

# The Interweaving of Dreaming & Focusing

by Andrea Koch



As a passionate dreamer and focuser, I have often pondered the interrelatedness of the two processes of Focusing and dreaming. How are they similar; how do they differ; where/when/how do they connect and affect each other? When I asked Ann Weiser Cornell about this in one of my first of many workshops with her, she answered, “They both tread the same territory.”

I’ve found this to be very true in many different ways:

- In my conversations with experienced focusers, many mentioned that they do Focusing in their dreams.

- In workshops, while listening to participants describe their Focusing process, I often thought: this sounds just like a dreaming process.

- Often I have experienced and been told about processes where dreaming and Focusing interaffect each other, where the dreaming is for example a preparation or continuation of the Focusing processes during the workshop

- Angelika Kopečný, Focusing Coordinator in Berlin, describes in her latest novel her creative writing process as one where her daydreaming, Focusing and night-dreaming interweave.

- My own dreaming and Focusing experience has brought me to the conclusion that Focusing is dreaming in slow motion, or dreaming is multidimensional fast motion Focusing.

Trying to deepen my conceptual understanding of this, I looked for insights in the Focusing literature. As far as I know, no one has ventured to consider the similarities between the processes of Focusing and dreaming. Cornell (in her book *The Radical Acceptance of Everything*) mentions that for a full felt sense to develop during Focusing, four aspects are important: body sensation, emotional quality, imagery or symbolism, life connection or story. All these aspects are predominant during dreaming. Felt shifts could also be said to happen while dreaming, we can find them not only in our dream narratives but also in the physiological shifts and body changes that take place while dreaming.

While studying Gene Gendlin’s *Process Model*, my experience has been that holding both the experience of Focusing and dreaming alive while reading, helps my understanding of the book tremendously. One example of this is how our experiencing of time in dreaming is often not linear, but more an experience of time along the lines that Gendlin sketches (“But the implying is not left behind in a linear series; it is always the future that is now. In terms of linear time the ‘line’ seems to move both forward and **back** behind itself” p. 71). Going in the opposite direction can also be very stimulating. Not only can studying the *Process Model* enlighten our understanding of the Focusing process, I believe it can also help to understand dreaming. Staying with this simultaneous forward and backward movement “in time” one can also understand how dreams can be connected with various aspects from the past, present and future (e.g. precognitive dreams).

Sometimes on this road to discovery, I stumbled over some of Gendlin’s statements about dreaming, that seem to me to highlight the differences between dreaming and Focusing:


“In deeply relaxed states we do not fully appreciate what comes. In a dream we rarely know it is a dream. The body-sense that interprets everything has been relaxed. The whole way we are is not fully ongoing, so all of it cannot respond. ...We cannot ‘integrate’ what is new when we are in the dream...” (*Let your body interpret your dreams*, 1986, p. 159)

“Except in rare cases, the step forward is not actually in the dream. It comes from the energy that the dream’s images imply and create. ...*What is next is only what the client’s body makes of the dream.* I will present a number of procedures by which the body can make therapeutic steps from a dream” (*Focusing Oriented Psychotherapy*, 1996, p. 200)

I wonder how such an understanding of the dreaming process influences how we approach dreams and Focusing. What might happen if we conceive of dreaming as more of a part of an ongoing process, as in “The implying is thus always the whole body’s, one implying ... the processes are not separate.” (PM, p. 25) “In this sense we

can say that the implying always “wants” life to work out, to go on, to succeed” (PM; p. 286)? The “whole body” staying whole all through the night of sleeping and the day of waking, always implying a way forward with dreaming and Focusing “helping” us. In this way Focusing and dreaming can “help” us, “heal” us, move us forward (maybe in little tiny steps) even without our understanding of what comes up, only with the experiencing of bodily felt changes, shifting. We would concentrate on the connections between dreaming and Focusing, on their “interaffecting” of each other. We trust that they will influence each other, support each other, strengthen each other in both directions, interweaving with each other, not one process being dependant on the other having been there first. We see more of a continuum between the two processes as both helping us to “develop more congruent symbols for organismic experiencing” (as Jim Iberg says in his 1996 article, “Finding the body’s next step: Ingredients and hindrances”), or being a part of an ongoing meaning-making process.

I believe when we concentrate more on finding the similarities between the processes of Focusing and dreaming we will also see how understanding the one can help us in understanding the other. “This is also why carrying forward an organism’s own inwardly arising process connects it to its original implying, and is therefore so much more valuable than even the best imposed way.” (PM, p. 286). Focusing with our dreams is an example of such a valuable way of carrying forward. Dreaming our Focusing further can be seen as an equally valuable way.

At present I am “daydreaming” the *Process Model* further, wishing to integrate the dreaming process as closely as Focusing is already inherent in it. Also I am seeking ways to teach Focusing through working with a person and their dream. Anyone who wishes to join me on these paths is more than welcome to contact me at: [koch24@me.com](mailto:koch24@me.com). 

*Andrea Koch, Focusing Trainer, lives in Berlin, Germany and is presently writing a book on “Cherishing Dreams in a Person-Centered-Way”, which will include Focusing and will be published by PCCS, hopefully in 2012.*