that this approach could help stroke victims, children with special needs, those with brain injuries, cerebral palsy, and other serious problems. As a physician, I knew that this was a claim far outside what mainstream medicine thought possible. But because I could see that the lessons were influencing my nervous system, and because my practitioner (Marion Harris—who had trained with Feldenkrais) seemed so unprone to exaggeration, I became curious. So, I got hold of his books.

At one point—in significant part because of reading this book—I realized that Feldenkrais’s ability to help people with brain problems was related to his understanding decades before many of his peers, that the brain is neuroplastic. He displayed an ingenious appreciation for how to use this understanding to influence the brain non-invasively through mental experience and physical movement—a chief interest of mine. So I set myself the task of “cracking the code” of Feldenkrais’s writings—figuring out where to begin and how to explain his work in a clear, efficient way to non-initiates. I also wanted to determine where Feldenkrais’s work fit in with the current knowledge of the brain, and to learn what he had to teach us about our brains and how to use them (Doidge, 2016).

Moshe Feldenkrais was arguably responsible for some of the most important contributions to our knowledge of the power and principles of mind-body functioning. The mind-body connection is central to what is variously called “holistic” or “integrative” or “complementary” or “functional” medicine in the West. Though the method developed by Feldenkrais was able to improve functioning and performance, diminish symptoms and pain, and at times totally rectify conditions that mainstream medicine could not, Feldenkrais emphasized he was not practicing “medicine,” or even “teaching.” Rather, he explained that he was creating situations where the pupil could use their own enhanced awareness to discover how to perform a compromised function better, potentially leading to healing.

This was possible because Feldenkrais realized that the nervous system was far more flexible than most people thought. The nervous circuits involved in movement and action, he found, could actually be altered if people learned to refine their awareness of how they moved. This would not only help people improve everyday functioning, but could also help to alter brain structure and function. As he developed his method he made additional valuable findings, such as how to rapidly
quiet a nervous system, get it ready for learning new things, and help it to unlearn certain largely unconscious habits. Perhaps most impressively, through his method Feldenkrais learned how to restore a normal developmental process when it was interrupted by many different kinds of brain problems in childhood or even before birth.

Feldenkrais was originally schooled in the exactness of mathematics and engineering, and then received his doctorate in Physics (Mechanical Engineering) at the Sorbonne, where he was a major player in the laboratory of French Nobel Prize Laureates, Frédéric and Irène Joliot-Curie.

As a young man he had a severe knee injury that couldn’t be helped by the medicine or surgery of his time, and so he turned to his own mind to see if he might be able to apply his knowledge to help himself. In addition to his formal academic training, Feldenkrais was also one of the first Judo masters in Europe, and had written books on hand-to-hand combat used by several countries to train their soldiers. He was aware of Eastern insights into mind-and-body functioning, and understood how extraordinarily effective the mind could be in influencing the body when the stakes were high, as in combat. A Physicist Unfooled by the Machine Metaphor for the Brain

In his first book dealing with biology, Body and Mature Behavior: A Study of Anxiety, Sex, Gravitation, and Learning (1949), Feldenkrais lay the groundwork for his model based on his reading of a small scientific literature that argued that the nervous system is growing and changing throughout life. He cited the experiments by psychologist Karl Lashley and others suggesting the brain is plastic, and that the nerve cells in the brain appear able to form new connections and paths, and that learning can facilitate certain nervous paths to work better. This is significant because Feldenkrais was writing a good fifty years before most biologists and neuroscientists accepted the idea that the brain of the adult can change—a function of what we today call neuroplasticity.

Neuroplasticity, as I define it, is that property of the brain that allows it to change its structure and function through mental experience and activity (see Doidge, 2016), and has only been widely accepted since the early twenty-first century. The Canadian psychologist Donald Hebb, in the same year (1949), speculated that the brain might be plastic (as did Freud in the 1890s!) but these were hypotheses. Most neurologists and neuroscientists believed that the central nervous system of an adult was hardwired for life. They thought the brain produced mental experience; but it certainly wasn’t changed by it.

It is my sense that Feldenkrais was capable of important clinical insights in this area not because of a certain “flakiness,” but because of a certain hard-headedness. Perhaps it was because he worked as a nuclear physicist, with machines in an exact “hard” science, that once he turned to biology he very quickly understood that the mainstream metaphor for the brain—that it was “hardwired like an electrical machine”—was wrong. In contrast to the way neurologists spoke, Feldenkrais was drawn repeatedly to the idea that the brain is growing and changing for our entire lives.

