
Reflections, thoughts, clarifications and mostly questions
on

The Elusive Obvious

By:

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Dr. Chava Shelhav was a member of the first group of students trained personally by Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, worked with him for many years and acted as his assistant in programs worldwide. She received her PhD at Heidelberg University in Germany and her MA degree from Boston University based on her work with children with Cerebral Palsy and her master's thesis, "Working with Brain Damaged Children Using the Feldenkrais Method," that was published in 1989. Her method of teaching utilizes aspects of the body-mind relationship, and emphasizes the influence of early development on the individual and on social personality. Dr. Shelhav achieved distinction through her work with infants and children, especially disabled ones. She witnessed the growing need and interest of working with babies and special needs babies and developed "Child'Space method"—a unique Method of Developmental coaching that applies the Feldenkrais theory.

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Have you ever found your-self puzzled about what "The Elusive Obvious" means? Were you still baffled even after having read the entire book? Have you ever discussed it with colleagues, but failed to reach a full consensus about the true meaning of this term?

If you did, then know that you are not alone. We, as well as many other readers, are left perplexed and pondering...

Here, we will ponder some more and perhaps elucidate some of the **elusiveness**, and shed some light on Dr. Feldenkrais' thinking.

Let's begin by examining the word "elusive". "Elusive" describes something or someone that is difficult to find, define, or comprehend. A thief can be elusive, as well as a memory, a thought, or a concept.

The oxymoron "The Elusive Obvious" is a product of Dr. Feldenkrais' keen intelligence and quick wit. An oxymoron is a term that uses two words that have, opposite meanings. It is a figure of speech that does not make literal sense. For example: bittersweet, deafening silence, unbiased opinion.

Similarly, the term "elusive obvious" can leave us puzzled and perplexed. Perhaps, that was Dr. Feldenkrais intention, and even if it wasn't, it did get us to think...

Thus, an "**obvious**" spoken message may have many "**elusive**" aspects to it.

A practical example can be easily found in Awareness through Movement lessons. The movement instructions can be obvious both to the teacher and the students. Yet, the movements are only the means by which awareness and self-direction are to be explored and developed. From the teacher's point of view, even if the students perform the **obvious** movement instructions, their own subjective experience, internal interpretation, and self-exploration is mostly **elusive**.

When considering Awareness through Movement lessons, we can ask: What are the **obvious** processes that a lesson offers? For example, a lesson might offer exploring a movement from its simpler variations to more complex ones. Such a process can be easily described and articulated. But then we must consider: What are the **elusive** processes that the lesson offers? The lesson might involve shifting the attention from the details to the whole, meaning that the lesson deals with organizing the attention and the movement is just the means to do so. This is a good example of a more **elusive** process which is much more complicated to articulate.

Dr. Feldenkrais brings localization of functions in the brain as another subject that might seem obvious, yet in reality is more complicated than anybody's grasp. Localization means that specific areas in the brain are responsible for specific behaviors. This type of mapping, which correlates between the brain and the body parts defines the homunculus. The image of the homunculus further strengthens the appealing idea of localization, both ideas that are relatively easy to grasp. Yet, neuro-scientists have shown that these maps are plastic and dynamic, they change in accordance to one's personal experience.

In addition, many functions have been shown to involve multiple brain regions and are thus not localized. Brain regions that have been thought to be involved in a specific function, were shown to be involved in many other functions as well. When it comes to complicated functions such as learning, memory, awareness and consciousness, the theories are numerous and science is far from reaching a unified consensus. There is still much elusiveness in understanding brain function...

These examples are only a few of the many examples that Dr. Feldenkrais lays out throughout the book. All are intended to show that things that seem obvious to us are perceived as a fixated reality, when they are in fact a product of the enormously complex workings of our nervous system. Our nervous system creates order by enabling us to perceive ourselves and our environment as "invariant", meaning: not

changing, constant. This order enables us to move and act in a world that seems predictable, yet this perception of predictability is the construction of reality by our own brains. We create a given image of ourselves, of our environment, of our relationship to our physical and human surroundings.

This causes the belief in the invariance of for instance habits or “I have this pain and it will never go away”. But the greatness of Feldenkrais lessons allows the students to choose each time different and appropriate variations according to the needs of change. So there is no logic in talking about a set of rules of mapping in the brain.

The concept that child development is an **obvious**, predictable, process with a fixed timeline, is another example of how appealing fixed notions are to the mind.

"**Obviously**" lifting the head should precede rolling, belly crawling should precede standing on hands and knees which should precede sitting and so on... Yet, in reality, developmental progression is highly individualized and multifaceted. Body weight, muscle mass and body proportions, cultural differences in child rearing, the physical and climate conditions to which the child is exposed influence not only the "when" but also the "how" the child advances and learns each new skill. Thus, predicting and explaining what the child should be doing or is going to do next becomes very **elusive**.

As humans, not being born with wired in skills and knowledge, our habits and perceptions are acquired through sensory experience. How can we influence the working patterns of our nervous system? How can we begin to perceive the **obvious** as more plastic and dynamic? How can we change long years of fixed perceptions regarding ourselves and our environment?

The answers to these questions are not **obvious**... but we shouldn't avoid them just because of their **elusiveness**...

Dr. Feldenkrais directs us to take another look at the learning process we all went through during our early development. Our learning was not dictated by intentionally achieving desirable **obvious** goals, but rather through trial and error that explored countless variations. How did all the trials and errors of all the variations advance our learning? Well you can guess by now that the answer is very **elusive**. Yet, we can assume that learning happens through comparing variations, through noticing differences, through assimilation and integration of multiple variables throughout those trials and errors.

The same process can enable us, as adults, to realize that what we perceive as unalterable and obvious might have more elusive aspects than previously thought. Through variations we can develop the awareness of having more choices at hand, which enable us to develop freedom of choice, or as Dr. Feldenkrais would say: "If you know what you are doing, you can do what you want."

We hope that this short discussion sparked your curiosity to read and reread "**The Elusive Obvious**". Perhaps now you will have an easier time following the many

examples Dr. Feldenkrais presents and maybe you will find some more cues to the human potential for learning, development, improvement, and change.

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