

**PLEASE CHECK ALL OF THE MOSHE QUOTATIONS -- since the original sources in English were not available to us at the time of doing this translation**

### **The Encounter between Moshe Feldenkrais and Heinrich Jacoby**

We are relatively well informed about the encounter between these two men. From Feldenkrais we have two longer accounts dating from the Eighties: in his book “The Elusive Obvious” and in a transcription of a workshop held in 1984<sup>45</sup>. In addition a number of letters exchanged between them and notes made about their meetings have now been found in Jacoby’s literary estate, administered by the Heinrich Jacoby / Elsa Gindler Foundation. There also exist notes made by Sophie Ludwig about this encounter, apparently based on that documentation and personal communications by Jacoby<sup>46</sup>. So these are three highly different “sources” in need of critical evaluation but eloquent in their distinctiveness. The primary sources, the letters and notes in the Jacoby estate, are closest in time to the actual events. Jacoby used to assemble information about people he met for exchanging practical ideas. Feldenkrais’s remarks – some thirty years after these meetings – are less accurate in detail because of the time that had passed, but reveal how he assimilated the experience.

A note made by Heinrich Jacoby shows that he met Moshe Feldenkrais ten times at Zürich between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 1950 – “each time for over two hours of conversation”<sup>47</sup>. They communicated in English, French, and German with Feldenkrais using English and French in their correspondence while Jacoby preferred German. Konrad Hirsch, who had met Feldenkrais in London, had previously told Jacoby understanding would “present no problem” since Moshe “speaks and understands French, and also understands (but does not speak) German as well as French”<sup>48</sup>. Jacoby himself wrote to Feldenkrais that he “hoped we would understand one another despite my limited knowledge of English and French”<sup>49</sup>. In a later letter Feldenkrais mentions the difficulty of reading in a foreign language<sup>50</sup>. So it is difficult to imagine that Jacoby’s linguistic precision and mastery was mediated in other languages.

Sophie Ludwig notes that the two men got on excellently<sup>51</sup> even though they were so different in character. Feldenkrais’s attitude to life had been shaped by his experiences in Judo and the Zionist underground. It is said that as long as he lived he never entered a hotel without first finding out about escape routes<sup>52</sup>. He describes their encounter as having been a trial of strength: “I was a strongly built natural athlete. Jacoby was a man of small build who, as he told me, first learned to walk at the age of seven<sup>53</sup>. He was hunchbacked, but moved with great dignity. My first impression, then, was that the man was no match for me<sup>54</sup>. I felt this intuitively somewhere in the depths of my sub-conscious despite my clear sense that it was right for me to see him”<sup>55</sup>.

There was a far-reaching exchange between the two men covering the most important topics. This was practical in orientation with demonstrations, experiments, and searching questions that Jacoby based on “Body and Mature Behaviour” which Feldenkrais had previously sent him. Jacoby’s notes about the meetings between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of June amount to a summary and were obviously written after the event. Here Jacoby says of Feldenkrais (among other things): “Largely self-taught in matters of education and exercise, but very open and full of common sense. Despite great physical agility, strength, and courage, Dr. F[eldenkrais] does not represent either in his way of speaking or in the quality of his movements what he “in theory” deems desirable – in other words he easily becomes breathless during demonstrations, sweats exceptionally easily, and “crashes around” when presenting somersaults, headstands, experiments in gravity, etc. But he is very much ready to admit that himself, to try things out and to call them in question”<sup>56</sup>. Jacoby mentions that he carried out various experiments in drawing, singing, and piano-playing with Feldenkrais, which he recorded on tape : “Striking improvements in quality in

the course of these experiments. Fundamental aspects of my work. Examples of why it is impossible to be 'ungifted' for something. Biological and functional preconditions for mathematics (comparing – measuring), visual creativity (sensitivity to differences of darkness and light), remembering (capacity for memory, function of organic matter), etc, etc<sup>57</sup>.

For Heinrich Jacoby the meetings with Feldenkrais were an encounter involving an attempt at understanding and mutual clarification of fundamental relationships. He cultivated such "work-meetings" with many pupils and guests. He was not primarily interested (as might be mistakenly thought from his note) in comparing states of knowledge and abilities, but rather in furthering processes of development. For instance at the end of 1950 Jacoby asked Konrad Hirsch whether he was doing anything about "doing some in-depth work on himself", and recommended that he should "work for a time" with Feldenkrais (among other things) which "could help his health"<sup>58</sup>.

Feldenkrais described the encounter with Jacoby as an exceptional learning-experience, expressly calling that a "transformation" and according it special status in what he wrote. He didn't sing the praises of any other of his teachers so extensively and in such detail.

Every time he stressed how much remained to be said. He called Jacoby "a very important teacher"<sup>60</sup>, someone worth his weight in diamonds. Usually Feldenkrais was sparing in his praise and reverence, so such appreciation was worth all the more.