Feldenkrais also rejected the theories of localizationism so common among neurologists of his time. “Localizationism” was a mainstream view of the brain that declared that each mental function is processed in a single location in the brain. Because scientists and clinicians didn’t believe the brain had any plasticity, localizationists assumed that if an area was damaged nothing could be done to restore that lost function. This “mechanistic” way of thinking about biological systems extends back to Galileo and Newton’s discovery of the “mechanical laws of motion and physics.” Those laws were so impressive that scientists sought to use them to describe living systems in biology. This led scientists to describe the body in mechanical terms, as if it were a machine. As a simile—the heart is like a pump—this can work as a useful short hand. But as a metaphor—the brain is a computer—important misunderstandings are created. Because Feldenkrais knew that physics had advanced well beyond these earlier mechanistic theories, he understood that applying
early physics to consciousness was naïve. As a newcomer to biology, he seemed most interested in understanding the study of life on its own terms. Once he turned to biology, instead of modeling the body on a machine, Feldenkrais focused on key biological concepts such as growth, development, and evolution. Feldenkrais knew when to think like a physicist, and more importantly, when not to.  

The Elusive Obvious and Neuroplasticity

In reading The Elusive Obvious, readers are given a sense of what it may have been like to be with Feldenkrais in person. Across the pages, Feldenkrais’s take on a range of topics is punctuated with flashes of brilliance (such as the exchange between himself and anthropologist Margaret Mead), and occasional free associations, but he always circles back to his primary interest in habits, how we learn, and how to learn better or more gratifying ways of performing actions. It is here, in The Elusive Obvious, more than any other work of his that I know, that Feldenkrais makes clear the extent to which his understanding of brain plasticity informed his discoveries of how to help people, and it shows the firm scientific ground his method rested on.

Though Feldenkrais was on to plasticity in 1949, if not earlier, I strongly suspect that his interest in it was vindicated and reemphasized in this 1981 book because in 1977, one of Feldenkrais’s students, and a practitioner of his method, Eileen Bach-y-Rita, introduced Feldenkrais to her husband, Paul Bach-y-Rita, MD (who is mentioned in this book, p. 129). Paul Bach-y-Rita was a neurologist, a specialist in rehabilitation, an important neuroscientist, and one of the boldest and earliest scientific pioneers in brain plasticity in human beings. He was writing about it in depth, already in the 1960s, and had demonstrated that sensory experience can rewire the brain, from cradle to grave, and developed inventions to use it in brain damage and blindness. (In fact, just before his untimely death, Dr. Bach-y-Rita had plans to study the method and its effects on head injuries, but that work was never completed.)

In The Elusive Obvious, Feldenkrais clearly articulates his understanding of brain plasticity. He writes, “The mind gradually develops and begins to program the functioning of the brain. My way of looking at the mind and body involves a subtle method of ‘rewiring’ the structures of the entire human being to be functionally well integrated, which means being able to do what the individual wants. Each individual has the choice to wire himself in a special way” (pp. 26–27). “The neural substance organizes itself,” to order experience (p. 25), he boldly asserts. “You can, at any time of your life, rewire yourself …” (p. 117). Feldenkrais understood that plasticity exists throughout life. The idea that the brain is changing its own structure in response to experience couldn’t be clearer.

To say he was an “early adopter” of neuroplasticity understates the case. In 1981, there were just over 100 scientific papers that used the word “plasticity” with respect to the brain, and few had demonstrated its clinical utility. By the publication of The Elusive Obvious, Feldenkrais had already been applying neuroplasticity for thirty years.

Habits and the Neuroplastic Brain

Life experience, through our mental experiences (which includes sensation, thought, our experience of action, even imagination), rewires the brain. Neurons that fire together wire together. You see a man with a yellow hat, and your neurons that are involved with processing man, hat, and yellow, fire at once, and wire together, and form a circuit, changing your brain. If you repeat a mental experience, the neurons in that circuit connect more closely to fire faster, stronger signals. That circuit starts to have a competitive advantage in the brain, compared to less used circuits.

But change can be for the better or worse, and change for the worse in brain structure is not something that can be discarded as easily as a bad idea, once its flaw is exposed. This is because habits create altered brain structure, and the problematic circuit still has a competitive advantage over others. So, if I develop a bad habit—say an addiction to getting pleasure from cocaine—that
circuit is wired strongly into my brain (and its reward system) and fires fast, potent, efficient signals. That's why it becomes not just a bad habit, but one that is very hard to get rid of.

