

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Focusing Colleagues, Friends, and other interested Readers,

It gives us great pleasure to present this Folio. The first seeds for this issue were planted at our annual International Conference in Costa Rica in 2004. Over time, while gathering thoughts for the topic of this issue, it became clear that the subject of fear, related to both global and personal events, began to emerge as a real concern for many, touching people deeply, and in numerous and diverse ways.

For instance, we thought of the welfare and safety of our Focusing colleagues in Afghanistan working with victims of war trauma. Then came another global concern — the effects of climate change and the plight of survivors of disasters such as hurricane Katrina and the tsunamis — and then more issues relating to fear became visible from the consequences of 9/11 and its aftermath. There were fears expressed related to the post traumatic effects of 9/11, such as how children have been affected, the possibility of sudden death, and so much more. The topic of fear clearly had a global relevance and resonance.

We began to wonder how Focusing teachers, trainers, and psychotherapists were using Focusing and experiential work to address fear in a new ways that might contribute to new patterns of relating, both within ourselves and in relationships. What are the distinctive contributions of our community in psychology, education, health, healing, spirituality, politics, and the myriad of other arenas in which Focusers work toward transformation? Many of us believe that Focusing and its practices can help resolve conflictual issues in order to move toward a more peaceful existence. Hence, the title of this Folio emerged: **FELT MEANING AND GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION: *How Focusing Brings New Patterns of Relating in a Landscape of Fear.***

In *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning*, Gendlin discusses experiential meaning that is culturally derived. He differentiates how culturally derived meaning functions from how direct reference and fresh symbolization function. Culturally determined meanings involve an assumed and shared knowing of meaning — a kind of “pre-packaged” meaning. For example, if you see a stop sign you *know* what it means and do not have to go into your experiencing further to know how to respond. Such shared meanings make an important contribution to understanding social situations. For example, culturally determined meanings help us know what behavior is expected at weddings and other rituals, or what to do when meeting people for the first time in our hometowns.

As Focuser’s we value and know how to attend to the felt sense, freshly creating meaning that is more specific and unique than shared cultural meanings. But this doesn’t negate the reality of shared meanings and their importance in how people live in the world. “Fear” is one of these cultural, and even cross-cultural signifiers for which everyone “knows” much of the culturally shared meanings without direct reference.

There is something widely shared, perhaps universal, about fear that tends to bring a response *before* the Focusing process. Fear has physiological correlates rooted in basic instincts related to survival. It is strongly felt in the body and can direct behavior in reaction

to a situation when a threat to one's physical survival is perceived, or when what one holds as an ultimate value or significance (like a religious belief, or need for power) seems under attack. Reactions to fear often happen without pausing to let a felt sense of the situation form.

Whether or not this *pausing step* is taken may make all the difference in the kind of human interactions that result. We believe the subject of fear will be of crucial interest to people across cultures, religions, and theoretical orientations, because *acting from fear contributes to the polarization and dehumanization of our fellow human beings*.

We believe this issue reveals some of what is remarkable about the experiential Focusing process. We hope that readers will notice how these articles keep pointing to a way to 'be with' fear before impulsively 'reacting' with the limited set of usual options, such as fight or flight. Pausing to let a felt sense form can produce an opening of meaning that generates many more-subtle options for living forward.

The diversity of articles in this issue mirrors the diversity of the people who practice, use, and live with Focusing in their daily lives. Some of the articles are deeply personal and speak of transformative inner experiences. Other articles demonstrate the power of Focusing in transforming the experiences of clients. One common thread running through the articles is the significant difference Focusing has made in viewing, sensing, and living from an implicit *inner knowing* that carries the Focuser forward to the next *right* steps of change. With only the culturally shared meaning of "fear," you would not see such a diversity of responses. Some of the responses you read about here will surprise you, yet we believe you will easily grasp and feel the rightness of them.

We sincerely hope that this issue stimulates new ideas, new projects, and new, more enlightening ways to turn a landscape of fear into a landscape of peace, harmony, and expanded global communication and understanding.

The Folio Committee

Bala Jaison, Ph.D.

Doralee Grindler-Katonah, Psy.D., M.Div

James Iberg, Ph.D.