

BEFRIENDING FEAR: A Story Told from Two Angles

Dr. Juan Prado Flores

A young mother and her aunt came to my office for the first time, bringing her three-week-old baby. "I don't know what's the matter with my little girl, doctor," she said. "If I touch her she cries, if I nurse her, she cries, if I carry her, she cries. I haven't even been able to bathe her because I feel my hands are sweaty and cold as if they had ice inside, like...I don't know..."

Nine years before, the young mother's sister had died of medullar aplasia at the age of 13. She had married four years later, not wanting to get pregnant and had become pregnant although she was using an IUD.

I could see that the baby was happy in her aunt's arms. This didn't seem to fit with what the mother had told me. The check up was normal, so I told the mother: "Your baby is healthy." Then I asked a question I didn't usually ask: "Do you feel that there is something that keeps you from enjoying your daughter?" She stared at me for a moment. "Well, my hands, doctor!" "And what do you feel in your hands?" "Well, a cold sweat, and a freezing feeling inside and... I don't know what else".

I told her that when we can be with those feelings or sensations in a certain way, sometimes we can know what that "something else" is, and that can solve our problem. I suggested that we do a focusing exercise and she agreed. I asked her to close her eyes so she wouldn't be distracted by anything from the outside and to see if she could go "inside" her body, go to her hands, and be there, trying to see how they felt. She agreed.

After about a minute, I saw her face get tense. "See if," I tell her, "when you are with this sensation, something comes up like a word, an image, a memory, or something that connects with all of this." "Yes, I feel that I'm never going to be a good mother for my daughter!" When I asked her how that felt, she answered: "Very sad". I asked her where she felt the "very sad" and after about 15 seconds she said: "Here" and indicated her chest area. "Would it be OK," I asked her, "to be with this just like you were with your hands?" "Yes". "See if something connects with all of this." A few minutes passed and she said, crying: "It's when I'm in the hospital and my little sister is dying in my arms and we are both alone..." I asked: "How does this feel?" And full of tears she answers: "There's a lot of pain." (I almost started crying myself) I told her: "See where you feel the pain." She takes her time to look for this inside and pointed with her finger: "Here, in my heart". "Maybe this intense pain in your heart also needs your company. Would it be OK to be with this?" A few seconds passed and she answered: "Yes". "Well, be there all the time you need to, not trying to fix it, only being there with it."

About three or four minutes passed and I saw that she was calmer and had stopped crying. Her cheeks started to look pinkish. It's hard to believe how different she looked; I

asked her if it was OK to continue and see if there was something more that wanted to express itself, or if it would be OK to finish. She answered that it felt OK to finish. I asked her if she felt like giving thanks for this entire story that folded out from her hands and she told me that she had been giving thanks for awhile. When she opened her eyes I asked her: “How do you feel now?” “I feel like going home and bathing my daughter”, she answered.

She left, and three weeks later she and her baby came back with the grandmother, who told me that the night after they visited me, she asked her daughter if everything was ready for her (the grandmother) to bathe the baby. Her daughter answered: “I already bathed her.” “I couldn’t believe it!” the grandmother said. Then the young mother added: “Now the baby cries when my mother bathes her, not me.”

That feeling in her hands never came back. Later, when I asked her permission to use her story for my Focusing classes, she told me that since her little sister’s death, neither she nor her mother had been able to pass in front of a hospital. They had even crossed the street to avoid it. But recently, she had been able to be with her cousin, a single mother, who was in an intensive care unit in a hospital. She told me that she couldn’t recognize her cousin because she was deformed, swollen, and pale, with many tubes and machines connected on her. “The doctor told me that she was in septic shock, but he asked me to speak to her, because even if she seemed to be unconscious, she could hear me. Without being too sure if she was aware of what was happening around her, I started telling her that even though we had very different ways of thinking and being, I wanted her to live, that her three year old daughter needed her and that even though she and I had had problems lately, I loved her and I remembered how we played together when we were children. When I was saying this I saw a tear run down from the corner of her eye. When I left my cousin, my mother wasn’t there any more. She had not been able to be there, even in the waiting room.”

I asked her if the way she was able to be tender and loving with her cousin was the same as the way she had been with her hands that time, and she said: “Yes”. “Your loving presence with your cousin probably saved her life,” I told her. She said that she thought so also.

Years later (September 5, 2005) she told me of her inner experience during our first focusing session:

In my Focusing I faced the enormous monster, fear. When I had this experience, my life changed completely. Before that, I felt my life had no meaning. I had lost my sister. My mother was single and I had to take care of my brothers and sisters and my home. In my house there was little affection, and a lot of responsibilities.

I was afraid of marrying and having my own family. I couldn’t express what I felt, I was afraid of love, and didn’t know how to treat people. When I got married my problems began...

When I entered the focusing exercise, I felt uncertain. But little by little, I started discover something marvelous and it felt good to be there. I entered and everything was dark, like a dark room. Only darkness and loneliness. Then I saw a point of light. I tried to approach, but it was very difficult and it seemed very far.

When I got there, I saw a little girl crying, very sad, with fear and loneliness. When I got near the girl, all of my sad memories started to appear. There was a moment when I wanted to leave and get out of there, but a soft voice helped me to get strength to continue. Then I realized I wasn't afraid any more, and that it was nice to see what was there.

When the fear disappeared, my memories were filled with light and the sad little girl stopped crying and got up. I saw her smile and she became an adult. There was a green path filled with flowers and a blue sky, and there was happiness everywhere. I could be with those memories and still feel safe and calm.

Within those memories was the most painful one: I saw my sister who had died. I could be there without fear, without sadness. I saw everything that had happened since her illness, and it was wonderful to live that experience. I could tell her how much I loved her, and thank her for the time God had let me be with her, and for being my sister. Then happy memories that I had forgotten, or had left in a corner, joined these. There were many happy memories. I walked and saw my family waiting for me, very happy, with their arms opened. They were my husband and my daughter that was just born, and my happiness began then.