Not all “bad habits” start off with bad decisions, such as trying cocaine, and thinking “I won’t get addicted.” There are other habits that start off as “adaptive” that can become non-adaptive later on. The Elusive Obvious focuses on this second category of “bad habits.”

One example that he gives is learning to read. Most of us learn to read by reading aloud, i.e., by vocalizing each of the words, which often have pleasurable rhymes, and are more like simple poetry than prose. Think of stories like, “Jack and Jill / Went up the hill.” It’s pleasant to hear the sounds, and easier to remember rhymes and thus learn the words. But sooner or later, we are asked to read silently. At this point, most people still “subvocalize” each of the words, hearing their sounds in their heads. Subvocalizing becomes strengthened as we read more, and becomes a habit. It enriches reading if the writer has a good ear for sound, or we read poetry, but it also keeps our silent reading speed pretty close to the speed we would have reading the passage aloud. Speed readers, on the other hand, either never develop this habit of subvocalizing, or learn, in a course, to drop it, and they can just look at the words and somehow know their meaning. They can read much faster (though hardly at the speeds often claimed). Slow reading speed, because of subvocalizing, is an example of something that starts off as adaptive, but in a new situation becomes restrictive, and a waste of energy.

I would call these “habit-transpositions,” to coin a phrase to summarize one of Feldenkrais’s major themes: that habits, once adaptive, can migrate from one activity, or kind of movement, or behavior, or even mental activity, to another. This happens unconsciously, and is common throughout life. Spend all day slouched forward at a computer, and you will walk stooped forward too.

Of course, habit-transpositions affect not only posture. They can affect how we perform in multiple activities. They can even affect our ideas about our bodies. For example, F. M. Alexander (whose work Feldenkrais appreciated) made some interesting observations. To simplify one of Alexander’s ideas, in my own language, consider the following. As children, we were often told to “sit down,” and as a result may have picked up the idea, the habit of mind, that what our energy should be doing when we approach a chair is to collapse down into it, as we sit. But we do much better when we use the chair for support, so we can sit up and give our heart and inner organs space. Sitting down involves a habit-transposition of our attitude toward the idea of down, and applies it to sitting. In this book, Feldenkrais discusses how, for instance, the common belief that speech is merely vocalized thought can cause all sorts of misunderstandings and confusions because we get in the habit of thinking they are similar—though, in reality, there are profound differences between thinking and speaking.

One of Feldenkrais’s chief goals was to help people realize when and how they were doing habit-transpositions, so they could discover a way to perform each new activity afresh, on its own terms, unencumbered by a previous habit, learning, compulsion, attitude, excess effort, or “parasitic movements” that were not useful.

One of the reasons that Feldenkrais’s work on habit is so important is because he provides an approach to “breaking habits” that offers a radically different alternative to the mainstream approach proposed by behavioral psychologists. Mainstream behaviorism focused on stimulus and response, and left out the role of the mind (or conscious awareness) in the development and the breaking of habits. Feldenkrais did not.

The mainstream behaviorist approach to habit was not interested in the role of psychological or brain development in habit formation. The aim was reductionistic: to eliminate from psychology
anything that wasn’t easy to measure, such as mental states, and instead study just observable behavior, and sequences of stimuli and responses to them. In so doing, behaviorists came to a position that eliminated the psyche, and subjective awareness, from psychology, even though psychology is, by definition, the study of the psyche (the logos of the psyche). And, they left out the brain.

While Feldenkrais understood that many of the discoveries of behaviorists were of great significance, he didn’t make a virtue of ignoring the function of the brain or mind. Instead of starting as a reductionist, and trying to eliminate obvious human attributes from the field of observation and study, Feldenkrais had a more holistic point of view from the outset.

Another key difference between Feldenkrais and the behaviorists had to do with the goals of their respective approaches. As one of the most well-known behaviorists, John B. Watson proudly argued in his book Behaviorism, “It is the business of behaviorist psychology to be able to predict and control human activity.” Feldenkrais was not concerned with controlling other people’s behavior, nor was he especially interested in predicting it. In The Elusive Obvious, he writes about free choice, and where it occurs: in thought. And instead of setting up cycles of repeated stimuli to “break” bad habits, his key theme is that many of our best outcomes, when we have developed a problematic movement, or way of performing an action, come from our random attempts to do things that have unforeseen—unpredictable—positive consequences. One overcomes bad habits not just by replacing them with a better habit (a good behavioral approach that is sometimes effective, as when a person, instead of smoking on a break, goes for a run), but rather, by becoming more aware of ways of performing that feel better, and that are more associated with ease. It is an approach to habit that uses introspection and awareness of one’s actions, to increase one’s freedom, as opposed to one that aims at controlling behavior.

