



The Movement Exploration Lab

Inclusive Attention

Here I want to talk about one of the topics I'm most passionate about.

Inclusive Attention.

This is something Moshe Feldenkrais repeated over and over and over and over again to Feldenkrais® practitioners in training.

We've touched on this idea in the past when we talked about things like:

"Do not concentrate" in the Learning How to Learn Lesson in Stage 1: Framing the Fundamentals.

To reiterate...

Moshe Feldenkrais more or less said...

Do not concentrate if what concentration means to you is to attend to one thing to the exclusion of everything else.

Instead, he invites us... Ha!

Dare I say he insists (if we truly want to be doing the Feldenkrais Method®) that we practice inclusive attention.

What exactly does he mean by this?

As you're listening to this lesson, can you follow along and continue to watch the slides, and hear my voice while very gently and very slowly beginning to nod your head up and down...

And sense the temperature of the air on your skin...

And sense the entire surface of the back of you...head, neck, shoulders, torso, pelvis, legs....

And sense your breathing...

And notice the other sounds besides my voice.....

And the contact you're making with the ground (whatever that may be at this moment -- floor, seat, mat...)...

And sense the entire front of you...

.....all at the same time.

There is no doubt that you will not be as precise about any one particular thing.

What you want is to take in the 'whole thing'.

Here is a quote from my favourite scene in the movie The Legend of Bagger Vance. Bagger Vance is an incredibly wise, mythical character...

(Inspecting a golf green night before Bagger Vance caddies for Junuh at a big golf tournament and young boy Hardy starts swinging a putter)

Young boy, Hardy: You think Junuh can win?

Bagger Vance: Yeah, if he can find his authentic swing.

Hardy: "Authentic"?

Bagger Vance: Go and hit one more for me.

Yep, inside each and every one of us is one true, authentic swing.

Something we was born with, that's ours...

...and ours alone. Something can't be taught to you or learned.

Something that got to be remembered.

Over time, the world can rob us of that swing...

...and get buried inside us under...

...all our woulda's and coulda's, and shoulda's.

Some folk even forget what their swing was like.

- You keep swinging.

Hardy: But I don't have any balls.

Bagger Vance: Don't worry about the ball or where it's gonna go...

Just swing the club.

Close your eyes.

Hardy: Close my...

Bagger Vance: You can't make that ball go in.

You have to let it.

Feel the club. Feel the weight of the club.
A deep perfect line. Dropping in, soft as butter.
Listen to the sounds of the night. Keep swinging that club.
Feel the breeze coming off the sea.
Inside every one of us is one true, authentic swing.
Keep swinging that club...
...until you're part of the whole thing.
Something we was born with.
- That's good. Listen to the night. -
Hardy: I don't feel a thing.
Bagger Vance: Just keep swinging that club until you're part of the whole thing.
That's a good thing.

Certainly...it helps to bring some things into the foreground of your attention while letting others recede into the background...

But never let go of that background.

To attend to something else, you need to let go of whatever you're attending to so that it recedes into the background, allowing something else to come to the fore.

I love Moshe Feldenkrais' example: reading.

When learning to read, we attend to one letter at a time, then letting it go so we can attend to the next and so on....

But...

If we completely drop the previous ones, we'll never read and comprehend what we are wanting to understand.

Eventually, you start attending to whole words at a time, and then groups of words, until speed readers can comprehend entire lines and paragraphs at a time.

Now...a little shift of perspective...

Since, as Moshe Feldenkrais pointed out...

We act in accordance with our self-image, the more complete and clear our self-image, the more clear, effective and efficient our actions.

How can we have a complete self-image if we don't include the 'whole thing'?

Now, I can appreciate that this still can sound and be pretty darn elusive.

I'm asking you to trust me on this - for now.

Practice, experiment, intend to develop your capacity for more and more inclusive attention and you'll be so glad you did because...

This is one of the most useful ways to bring this work off your mat and into everyday life.

Here's Feldenkrais himself - while speaking extemporaneously at the last big teacher training he taught:

"...you will find that in the beginning we cannot conceive ourselves in entirety because we are so used to divide our attention...fix it on that, on this, on that, but not on our entire self. Therefore, we find it difficult to do the thing and at the same time think the length of the body, or the curve of the spine....

"You will find that the way of looking at [things or self], seeing the foreground and the background and be able to move the foreground into the background and the background become a foreground and that, looking at [things or self with this] generality, in this connection with the cosmos and with your entire inner self...and that is fundamental to life in general....

...in fact you already know that yourself. That we use that [inclusive or general attention], but only -- not methodically -- not generalizing -- we use it only in those things that we do more or less well....in those parts in which we excel. And obviously, the parts or the actions in which we excel give us the model how to use ourselves in the neighbouring function....Why can't we spread that excellence over our entire being? And of course we can."*

And...

Feldenkrais made it clear that without practicing the ability to have this generalized, inclusive attention when doing ATM™ lessons...

We'll be doing nothing more than another type of 'exercise'. And the benefit we derive from ATM™ lessons will remain short-lived.

That's not what I want, and I'm sure it's not what you want either.

So...

The invitation at this stage is to be more intentional, more methodical in directing your own attention in this more inclusive and generalized way because...

One of the things that marks mastery of this process is the ability to self-direct our attention. It is one difference that will make a great difference overall.

You will get so much more out of your lessons.

Becoming whole and part of the whole thing...

That's a good thing.

*Amherst Training Transcripts - International Feldenkrais® Federation