Jacoby taught "in an unusual way". "Without making any direct mention of this, he awoke in me the question of why I ... hadn't followed my own teaching"<sup>62</sup>. Feldenkrais described how Jacoby got him to draw a lamp, helped him to really see, and after a renewed attempt at drawing made him "feel I'd created a masterpiece and had become at least ten centimetres taller"<sup>63</sup>. Just previously Feldenkrais had "thought, somewhat childishly, I would be able to show Jacoby I'm not so clumsy"<sup>64</sup>. This man who had hardly ever sung anything and had never played the piano was asked by Jacoby to sing and to play the piano. "I said: 'I can't play the piano'. He replied: 'That's just why I'm asking you to do so'. He listened intently and after I had tried for a few minutes saw that nothing would come of it and I felt pretty silly"<sup>65</sup>. Then when they listened to the tape recording – astonishment: "Once again I learned something that I haven't forgotten up to the present day, 35 years later. Jacoby had me listen to the tape recording. I could hear the fruitless bashing around and then how it slowly turned into something, and I was amazed myself. During the time when I was searching for a melody I made exceptionally good music"<sup>66</sup>.

In the years that followed Jacoby and Feldenkrais tried time and again to meet once more. In 1952 Feldenkrais decided to move permanently to Israel. A little later he started to concentrate full-time on his particular form of body-related work. But obviously never again was there the kind of encounter and joint exploration that occurred at Zürich in 1950. If there had been it would surely have been registered in Jacoby's archive.

(Source: Norbert Klinkenberg: Feldenkrais und Jacoby – Eine Begegnung  
Schriftenreihe der Jacoby-Gindler-Stiftung, vol. I)

44. Feldenkrais 1987

45. Feldenkrais 1991

46. Ludwig 2002, p. 186

47. Note by Jacoby, AJGS JKorr 12

48. Konrad Hirsch to Heinrich Jacoby, 20.04.1950, AJGS JKorr 19

49. Heinrich Jacoby to Moshe Feldenkrais, 14.06.1950, AJGS JKorr 12

50. Moshe Feldenkrais to Heinrich Jacoby, 18.07.1950, AJGS JKorr 12

51. Ludwig 2002, p. 186

52. Personal communication from Myriam Pfeffer, Paris

53. According to other sources at the age of four, which is more probable.
54. .... ?
55. Feldenkrais 1987, p. 34
56. Note by Heinrich Jacoby, undated, AJGS JKorr 12
57. *ibid.* See also 5.52 ff
58. Heinrich Jacoby to Konrad Hirsch, 10.12.1950, JKorr 19
59. Feldenkrais 1987, p. 36
60. Feldenkrais 1991, p. 30
61. *ibid.*, p. 32
62. Feldenkrais 1987, p. 37
63. *ibid.*, p. 37
64. *ibid.*, p. 36
65. Feldenkrais 1991, p. 31
66. *ibid.*, p. 32

### **Similarities and Differences in Ways of Thinking and Acting**

The way in which such different personalities as Jacoby, Gindler, and Moshe Feldenkrais were shaped by their life-stories, which in turn influenced their work, is very striking.

At the age of 14 Feldenkrais left his Hassidic Jewish home to join the pioneers in Palestine, helping build the state of Israel. He was a scientist who studied at the Sorbonne in Paris and an athletic practitioner of the martial arts.

Jacoby on the other hand came from a middle-class German Jewish background, emigrated to Switzerland as early as 1935, and never left a German-speaking European environment. This highly artistic man (a musician and conductor by profession) was of rather small stature with pronounced scoliosis and a late developer with regard to motor skills.

Elsa Gindler was of frail health and experienced extreme difficulties both financial and political in Berlin (inclusive of the Second World War). As a woman she was a pioneer during this period.

A lecture described her life and work as follows:

“But how did Elsa Gindler enter upon this path? She was very ill during her youth and doctors had given up on her. Just because she could not expect any medical help from outside she began to ask herself whether the conditions for mobilisation of bodily defences might be found in nature itself, leading to a re-emergence of order and regeneration. This way of putting questions and conducting research led her to a path she never left again, a path she attempted to open to all her pupils, bringing into play the possibilities of self-experience, of “inner awareness”, inherent within ourselves. This approach made possible recognition of and conscious relationship with the laws of nature which prevail on our earth and to which our existence is subject. There remained a never-ending quest dedicated to the question of whether and where in human nature itself answers to the need for order and unhindered functioning (in the widest sense) are to be found.