Here Feldenkrais makes a crucial distinction. There are aspects of the brain that are hardwired, and those that are not.

The hardwired portions of our brain involve the hardwired reflexes we are all born with. These reflexes are responses to frequent situations our ancestors all had to face. They include, for instance, the fight or flight responses to dangerous animals, or our grasp and repositioning responses to falling, or how we orient ourselves to novelty. These are similarly wired into each member of our species at birth. These reflexes amount to a kind of knowledge that is transferred, over the course of the development of the species (phylogeny) from generation to generation. For instance, without any training, newborns, as they fall, have reflexes that position their bodies such that they will land in the safest possible way. The reflex carries within it the innate “knowledge” that falling is dangerous. Feldenkrais called this kind of innate knowledge “inherited evolved learning” (p. 24). Such reflexes are relatively hardwired, and they differ little if at all from person to person, or over the course of an individual’s life. (I say “relatively,” because one can train them to a degree, and learn to suppress them in response to specific triggers.)

The far more plastic, and non-hardwired, forms of learning are those that each individual acquires in his or her own way in the course of life, and that account for the differences between us, based on our unique experiences. “Homo sapiens,” Feldenkrais wrote elsewhere, “arrives with a tremendous part of his nervous mass left unpatterned, unconnected, so that each individual, depending on where he happens to be born, can organize his brain to fit the demands of his surroundings” (Body Awareness as Healing Therapy, p. 63). He argues that this form of learning, which occurs in the course of our individual development (ontogeny), is possible because there is a large non-hardwired portion of cortex. (I would say we now know that much more of the brain than the cortex is not hardwired.)

These distinctions are important to make. In the past, we have had schools of thought that seem to
think that the *mind* is a tabula rasa and infinitely plastic, and other schools that think everything in the *brain* is hardwired and not plastic at all. Though he did not put it this way, I think that by making these distinctions, Feldenkrais was able to develop a more sophisticated approach to the spectrum of human plasticity, and how it affects our growth and habits.

*The Elusive Obvious* lays out some of the deep presuppositions Feldenkrais had about the nervous system—ones I find very congenial. He clarifies that his approach rests on an appreciation of the fact that a *key role of the nervous system is to establish order in the midst of a world that has much chaos in it* (pp. 17–18). I would say (though he doesn't) that this also must mean that our nervous system, which is neuroplastic, and which, like a muscle, functions according to the principle of use-it-or-lose-it, thus actually *needs* some exposure to chaos. It needs exposure to random sensation and movement so that it can learn to do its job, which is to order the chaos, and build maps of the world and our many different body areas, movements, and sensations. We need to have experiences of novelty and exposure to unpredictable events and movements in order to build up differentiated brain maps. Then, as they become more differentiated, because of the drive for development—which rests on a kind of innate knowledge—we can acquire new abilities *spontaneously*. And this is precisely what Feldenkrais recommends. He also recommends this approach for breaking out of bad habits.

One can't emphasize enough how Feldenkrais's contributions offer a radically different mindset than the standard behavioral approach to habit making and habit breaking. Feldenkrais's insights do not disqualify the behavioral insights and approaches, but they do help us to draw a boundary around their applicability, and give us a richer and wider view of ourselves.

I want to conclude by observing the extent to which first principles underlie and shape each of these two approaches. The behaviorist approach starts with a deterministic, mechanistic view of human beings. It conceives of the best approach to eliminating bad habits and automatisms (which feel out of our control, compulsive, mechanical, determined, and unfree), as a treatment that is itself mechanistic in that it prescribes a predetermined regime of proper responses to stimuli, to produce better habits. Thus, the treatment for the problem of automaticity is a new and better automaticity.

In contrast, by emphasizing that we are capable of freedom, choice, and conscious awareness, Feldenkrais sought to use free choice to change habits. He sought to move away from automaticity altogether, by discovering other ways of performing that increased relaxation, spontaneity, learning, ease, grace, growth, and vitality.

