

EARTHQUAKE FOCUSING: Continental and Personal Shifts

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Reconstructed in present tense from memory and letters written home from Kabul, Afghanistan just after the Pakistan Earthquake, October 8, 2005

This morning here in Kabul we strongly felt the big earthquake even though it happened hundreds of miles away in northern Pakistan. I was in the living room and Patricia Omidian in the bedroom of her 4th floor apartment when the lights began to sway and the curtain fringes to dance. I could hear rattling and my body felt the jiggling as the whole building began to rock.

“Earthquake!”

Waiting... Will it stop soon?

Feeling...zipping...tinglings...readiness to act.

It isn't stopping!

I scoot to stand in an arch of doorway, forgetting this is not the place to be in a concrete apartment built in Afghanistan.

“No!” calls Pat, “Get in here by the wardrobe!” Often some space beside a large piece of furniture survives in a collapse.

“We STAY here,” Pat says. “To get out of the building we would have to go down 4 flights in that unsafe stairwell!”

Hunkered beside that wardrobe as the rocking jiggling continues and continues, my awareness dips into what I am sensing right now inside myself.

Big zipping-electric-tingling all over.

“Oh, hello! This is how it is right now in me! We could be squashed flat under tons of concrete in a few moments!”

What I can do of Focusing during the quake is hold a thin bit of awareness around the intense, huge, unfolding experience, and acknowledge what is coming inside me about it. This brings a bit of calm. I am WITH the zipping-electric-tingling, the fear, the understanding of squashing possibilities. These aren't all of me; they feel like almost all of me, but they are not quite all.

When most of the shaking stops, nothing in the apartment has been damaged; no new cracks; nothing even knocked off shelves. Our need for action immediately goes to finding out what happened, where the quake was. We call my geologist husband in Oregon, USA, since he has a working internet and geologic knowledge. In 15 minutes the reports come in of a major quake in northern Pakistan. BBC buzzes through the static on Pat's small emergency

radio that Margala Towers Apartments in Islamabad had collapsed. So right away we know there are deaths, and we have lots of close friends in Pakistan.

I try to go back to work preparing for a Focusing training to be given this week. I can't concentrate, so I Focus, noticing in my body what is here right now. A very fizzy, freaky something in me gives me the body feel of wanting to run around screaming.

I stay with this kindly for a few minutes, describing and acknowledging, until I sense some relaxing and loosening. I go back to work preparing tomorrow's intensive Focusing training for Saba Press with 30 radio, TV, and magazine publications professionals.

October 17, 2005

Now it is 10 days after the quake. We know tens of thousands of people have been killed, and many more are homeless. I sense it is impacting me but I haven't taken time to listen to the whole thing yet. Pat and I fly from Afghanistan into Pakistan on the small plane for aid workers. I see from the air the folded, broken crust of the Earth where this crunching movement is going on. I sense in my body how totally inevitable these earthquakes are, how they have been going on for millions of years as the Indian subcontinent forces up into Asia, borne on deep earth currents, and they will continue.

Coming in to Islamabad International, on the tarmac we taxi past slowly moving convoys of Pakistan's decorated Bedford trucks, moving in to load aid items arriving from all over the world. Piles of buckets, mounds of tents, and bulky packages jumble around large cargo transports unloading more help. Tears come. I sense the great wounding, that has happened here and the caring pouring in.

As we drive around the city, I see in the major efforts made right here to help the victims of the quake. Friends tell us they and others are buying items the homeless will need, delivering them to collection stations, or themselves packaging them, loading trucks, hiring drivers, going up into the hills and distributing them.

A friend drives me to lodging and inadvertently right by the collapsed Margala Towers building. The terror of people falling and being squashed is suddenly very real in me.

Then I get the news that a family friend, overseeing the delivery of things he collected, goes into the earthquake-damaged area by helicopter, and crashes to his death. Knowing his family, I sense a swelling of aching pain throbbing in me and acknowledge this.

I am giving a one-hour, guest lecture at the National Institute of Psychology at Quaid-i-Azam University tomorrow, Oct. 18. What can I share with them in just one hour, that they can use in this emergency?