This endeavour contributed towards human education and compensatory self-improvement on the basis of recognition of essential states of affairs and relationships founded on the laws of nature. Elsa Gindler also discovered crucial correlations within the process of breathing, but that is only part of a much more comprehensive phenomenon. This involved recognition of a few

fundamental facts and connections whose striking simplicity and plausible generality lead anyone investigating them – be that a doctor, teacher, scholar, housewife, physiotherapist, dancer, musician, or suchlike – to find fresh approaches for productive work in their specific field”. All three shared a very similar highly developed view of human potential, theories, and ideas, but their approach and practical implementation differed widely.

For all of them it was important that personal experience, both lived and acquired, provides the foundation for learning and knowledge. Learning-situations must be created in such a way that they make what is new experienceable, stimulating personal solutions rather than building on prepackaged knowledge and answers. In terms of method that meant for Jacoby that “the teacher should create situations in which certain states of affairs become so striking that students experience something – as in the case of Galilei who long ago just had to “trip over” certain phenomena so as to be able to recognize and articulate the law of gravity”. That accords with Moshe’s view of “creating conditions for learning”.

Jacoby and Gindler remained purely experience-oriented, conducting experiments that inevitably arose out of “understanding of the phenomenon to which a relationship is to be established” (Jacoby) – such as the ground, lifting a chair, the weight of an arm, playing the piano, and drawing.

Feldenkrais, on the other hand, developed in his Method a highly refined system creating learning conditions based on the functioning of the human brain and the development of human movements and maturation.

Clear-cut differences become apparent in the use of language. For Jacoby, who taught life-long solely in his mother tongue, dealings with the meaningfulness of language were so important that he put great emphasis on precise and reflective use of words inclusive of consideration of their etymological history. Feldenkrais, however, moved between very different linguistic and cultural realms, and that also received expression in the way he taught. Language was obviously not his primary concern and mainly served to convey information.

All three shared the objective of not wanting to be a teacher in the traditional sense. Instead they wished to create learning-spaces where students are their own “teacher” and the actual teacher also learns from them. Jacoby and Gindler pursued this aim further with great rigour by refusing to provide training in their work or to take on trainees.

“I have a laboratory. I don’t want to train anyone. I want to do research – and anyone who would like to join me in that is very welcome” (Gindler). People came to her for study groups rather than to be taught. In a similar way, Jacoby taught his approach to education in vacation courses and study groups where he worked intensively and on a highly personal level with a small number of participants over prolonged periods, maintaining contact with many of these people for years.

Gindler, Jacoby, and Feldenkrais saw unquestioned knowledge without the requisite experience as being harmful for what Jacoby called unfolding beyond schooling (“Nachentfaltung”) and personal maturation. All three had an inner need throughout their lives to pursue research, to learn with and from their students in any situation, to develop new approaches to problems, and never be content with what they found.

It is important to note that the research was not designed to test the effectiveness of the research design. The research was designed to test the effectiveness of the research design. The research was designed to test the effectiveness of the research design. The research was designed to test the effectiveness of the research design.

For all of them it was important that personal experience, both lived and mediated, provides the foundation for learning and knowledge. Learning-situations must be created in such a way that they make it possible for students to experience personal solutions rather than building on pre-learned knowledge and answers. In terms of method that meant for Jacoby that "the teacher should create situations in which content areas of ethics become so striking that students experience something -- as in the case of Gulliver who long ago just had to "trip over" certain phenomena as he is able to recognize and articulate a law of gravity." That occurs with Jacoby's view of teaching conditions for learning.

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Heisenberg, on the other hand, developed in his field a highly refined system of learning conditions based on the functioning of the human brain and the development of human nervous systems and maintenance.

Classical differences become apparent in the use of language. For Jacoby, who taught his long solely in his mother tongue, dealing with the meaningfulness of language was so important that he put great emphasis on precise and reflective use of words inclusive of consideration of their etymological history. Heisenberg, however, moved beyond very different linguistic and cultural worlds and that also took on expression in the way he taught. Language was obviously not his primary concern and mainly served to convey information.

All three shared the opinion of not wanting to be a teacher in the traditional sense. Instead they wanted to create learning-situations where students are their own "teacher" and the actual teacher also learns from them. Jacoby and Gulliver pursued this aim further with great interest by refusing to provide training in their work or to take on students.

"I have a laboratory. I don't want to train anyone. I want to do research. And anyone who would like to join me in that is very welcome." (Gulliver). People came to her for study groups and she taught in a similar way. Jacoby taught his approach to education in a lecture room and study groups where he worked intensively and on a highly personal level with a small number of participants over prolonged periods, maintaining contact with many of these people for years.

Gulliver, Jacoby and Heisenberg saw unproblematic knowledge without the requisite experience as being harmful for what Jacoby called "Knochenbildung" ("bone-formation") and personal development. All three had an inner need throughout their lives to remain associated to learn with and from their students in any situation to develop new approaches to problems and never to content with what they found.