A more comprehensive psychology of the future would help us to better know when to use a classic behavioral approach, and when to use more of an awareness-based approach, because both work, but in different situations. This is especially important to know, precisely because when stuck in a habit rut, we are somewhat mindless and automatic. But is it because we are machines, or that we are often in a bit of a trance, not quite paying attention? Without awareness, we can start behaving *like* a machine that can't turn off when it should. But that does not *make us* a machine. No real machine yet knows or thinks it is a machine. Consciousness and self-awareness matter. Can we now agree that at least this much is obvious?

—Norman Doidge, MD, Toronto, Canada, 2018

References


Are you satisfied with your posture? Are you satisfied with your breathing? Are you satisfied with your life? I mean, do you feel you have made the best you could of your genetic endowment? Have you learned to do what you wish to do with yourself and how to do it? Do you suffer chronic pains? Do you regret not being able to do the things you would have liked to do? I believe what you wish secretly is not in fact wishful thinking, but that we are all able to live the way we want. The main obstacle is ignorance: scientific ignorance, personal ignorance, and cultural ignorance. If we do not know what we are actually enacting then we cannot possibly do what we want. I spent nearly forty years first learning to know how I was doing what, and then teaching others to learn to learn so that they could do justice to themselves. I believe that knowing oneself is the most important thing a human being can do for himself. How can one know oneself? By learning to act not as one should, but as one does. We have great difficulty in sorting out what we do as we should from what we want to do with ourselves.

The majority of people in each generation stop growing with sexual maturity, when they are considered to be adult and feel themselves adult. Most learning achieved after that involves essentially what is important socially, and personal evolution and growth are mostly accidental or a fluke. We learn a profession most of the time by opportunity rather than by continuous genetic development and growth. Only artistically inclined people, be they cobbler's, musicians, painters, sculptors, actors, dancers, and some scientists continue to grow personally as well as professionally and socially. Others grow mostly socially and professionally and remain adolescent or infantile emotionally and sensorially and consequently also arrested in their motor functions. Their posture grows worse, and movements or actions are gradually excluded from their repertoire. First jumping, then turning a somersault, then twisting, in whatever order, are so eliminated or neglected that in a short time it is impossible for them to perform these actions any more.

People in the arts do, by dint of the art, continue to improve, differentiate, and vary their motor skills until old age. They continue to grow, gradually achieving a performance fitting their intention. Obviously, there are artists in all walks of life, but regrettably few among the rank and file.

Reading this book may help you to a happier road more in the direction of your individuality than the high road you are usually set upon. There is no intention to correct you. Your trouble and mine is that we are trying to behave correctly, as one should, at the cost of quenching, with our own consent, our individuality. In the end we do not know what we want, to the point of believing that what we are doing is what we really want to do; moreover the annoying status quo becomes more attractive to us than what we believe or say that we want. An obvious solution is to preoccupy ourselves not with what we do but how we do it. The “how” is the hallmark of our individuality; it is an inquiry into the process of acting. If we look at how we do things, we might find an alternative way of doing them, i.e., have some free choice. For, if we have no alternative, we have no choice at all. We may kid ourselves that we have chosen a unique way of doing things, but it is compulsive for lack of alternatives.

It is not easy to see how you can be assisted in your task by a book, or by anything else. The thinking is exhilarating, but the communication of the thinking through words is a stumbling block. Speaking is not thinking, although sometimes it is. Anyhow, let us have a go at it. I enjoy your company and hope you will come to enjoy mine.

This is the fourth of my books on this subject in English. It was written at Peter Mayer’s request and in response to my students’ demand for a work condensing the four years’ teaching given during summer vacations that led to their graduation and the formation of the Feldenkrais Guild in San
Scientist, martial artist, and founder of the method that bears his name, Moshe Feldenkrais wrote several influential books on the relationship between movement, learning, and health. In *The Elusive Obvious* he presents ideas that are more relevant today than when the book was first published, as current research strongly supports many of the insights on which the Feldenkrais Method is based. This beautiful new edition is ready to be treasured by an emerging generation of somatic practitioners, movement teachers, performing artists, and anyone interested in self-improvement and healing. The two main strands of the Feldenkrais Method—Awareness Through Movement and Functional Integration—are now known by many around the world for reducing pain and anxiety, cultivating vitality, and improving performance. *The Elusive Obvious* presents a thorough and accessible explanation of the Feldenkrais Method, and, as its title indicates, throws light on the solutions to many of our difficulties that are hidden in plain sight.
The Elusive Obvious: The Convergence of Movement, Neuroplasticity, and Health

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