October 18, 2006 National Institute of Psychology Guest Lecture

Sixty people crowd into the lecture hall, graduate students and faculty of psychology, all carrying their own shaken inner turmoil about going through the quake, and numerous heavy

aftershocks. They urgently desire to help anyone they can. We consider together how Focusing can help in an emergency situation. Focusing supports resiliency, which is being like a green stick that bends but doesn't break in a storm, and returns to health quickly afterwards.

I share with them two pre-Focusing practices they can use to build resiliency in themselves, and use to help other quake survivors: Finding Safe Space Inside Yourself and Excellent Listening. Using the Safe Space Exercise, they can find their own safe, calm, gentle inner space so they have safety from which to listen to others who have had such trouble. And they can teach others who want to learn it, to give them a sense of goodness and safety, so they can be gentle with their traumatic responses.

Excellent Listening is one of the greatest gifts they can give to anyone, and it is healing, just being a human listening to another human. Together we make a short list of qualities of an excellent listener. Most trauma victims naturally start telling their stories. Excellent listening is a way we can let inner healing process start to heal them. We practice just listening with no suggestions, no fixing, no judging. The quality of our listening is like holding the story-teller in kind, calm caring, in which they can begin to find their own calmness. They feel strengthened to go offer their listening to be with quake victims who are evacuated to hospitals in Islamabad.

Oct. 20, 2005

Pat and I go to Peshawar to give a Focusing Level 1 Workshop for 18 Pakistani social workers, aid workers, and master trainers involved in aiding quake victims. Many are just back from service in the disaster area, devastated by what they saw of children's arms sticking out from collapsed schools, wandering stunned survivors, flattened villages.

They are in great emotional distress, not sleeping, withdrawing from family, having anger outbursts, and some of them are having a hard time with their work. We explore with them how to listen to each other and how to Focus, to "listen" inside themselves in a way that will be healing for them. How very important this support is, and it will spread out from them to benefit others.

Oct. 22, 2005. Back in Kabul

This past week in Pakistan is held in me as a huge, ragged, swelling sensation, as big as the view of the Himalaya from the small plane and as rugged. After coming back to Kabul, Pat and I know we have to take some Focusing time for ourselves, and sense how this huge experience is carried in us. In my Focusing, at first I meet and hold gently...a place in me that is screaming in agony from all the pain I have witnessed in others.

Describing this body sense...tearing, twisting ache in chest and heart, staying with it to hear all it holds...

Now ahhh...this shifts to acceptance that I do feel the pain of others. THIS is one way we are all connected, able to feel inside some of what others feel.

Pain is still here, and gratitude that I feel pain from others, that we are connected.

Now I remember and sense in me the flowing of support for the quake victims we saw everywhere when we were in Pakistan.

Describing this body sense...like a rushing yearning to heal the one connected body that all people really are, and it is a yearning of love

Oh, the ache in my heart and chest area is part of this greater ache in so many hearts as the inside of each of us feels the pain inside others.

Now I sense this as a river of yearning aching love all over the world in people...This river rushes towards the site of wounding, wants to heal the wounds... just as the healing systems in my body rush to help heal a cut or broken bone.

Feels like the Holy Spirit in Matter is rushing in us to help those who are wounded and homeless and devastated by the earthquake in Kashmir.

And suddenly this sense of the rush of healing dives deeper and touches my deepest personal wounds.

I sense that place in me which feels like a small girl...

Ever since I was small this place in me has been so afraid I'll be abandoned if I don't help...And keep helping and helping so much that others really feel they need me.

And tonight she GETS IT, that I'LL NEVER BE ABANDONED! There are always those who can be present with me in any hurt or fear, AND I CAN BE WITH THIS PLACE IN ME, which is so afraid of abandonment.

She really gets it, that I am worthy of commitment by others and others are committed to being there for me. The rushing, healing love is for me too.

And I can help others from being part of this rushing stream of the yearning healing...Instead of out of fear that I will be abandoned.

And today I feel very different inside, like being born anew. Something in me feels melted. The superstructure of trying so hard to keep people caring about me doesn't have to be there.

I can be totally me, present with all my inner currents. I will be loved and valued for myself. I don't have to feel pushed, and stiff with trying so hard. I make room for the healing, aching, rushing love to do its work through me and all the others who do its work too.

The continents have shifted outside and inside.